

MINUTES OF THE UNIVERSITY SENATE, DECEMBER 9, 1996

The University Senate met in regular session at 3:00 p.m., Monday, December 9, 1996 in Room 115 of the Nursing Health Sciences Building.

Professor Janice Schach, Chairperson of the Senate Council, presided.

Members absent were: Gary Anglin*, Vasant Bhapkar, Patricia Birchfield, George Blandford, Darla Botkin, Joseph Burch, Laurretta Byars, Berry Campbell, Brad Canon*, Ben Carr, Edward Carter, Eric Christianson*, Jordan Cohen*, Scott Coovert, Raymond Cox*, Frederick Danner, Frederick DeBeer*, Philip DeSimone, Andrew Dreibel, Richard Edwards, Janice Evans, Robert Farquhar, William Fortune, Daniel Fulks, Beatrice Gaunder, Hans Gesund*, Issam Harik, Christine Havice, James Holsinger, Clifford Hynniman*, Craig Infanger*, Edward Jennings*, Raleigh Jones, Jamshed Kanga*, Laura Keith, Stuart Keller*, Monica Kern, Craig Koontz, Philipp Kraemer, Gretchen LaGodna, Thomas Lester, G.T. Lineberry*, C. Oran Little, Joyce Logan*, Daniel Mason*, M. Pinar Menguc*, Jenny Miller, Karen Mingst, David Mohnney*, Donald Mullineaux, David Nash, Wolfgang Natter, Michael Neitzel*, Jacqueline Noonan, William O'Connor, Melanie Shay Onkst, Rhoda-Gale Pollack*, Deborah Powell, Thomas Robinson, Michael Rohmiller, Avinash Sathaye, Horst Schach, David Shipley, David Stockham, Enid Waldhart*, Thomas Waldhart*, Retia Walker, Jesse Weil*, Charles Wethington*, Adam Wilhelm, Carolyn Williams, Eugene Williams, Lionel Williamson, Paul Willis, Emery Wilson, Phyllis Wise, Craig Wood, Ernest Yanarella.

Chairperson Schach made the following announcements:

There are three new members to the Senate Council, they are Ray Cox, Roy Moore, and Lee Meyer. They were given a round of applause. Mike Neitzel, Tom Garrity, and Jim Applegate are the outgoing Senate Council members. They were given a round of applause. Jim will be continuing on as Senate Council Chair next year.

The Holiday Social will be December 10, 1996 from 4:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m., in the Alumni House with the Board of Trustee members.

The Chair said that following discussion with Merle Hackbart, Special Assistant to the Governor and the Governor's Task Force on Higher Education, the Senate Council developed the following resolution in keeping with the Senate Council's position on the role of the research institution in the Commonwealth, in an attempt to gain further recognition by the Governor's Task Force of the needs of the University of Kentucky. Professor Schach asked Professor Applegate to introduce the resolution. * Absence Explained Senate Council Resolution The Pursuit of Academic Excellence The University of Kentucky Senate Council by this resolution reaffirms the commitment of the faculty to excellence in teaching and research at the University of Kentucky. The Council believes that the University should be positioned to move to the next level of excellence in achievement as a Carnegie I Research University and should be positioned for national recognition of its teaching and research programs. As a first step in assisting the University to move to this next level of excellence, the Senate Council proposes that the Administration, in concert with the faculty, examine programs currently in place at the University of Kentucky which are already at or have the potential to move into arenas of national prominence and identify new programs which are of major significance to the Commonwealth. Further, a study should be undertaken to determine what types of resources will be needed to

achieve or sustain academic excellence in these identified areas. These initiatives will constitute an important first stage of the development of a Capital Campaign for the University and will be useful for the planning process of such an effort.

Chairperson Schach said she would like to outline the discussion for the agenda item concerning plus/minus grading. The discussion would be broken into two parts; one to discuss the merits or demerits of plus/minus grading systems in general and the other a discussion of policy making. How does the University deal with it as a policy, considering the history and where we will be heading in the future. The following will be the ground rules for the discussion, there will be no action items entertained, the Chair will recognize the speakers on the floor and all speakers need to represent new views as compared to the person who spoke before so that everyone gets an opportunity to participate. If you are going to simply support what someone else said, just state that. Everyone received a chronology of plus/minus grading at the University. The history is a long one starting previous to 1970 with the College of Law, then the College of Architecture and the Landscape Architecture program. In 1983, the first proposals for University-wide plus/minus grading was returned to the Senate Council. It was denied at the Senate Floor in 1984 and again in 1989. So, on three separate occasions plus/minus grading on a university-wide basis has been rejected. In 1990, Fine Arts came on board. There was also Senate discussion of the proposal by the College of Arts and Sciences and in Communications, where again a University-wide system was discussed and returned to the Senate Council. The approval of plus/minus grading in Arts and Sciences was significant and impacted more students than the other colleges with specific courses tied only to that major. Then, the Colleges of Social Work and Human Environmental Sciences came forth with similar proposals which were denied on the Senate floor. There is a compilation at the end of the chronology of which colleges have plus/minus, which are requesting, and then a poll that Senate Council Chair Gretchen LaGodna conducted in February 1996 of where other colleges stood on the issue.

After reviewing the chronology, it is evident that this is a subject with a long history in the Senate and has been carefully considered in the Senate and the Senate Council. This has not been a subject that has been treated lightly or quickly. It has been carefully debated and considered. The Senate Council Chair would like the discussion to acknowledge that, and acknowledge that they are all trying to work for the best solution on this subject. Contrary to some of the recent Kernel editorials, no one is trying to do anyone harm, no faculty is trying to do students harm, and vice versa. Everyone is trying to find the solution that is in the best interest of everyone. So, the Senate Council Chair would like the discussion to proceed in that spirit. Much of the discussion that has gone on so far probably has served individual interests and at this stage we need to consider what is in the best interest of everyone at the University. What is in the best interest of all colleges and not individual cases.

In order to frame the discussion, a number of individuals have been asked to speak who will provide some important information in consideration of the discussion. Then, there will be a four person panel of students and faculty who have thoughtfully prepared their positions on plus/minus grading. Then the meeting will be opened for floor discussion. Agenda Item: For discussion only.
Grading Systems Background:

A Chronological History of +/- Grading Systems at the University of Kentucky Pre-1970 Senate approves College of Law +/-

grading system. 1978 Senate approves College of Architecture +/- grading system at May 2, 1978 meeting. 1982 Senate approves Landscape Architecture Program +/- grading system at October 11, 1982 meeting. 1983 A university-wide proposal for +/- grading is forwarded to the Senate in 1983 and returned to the Senate Admissions and Academic Standards Committee. 1984 A university-wide +/- grading system proposal is denied by the Senate at the April 1984 meeting. 1989 A university-wide +/- grading system is denied by the Senate at the March 20, 1989 meeting. 1990 Senate approves of College of Fine Arts +/- grading system at April 23, 1990 meeting. 1994-95 During the 1994-95 academic year, the Senate Admissions and Academic Standards Committee considers a College of A&S proposal to establish a plus/minus grading system for undergraduate courses in that college. After deliberations, the committee recommends that the change be instituted on a university-wide basis rather than in just the College of A&S. Plus/minus grading is already in use in the College of Law, Fine Arts, Architecture, and the Landscape Architecture Program. April 1995 At the April 10, 1995 Senate meeting a general discussion is held. Debate ensues regarding instituting the +/- system for all University undergraduate courses, as well as solely in the College of A&S. No clear consensus is achieved. October 1995 At the October 9, 1995 Senate meeting, the College of A&S proposal and a university-wide system is again discussed and the following concerns raised: 1. Issues of equity and consistency 2. If there was no designated A+ grade, the best students may be less likely to earn

4.0's. (This concern was confirmed by experience of Shippenburg University of

PA, who adopted a +/- grading system in 1992.) 3. Weakest students may be more likely to fall below 2.0 GPA's. The Senate returns proposals to the Senate Council for further study. December 1995 In response to the Senate's directive, the Senate Council seeks additional input by sending the proposal to the deans of undergraduate colleges asking faculty councils or comparable groups review it. The request specifically asks that they consider the advisability of a University-wide plus/minus system for all undergraduate students. The memo invites student input from the colleges as well. A separate request is made to the Student Government Association. February 1996 The Senate Council reconsiders proposals for a university-wide +/- grading system and +/- grading in the College of A&S at its 19 and 26 February meetings taking into consideration the following input:

Discussion at previous Senate meetings

SGA's October 1995 petitions and January 1996 Kernel survey

Internet assessment of other universities' experiences

Responses from 10 University of Kentucky Colleges

Research-based data from Dr. Tom Guskey and Dr. Roseann

Hogan The Senate Council acknowledges that those currently using a +/- grading system are satisfied, but concludes that there is no compelling rationale to recommend instituting such as system university-wide. The Council believes, however, that the original proposal forwarded by the College of A&S should be brought back to the Senate for a vote. March 1996 Senate approves College of Arts & Sciences +/- grading system. April 1996 The College of Communication and Information Studies College Advisory Council unanimously requests that their College be added to the list with approved +/- grading system. The proposed system is consistent with that of the College of A&S and is accepted by the Chair of the Senate Admissions and Academic Standards Committee as an extension

of the earlier debate. The Senate Council recommends the proposal and the Senate approves at the April meeting. October 1996 The Colleges of Social Work and Human Environmental Sciences forwards to the Senate Council proposals for a +/- grading system patterned after that of the College of A&S. The proposals are accepted by the Senate Council as extensions of the earlier debate and forwarded to the Senate which denies both proposals at the October 14, 1996 meeting. A motion is passed for the Senate Council to revisit the entire issue of +/- grading. At the October 28, 1996 Senate Council meeting, the idea is approved of holding a series of discussion-only sessions for +/- grading system at the November and December Senate meetings in an effort to arrive at a clear and educated consensus on this issue. The consensus of the Council is that no motions be allowed during these sessions and that spokespersons representing various sides, both faculty and students, be invited to present. Current Colleges with +/- Grading College of Law College of Architecture Landscape Architecture College of Fine Arts College of Arts and Sciences College of Communications and Information Studies Current Colleges Requesting +/- Grading College of Social Work College of Human Environmental Science The Graduate School Results of Poll on +/- Grading System Conducted by Senate Council Chair Gretchen LaGodna February 1996

College of Social Work

Faculty supports a university-wide +/- system

College of Allied Health Professions

Faculty Council reports \hat{E} not much support $\frac{3}{4}$ for the concept, but if established, they believe it should be university-wide

College of Engineering

Student view is negative and this view is supported by faculty

College of B&E

Majority of faculty polled were opposed to +/- grading system

College of Agriculture

Student Council strongly opposed. Faculty response mixed by majority support.

All were opposed to adding an A+ category.

College of Nursing

Faculty Council indicated majority of faculty support

College of Human Environmental Sciences

Faculty voted to support, but recommended no use of D- or A+ categories.

Suggest that the pluses be at the .5 level and minuses at the .7 level.

College of Communications and Information Studies

Faculty Council in support, only if university-wide and with no A+

College of Education

Departments were equally divided between opposition and support

SGA

Survey in Kernel revealed 235 students opposed and 43 supporting.

The Chair first invited Betty Huff, the University Registrar to share some of her thoughts and impressions of plus/minus grading at other Universities.

Betty Huff made the following remarks:

Jan Schach asked me to comment on any information I might have from my colleagues across the country about the impact of a

conversion to plus/minus grading.

About one year ago there was a discussion on the Registrar's List Serve about the effects of a conversion to plus/minus grading. I was unaware at that time that the topic would become a major issue at UK or I would have retained the correspondence. But the distinct impression given by my colleagues indicated the following:

A conversion to plus/minus grading resulted in a gathering toward the middle $\frac{3}{4}$ for most students. The students truly affected were the students at each end. Students with 2.00 GPAs tended to drop and students with 4.00 GPAs tended to drop. Since a C- is a 1.7, a student with a GPA bordering on 2.0 is likely to fall below 2.0 and be placed on academic probation. It is also important to remember that federal financial requirements necessitate a 2.0 overall for the academic year. Thus a student with all Cs and one C- would be out of compliance for financial aid purposes for that academic year and would have to appeal for an exemption.

As for the concern of students about their GPA, if they are applying to another university for undergraduate or graduate school, it is not necessarily so that the receiving institution accepts the GPA as reported. UK recomputes the transfer GPA for undergraduate students for purposes of admissions. Many universities who do not have a GPA that includes plus/minus grading will strip the pluses and minuses from the student's academic record. And many institutions recompute the GPA based on the major courses.

The Chair then recognized Virginia Davis-Nordin from Education to share some thoughts from Tom Guskey, College of Education, who is as close to an expert on the subject as there is on the campus.

Virginia Davis-Nordin made the following remarks:

Tom Guskey who some of you know has his doctorate from the University of Chicago in Measurement Evaluation and Statistical Analysis. He spends his time running around the world, researching and writing in this area.

I sent out an e-mail to the faculty in my college telling them about this discussion and this is what I received back from Tom.

Tom wanted to attend the Senate meeting on Monday, but he couldn't because he has to go to Vancouver to accept a national award for Book of the Year from the National Staff Development Council.

His wish for the meeting would be to press those who want plus/minus grading to provide evidence that the change will enhance teaching or learning in any way. He knows of none. As an institution of higher learning, should not our decisions be based on evidence rather than opinion, regardless of how passionately or emotionally presented? What is our purpose in grading anyway? As educators is our primary interest in helping students learn, or is it in accentuating and then codifying the differences among them? Is our purpose to develop talent, or is it to select talent? If it is indeed the latter, to select talent, then we should all teach as poorly as possibly for it accomplishes that purpose quite well. There are students who for various reasons will learn regardless of what we do. The vast majority of others who need our help and guidance, however, will not get it and variation will be enhanced. When I think of all the important pedagogy issues that deserve serious consideration and debate I am greatly saddened by the attention this trivial one of plus/minus grading is getting.

The Chair then introduced Alan Aja and Michael Tomblyn. Alan is the President of the Student Government Association and Michael is a Student Senator and as well as a Senate Council member.

Alan Aja made the following remarks:

I am going to give a brief history of the Student Government Association's involvement with the plus/minus system. I went back through some of the files in the Student Government office and I could not find action that was taken during the last year by the Student Senate or by the Student Government in general. I will tell you that as you recall last year the Student Government Association had a survey in the Kentucky Kernel. They took out a small ad and asked the question "Are you opposed or in favor of plus/minus?" Two hundred thirty-five students opposed and twenty-three supported plus/minus. However, we did not feel, that was a valid scientific survey, so we hired independent contractors under the direction of Tim Cantrell from Lexington Community College. Students were then called randomly from the phone directory and asked various questions about the plus/minus grading system. The bottom line is that out of ten students; seven were opposed, two were for, and one did not care.

I would like to share some of the points that students are concerned about.

- All or nothing, if we are going to have it, let's have it in every college. What about a grandfather clause? How about for first year students only and, if so, keep it University-wide?
- Graduate Students, what is my GPA, how is it going to work?
- Double majors, there are students who have classes in different colleges, one who has plus/minus and one who doesn't? What do they do when applying to Graduate School? What is their GPA? When they have two different ones?
- It is an accurate system. It is fair. It is a great reward to students who are in the plus range.
- IF IT IS OPTIONAL, WHAT HAPPENS? IF IT IS optional, what is the big deal?
- Even students in classes that deal with contract grading are confused.

There are instructors who have chosen not to use it this semester, who have mocked it in front of classes. That in many ways destroys the legitimacy and creditability of the system.

In all honesty, most of what I have heard has been against plus/minus. But the bottom line is listen to the students, the majority of the students here today are graduating, but are here because they are concerned about the student's future. Let's keep our University consistent and do what we can to be as fair, accurate, and consistent as possible.

Michael Tomblyn made the following remarks:

Please take out the results of the survey form. Professor Tim Cantrell took care of the experimental design and made sure there was no bias in the questions. The first graph is the class breakdown, it starts high with the freshmen. The reason for the sampling being higher with underclassmen is because more of them tend to live in dorms. But that is important because freshmen and sophomores will have to live under this system longer.

Page two, Item 2 is the breakdown of the survey results in each college, a frequency sample. There are really good results from the larger colleges; Arts and Sciences, Business and Economics, Engineering, and Education.

Item 3 is something I put in, because I wanted to know if

students felt that they were able to educate themselves sufficiently on the plus/minus issue. Basically the only way students do that is by talking to professors and by reading the student press.

Item 4 has the text in it, so you can read it exactly as it was presented. Once again Ken Cantril made sure there was no bias and we were not leading in it. Just like Alan said, if you ask ten students; seven were against, two were for, and one did not know. As far as in the different colleges, the larger colleges especially Arts and Sciences, Communications, Engineering, Social Work, Human Environmental Sciences, the percentage of the breakdown for and against was similar to that of the University as a whole. There were four colleges that were interesting; one the Graduate School, graduate students were opposed to plus/minus not quite 2 to 1. I am wondering if there is some noise there. I talked to some Graduate Students after the survey and found that they would not want to get plus/minus in their classes but when they are TAing in a large class they would not mind having that tool to differentiate between students. The other three that were interesting are the three colleges that currently have the plus/minus grading system. The College of Law was evenly divided. As far as the two undergraduate colleges who have plus/minus, one was opposed slightly and the other was almost completely opposed.

I have heard concerns from that the students opinions do not carry a lot of weight. But I feel every piece of information is a good piece of information.

The Chair then introduced Professor Steve Hart, the Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences to describe the process that the College of Arts and Sciences went through to approve in house the plus/minus proposal and share some thoughts as to the rationale of the College.

Professor Hart made the following remarks:

The issue of a plus/minus grading system has, as you are aware, been a long-standing issue in our university community. The recommendation to implement a +/- grading system in the College of Arts & Sciences originated in the Council of the College of Arts & Sciences (which is a faculty-elected body acting as an advisory body to the dean, consisting of representatives from the three areas of Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities, a student representative, and the Associate Dean, all of whom have voting rights, except for the latter). The College of Arts & Sciences Council during the 1993-1994 academic year asked that a sub-committee look at the issue of plus/minus grading, which, after lengthy deliberations, recommended implementing a new grading system. The recommendation was based on the rationale that the new +/- system will lead to greater accuracy in the assessment of students' academic performance. The College of Fine Arts was contacted, and the College Council heard that faculty and students alike liked the system. The issue was debated in the College Council in its first meeting, and the decision was made to proceed with a vote. As a result of some informal soundings Ms. Paige Bendel, then the student representative on the council, suggested that, if the new system led to greater accuracy, students were in favor of the new system. She also addressed the council with regard to relaunching the Student Advisory Council; she was encouraged by the A&S Council to do this. The Arts & Sciences College Council subsequently voted 5 to 1 in favor of the following motion:

"That the College of Arts & Sciences implement the system of plus and minus option for letter grades, commencing with the 1995-1996 academic year."

At that point, the decision was made to take a vote of the

faculty of Arts & Sciences. This vote was a paper ballot; ballots were circulated to every full-time faculty member in the College of Arts & Sciences. On November 7, 1994 the results of the vote of the A&S faculty became known:

Those in favor:	151
Votes against:	59

The above motion was then forwarded to the Senate Council. During the whole of the 1995-1996 academic year the issue was debated at the University Senate level; the issue, as I understand it, was whether the College of Arts & Sciences should be allowed to implement this system, or whether it should be a university-wide system. The argument in favor boiled down to two points: (1) the A&S faculty strongly supported such a system which was seen as more accurate, and (2) the University had already, in effect, adopted an approach whereby colleges retained a degree of autonomy since three colleges, Fine Arts, Law, and Architecture, already had the system.

Mitigating against its implementation was the idea that there should be uniformity in grading throughout the university system. The first survey of student opinion carried out by The Kernel in spring 1995 was inconclusive and showed opinion on the issue to be split. As you know, the proposal, after a year-long deliberation, was passed at the Senate level in Spring 1996, and has been implemented in the College of Arts & Sciences, and the College of Communications, as of Fall 1996. In preparation for this presentation today, I recently carried out an informal survey of A&S faculty on the new grading system; and the gamut of replies was quite broad; they range from the wildly enthusiastic (I quote: "I am thrilled to have this new option"; "Personally, I like the new grading system and feel it provides better precision in grading") to the doubtful (the main worry expressed was with regard to the lack of an A+ category) to those who thought it had made no difference. Many more reported themselves to be in favor than were opposed to the new system; faculty support, in general, therefore remains behind the new grading system. It is too early to give any definitive judgment on how the system is working; I saw with interest that students in the College of Arts & Sciences were not as opposed to the system as students in other colleges, as indicated by the survey carried out by the SGA and reported in The Kernel on December 2, 1996 and December 3, 1996.

It would be a good idea to hold another survey of student opinion at the beginning of next semester, to see if students are more or less opposed to the system once they have received their grades. The College of Arts & Sciences is committed to evaluating the new grading system: we want to look at the data and assess if the hypothesis, which has been expressed frequently, that this new system hurts the best students, is in fact true.

We intend to do a data-based comparison of grades for this semester. But I would be grateful for any other input you can provide to me, so that the right questions can be asked and the right answers given.

Chairperson Schach stated in the proposal for the College of Arts and Sciences and Communications there had been some questions over the semester as to whether it was required or optional for the faculty. That question was sent to the Senate Rules Committee of which Tom Nieman is Chair. He will now give the official interpretation. The interpretation was sent to all faculty in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences and Communications and Information Studies.

Professor Nieman made the following remarks:

The Committee along with Legal Counsel has decided that the

rule change is in fact in effect for the undergraduate students in the Fall Semester of 1996.

There is no requirement in this rule that an instructor must award any particular grade or set of grades within the grading system established in the Senate Rules. Instructors on an individual basis can determine what type of grades they are going to give within that system.

Chairperson Schach then introduced Professor Lee Edgerton, the Academic Ombud to outline what would be considered good practice with respect to clarifying with students and the instructor plus/minus grading as it relates to the syllabus.

Professor Edgerton made the following remarks:

Students have a right to information about the course. That is a senate rule which is interpreted to mean that the syllabus is to identify for the student the grading practice to be used in the course. The Rules Committee interpretation makes it clear that grades in colleges and programs for which plus/minus grades are allowed may or may not include plus or minus categories. If we are talking about a required course with multiple sections, particularly those classes for which we (faculty) do not allow students to shift from one section to another, I believe all sections should have a consistent policy with respect to plus/minus grading. In my opinion, an inconsistent grading policy in that case becomes a violation of their right to fair and just evaluation within a program.

It is more difficult to extend the argument for consistency in grading practice within a course to those situations where the course is taught by different faculty members in different semesters and different years. Most of us value the differences in style and format that are utilized by various faculty. If we acknowledge that value, and if we also acknowledge that different grading practices may favor different formats, we should, in my opinion, affirm both. Thus, my recommendation would be that courses with multiple sections, in which students may not shift between sections, be consistent with respect to plus/minus grading for any given semester. For a given course being taught by different instructors in different semesters, I would be receptive to letting the individual instructors judge whether plus/minus categories were appropriate for their section.

Because plus/minus grading is new, it is important that we clarify for students in the syllabus and in the first meeting of the class, whether or not we are going to use those categories. I think it would be desirable to share with the students the rationale for our decision. If you believe you are increasing the accuracy of the grading and feel that greater accuracy is important, share that with the students. If you believe that the course does not lend itself to such fine gradations and you choose to use broader categories, share that perspective. Give the students a chance for some feedback if they want to provide it before the end of the semester.

Chairperson Schach introduced the four members of the panel who would be sharing their own personal experiences and thoughts about plus/minus grading. There are two faculty members, one who opposes and one in favor of plus/minus and two students; one in favor and one opposing. First we will hear from Jed Porter a Senator from Architecture who was both a student and now a professor under plus/minus grading. Next will be Michael Tomblyn from the Graduate School who will speak to his thoughts against. Then will be Senator Doug Poe a Professor from the Business and Economics College who will speak against. Last will be John Swintosky, a Landscape Architecture student who will speak on behalf of

plus/minus.

Professor Porter made the following remarks:

I bring two perspectives to the discussion because I am an alumnus of the College of Architecture and I currently serve as an assistant professor on its faculty. Our college has had this system since Fall Semester 1978. As a student, I was always keenly aware of the implications of those pluses and minuses. I always welcomed the challenge of earning an A rather than an A- or a B+ rather than a B. I always appreciated the information which that system of evaluation provided. As a member of the faculty, I really appreciate the flexibility of a system which allows us to reward differences in performance. There are differences within the range that is usually reserved for A or for B. As an alumnus - as a former student - and as an assistant professor, I never regarded the system as inherently unfair. There are marked differences in performance. When students do well, they need to be rewarded, and when they do not, they need to be so informed. I have always regarded education as a partnership. I am expected to arrive well prepared and deliver a coherent lecture or be present in my studio and offer helpful critiques as my students' projects evolve. I expect my students to be well prepared for their lectures and to have drawings and models to show me. When they do not do well, I try to seek them out. I have never seen the system itself as a system that discriminates, for it has always seemed to me to reward students who do well and to inform students about their differences in performance.

As to some of the effects of the system in our college. I try to follow my own students' careers fairly closely. I find that they regularly find employment with the best firms in Lexington and elsewhere and that they are admitted to the best schools for advanced studies in architecture, which includes schools like Columbia University, Cornell University, and the University of Pennsylvania. They do so with A-s as well as As on their transcripts. The system has worked well in our college. I have always appreciated the flexibility which it provides me as an instructor. I appreciated the information about performance which it provided me as a student.

Michael Tomblyn made the following remarks:

It is not often that we get together on the second Monday of every month to actually debate an issue that directly affects students the way plus/minus grading does. We are going to be discussing what is perhaps the most important issue to all the students on this campus today. Like Alan and I presented, if you randomly selected ten students from the University population, seven are going to be against it. Even colleges who have had this grading system for years have failed to support the grading policy in this survey. The students on this campus are more agitated about this issue than any other and are frustrated by the appearance of faculty aloofness for their concerns. Today I am before this body to hear out the students on this important issue and to discard the condescending and paternalistic attitude that the faculty know better than the students what is good for them. The debate today will no doubt be animated and perhaps even heated but I hope my colleagues on both sides will spurn the devil of passion and embrace the angel of reason.

During the past month or two I have spent nearly 25 hours pursuing research on plus/minus grading. From talking to learned colleagues to pursuing the primary literature to networking with other universities. Over the next couple of minutes I hope to share my findings with you and to offer an argument in opposition to

plus/minus grading that I believe to be unassailable. In order for us to undertake such a drastic makeover of the basic fabric of our academic life one must offer convincing arguments that will leave no doubt as to the benefit of pursuing this change of course. So far no argument has been brought forth. Two reasons have been forwarded by proponents of plus/minus grading; one is that the new grading system is not really going to matter one way or the other and the second is that it allows professors to make fine distinctions between closely earning students. The former argument is a nonargument at best and at worst it actually argues against institutional plus/minus because, if it makes no difference, why do it. The latter argument is on the surface legitimate. Indeed why should two students who earn nearly ten points away from each other obtain the same grade? Is this not unfair to the better student, whatever the better student is? However, a closer study of this position finds it to be at least in this case indefensible. One must ask themselves who is forwarding this argument and why and why does the problem the proponents wish to correct exist? At least in the College of Arts and Sciences the lines in the plus/minus front are distinct. The faculty in humanities and social sciences are for plus/minus and the faculty in the hard sciences are in opposition. Of course there are a couple of exceptions on both sides but for the most part this is the rule. Now this really confused me for some time. Why would the lines be drawn so strongly? Then I obtained a copy of the Arts and Sciences distribution of grades for the last semester, Spring 1996, and it all became clear. This document contains the average grades expressing GPA points for lower division undergraduate, upper division undergraduate, total undergraduate, and total graduate courses. The results are absolutely striking. The average total undergraduate GPA in the hard sciences comes to about a 2.50, that is respectable, that is where it is supposed to be for average students, that is what average is. If you look over in the nonscience, the mean total undergraduate GPA is a 3.15, I know some thought this was worse. In Social Work it is only 3.5, 3.6, or maybe a little higher. Women's Studies gave about nine As for every B, assuming there were no Cs, Ds, or Es, if there were there would be more than nine As for every B. Aerospace Studies, Environmental Studies, and Modern Studies also gave more As than Bs, once again assuming no Cs, Ds, or Es were assessed. Here is the clincher, African American Studies felt that every student in all of their upper division courses earned an A, 4.00, that is average. When the number of nonscience departments and programs total three to four times the number of science departments it is no wonder that Arts and Sciences faculty support plus/minus grading. The reason is finally clear. While the sciences obviously utilize the five grade system, the nonscience faculty seem to only utilize a three grade system. So while the desire to differentiate between students is admirable, I would suggest that utilizing grade options already available to the Arts and Sciences faculty might obliterate the alleged need for institution of a plus/minus system. So if there are no defensible reasons to make the move to plus/minus, are there any reasons to oppose it? Yes, I think there are several. The results of moving to plus/minus from other universities has shown conclusively that in the end students are indeed hurt by the grading system. Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Missouri have been wrestling with the problems that have risen since moving to plus/minus. North Carolina State University is a perfect example. Some of you may have seen the latest tirade today in The Kernel. Each semester since the adoption of plus/minus, and it has been a few years now, has ended with the exact same result; 50% more

minus grades given than plus grades and we are to believe that it does not hurt students. You get the same numbers from other universities that we have networked and talked with. The students are currently in a state of rebellion against the plus/minus system at NC State and faculty have been utilizing the new options arbitrarily. Some will give an A- but not a B+ or B-, then they will give a C+. So it is a whole hodge podge of grading possibilities in the wonderful world of North Carolina State University since the institution of plus/minus.

Another obvious problem of plus/minus is the failure to replicate grading outcomes for identical situations. While our own Dr. Guskey has published research showing that his grading options are expanded, the probability of two professors assessing the exact same performance with the same grade declines precipitously. This is common sense and a real danger to students especially during their early years at UK when taking required course work encompassing several professors and teaching assistants are the rule. The facts are firmly ingrained in students' minds. They are informed of the dangers of moving to a plus/minus grading system. Just as it happened at MIT and other universities, this will lead to an increased epidemic of grade consciousness. You have all seen it before, students are coming to you at the end of the semester and arguing for one or two points on that first test or quiz. They are more interested in that one or two points than it they are going to come out of your class learning something. Moving to plus/minus increases grade consciousness.

Instead of being placated by the more options offered, people say well now students aren't going to feel the need to come and argue for a B because they received a B- and that is all right. Now, what you find at universities is now that you have twice as many students on the bubble, twice as many students on the borderline between one grade and another, and you are going to have twice as many students in your office. Increased grade conscientious has also been shown to lead to increased instances of cheating. None of us want that to happen. Not only are there problems with plus/minus grading itself, but as we close out this fall semester we have yet to come to terms with implementation problems. What about 400G courses; what are they graduate or undergraduate courses? A & S and Communications assume plus/minus on the undergraduate. G suggests it is a graduate course; the four or the four hundred if you look in the Bulletin says it is undergraduate. I have no idea which it is. I brought this issue up with people on the Senate Council and they said Fine Arts had the same problem and they have dealt with it. But no one could tell me exactly how they dealt with it. What about crosslisted courses? For example, there are students I know who signed up for a course under a biology heading and others who signed up for the same courses through a biochemistry heading, biochemistry being in the Medical Center, not A&S. Biology is under plus/minus while biochemistry is not. Who gets the plus/minus? Is this fair to those who wanted to sign up under one course number but could not because it was filled? How is a professor going to equalize a B- under biology with a B, or is it a C in biochemistry? Faculty have informed me that these problems have existed, but one again have yet to tell me how they have fixed them.

Finally there is the unfortunate factor of misinformation deliberate or otherwise that was fed to faculty last Spring regarding the optional nature of plus/minus grading. Many faculty who do not wish to employ plus/minus grading in their courses were fooled into thinking it was required. They were not informed they

could be conscious objectors and opt out simply by noting this on their syllabi. Now they know plus/minus is simply an option but are still bound by their syllabi. These faculty lose, the students lose and now there is greater rift between students and faculty. Of course these faculty simply give all letter grades and state that no one earned an intermediate grade, however a lot of faculty feel that is deception and are not going to do that. Once again the students lose and there is a great rift. Many other faculty will simply refuse to give plus/minus grades regardless of whether it is required or not. The end result is a new grading system that is not yet ready for implementation and will hurt many of those involved. The reasonable person can see that there are no defensible arguments in favor of plus/minus and a few good reasons to oppose. There are also implementation problems that threaten the future of plus/minus grading at UK. If the faculty truly wish to act in good faith on this issue, then today we will vote to hold off on plus/minus implementation until next fall and all work together to iron out the wrinkles in the meantime. Myself, and I'm sure some of my colleagues, are willing to talk about and perhaps even compromise on this issue. But only without the sword of Damocles over our heads. I have a modest proposal. Set aside the implementation of plus/minus grading until August and work for a compromise. Suggestions could be only having plus grades that reward more without having minus grades. You laugh but this is a way that your students will support you and the students will not be hurt. Maybe not that, lets keep plus/minus university-wide, but allow the students to choose the grading option when they register on VIP. The faculty get their option, they can give plus/minus in their courses, the students also get their option. We already do this for pass/fail and audit. The fact is that we are willing to compromise on this issue to an extent to give the faculty what they want and the freedom that they need as long as it does not hurt students. I hope today that faculty are going to stand up and join us rather than following the pied piper of plus/minus to an unfortunate end like lemmings.

Professor Doug Poe made the following remarks:

Briefly I have four reasons for opposing plus/minus grading. Two are personal and two are more generic.

In the primary undergraduate class I teach I use a variation of contract grading, because it encompasses a wide variety of tasks; computer projects, written assignments, homework, class participation, and in-class tests. I have used this system in which the student contracts to do a specified amount of work in each category so that they may not obtain a particular grade without reaching a certain level of proficiency in each category. Each semester that I teach this undergraduate class at the end of the semester I swear that I will never use this system again because it is so much work for me. But every semester on the last day when I ask the students, (I have kept records for the past 6 years) ninety-eight and a fraction percent report that if they had it do over again they would choose the contract grading rather than the straight forward grading. One hundred percent report that they worked harder and learned more than they would have if we had used the straight grade presentation. This type of grading that I use, I assure you I will not do under a plus/minus system. I will not fight fourteen graduations in the way the grade is computed. This goes along with what Virginia Nordin presented saying that the more graduations you get the less good the teaching is.

Secondly, as Michael pointed out, I believe it leads to grade consciousness and that I will have a lot more students in my

office arguing over a fraction of a point for something that was done early in the semester just so they can get a grade. More generically, last year the first time this was voted on I came with those two reservations, but I came somewhat open minded, willingly to listen to those who proposed going to plus/minus grading. They discussed that it would be beneficial to the students. At that time we did not have this large student representation, there were two or three students here, one who had enough guts to stand up and say the students did not support plus/minus. That along with my own personal feelings led me to oppose the issue. That was the University-wide proposal. In the intervening time period, having seen the information that has come forward, there is no consensus among the faculty on this campus that this (plus/minus) is a better way to do things. Students are without question opposed to it, despite the fact that it has been presented as being beneficial to them. The information I heard from the Registrar reinforces this even more firmly for me. Students who are solid A students will be penalized. This is not an opinion or a guess on our part; this is fact from the Universities that have made the conversion. The students who are the weakest, who would get a 2.0 average, will be penalized. What we are doing is creating a great muddle in the middle. Lastly along with this, coming out of the mountains and believing in strong mountain philosophy, I have always felt for the side that says, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" and what we have ain't broke.

John Swintosky made the following remarks:

I would like to discuss some of the merits of the plus/minus system and maybe rebut some of the opponents arguments. I admire Mr. Tombllyn's and our President of SGA's diligence in the participation in the process this semester. However I think it is precisely the lack of that participation that has put what they perceive to be students in a fix with grades because they did not do this leg work back when the original proposals came forth from Arts and Sciences and the College of Communications. These were debated and resolved in April of this year. The discussion today is like closing the barn door after the cows are out. As I digest the argument so far, opponents of the plus/minus system call for everything but exorcism while demonizing the proponents of the plus/minus system. Seldom is the crux of the issue the differing numerical values awarded even addressed. The two institutions reporting to serve student interest, The Kernel and the SGA, would do better to more closely analyze this point and then offer the opinions and alternatives. The two articles that were written created an aura of suspicion and distrust around this issue of grading. To me it is ludicrous to assume that faculty would benefit or generate any satisfaction by lower grades across the University. To insinuate legal action on this issue, to present information about an immaterial meeting with President Wethington who is not the person in the forefront of this discussion, it is the University Senate, leaves a lot to be desired. It clouds the issue. In reference to the survey, one third of the respondents were freshmen, I agree with that, but those freshmen have not been impacted by any grading system in the university so far, not that they should be left out, but those who are farther along, I believe have more opinion and more impact on this discussion. The three colleges and one department that presently use the plus/minus system were represented by roughly six and half percent of the vote; I will have to accept the scientific survey method that this represents their sample of the University at large. But with only eight voices out of Architecture, fourteen from Fine Arts, four from Law, and zero

from Landscape Architecture it seems like a more thorough survey might yield some more interesting results and maybe a more thorough survey of those who exist only under that system may open some eyes. As far as the bias in the survey, I have a question with that also, such as the third question which states "Are you familiar with the current controversy over implementation of a plus/minus grading system in some colleges," to me that choice of words rather than saying discussion or debate influences the response there. Also the fourth question where the University Faculty Senate was referred to twice, when this is the University Senate which represents the entire University not just the faculty, may incorrectly influence the response that this is an imposition from a participant group of faculty.

The background I bring to discuss this is, I was a student in the Engineering College from 1979 to 1983, where letter grades were the norm. If I remember correctly, I believe the grades were more narrowly defined. I know I had grades where an A was a 93 to 100 and a B was a 85 to 92. It seems as though the plus/minus grading system would merely return us to those days when the standards were slightly higher. Presently I am in the last year of the Landscape Architecture Program in the College of Agriculture. Landscape Architecture Program uses plus/minus grading, however to address the crossover group, almost all the rest of my courses are graded under the straight grades, except for a few courses in Architecture. I believe the plus/minus system more accurately rewards and is representative of the performance of the individual student. The old system lumps letter grades into blocks of ten and the new system splits grades in relative slithers with three. There can and should be further discussion of the exact numeration of the various plus/minus levels and on the inclusion or exclusion of the A+ grade. With the plus/minus there should be less likelihood of complaints about grades, since accuracy is heightened, there should also be less complaints about grade inflation, since individual grades are better defined. To me the student who knows their percentage grade, knows which category he falls into and is more likely to work to move up a level when it comes to finals and they are one or two points away from whatever, there is less likelihood of complaining about the grade versus quality points because there is only plus or minus .3 than the whole move from a 3.0 to a 4.0. The professors should feel less pressure because it is more clearly laid out where students are going to fall.

Professor Michael Kennedy's article in today's Kernel offers some of these same options, such as no A-. These are the types of discussion we should be having.

To sum up, decisions are best made when based on facts not on emotions, feelings, or choosing a lot of pressurized words such as extreme, mean spirited, agitated, aloof, and paternalistic. There was student input in the decisions made by Arts and Sciences and Communications to implement the new system. There are three colleges presently using plus/minus dating back to 1970, 1978, and 1990. There are three more colleges interested in apply plus/minus to their curriculum. It seems that there may be a shift occurring, that we are looking to move away from the straight grades and into a plus/minus system. It can recognize performance and excellence in student education.

Chairperson Schach thanked the panelists.

Kaveh Tagavi (Engineering) said that if there were two students and if one of them deserved a C+ and the other one deserved a C-, it is not fair to give them the same grade. About a year ago, the Graduate Counsel started discussing plus/minus. Because of

those discussions he sent e-mail to his faculty, not everyone answered, but those who did, 2 to 1 were for plus/minus. Dean Lester contacted him and wanted him to present some of his concerns. Dean Lester felt that if they did go to plus/minus, they should revisit after a period of time to see how it is working. He was also concerned about some of the GPA cutoffs, because some University-wide fellowships are given on a 3.3, and if this is going to affect some students, we need to be conscious of that. He was also worried about perfect 4.0 students, whose GPAs would drop.

Mandy Lewis (Social Work - student senator) said that 80 percent of the students in Social Work were opposed to plus/minus according to the poll in The Kernel, but the faculty is 100 percent in favor of the system. There is a shift there, the faculty members need to tell the students why they want plus/minus and the students need to tell the faculty why they oppose the system. Students do care what happens in the University and they do need to be listened to. If they can't even consider listening to how they feel about an issue to which most students are opposed, then they need to start over at square one.

Ellen Hahn (Nursing) said that after listening to the first debate, their senators and student senators entered into a survey of their faculty and students together. Their faculty are very divided, with the preliminary results showing about 52% opposed to plus/minus grading, almost the majority of the undergraduate students are against plus/minus, but among the graduate students over half are for it.

Doug Poe (Business and Economics) said that they had listened to this debate for a year and he has not as yet heard anything that is relevant to what they as a Senate should be voting on. What they should be talking about is whether or not a new procedure will enhance the learning of the students, whether the students like it or not, and whether they as faculty like it or not. The only evidence he has heard on that issue is in opposition from Education. All this argument about grade point average simply speaks to the point that this system leads to a concentration on grade rather than learning. He is not hearing anything that convinces him that the grading system, the one they have or the one they are switching to, has any benefits in terms in learning. They should not be looking at a different grading system unless there are compelling reasons to go to another system. The discussion of who likes it and who does not is meaningless in terms of what the University should be doing.

Ashley Vancill (student - Arts and Sciences) said that there were three groups of students; the ones who do not care about their grades, the ones who are doing the best they can in their classes, and the middle group. Implementing a plus/minus system would not encourage the best students to work that much harder, because they are already working as hard as they can, they are already learning everything they can. She does not see how it would enhance their learning, it would just cause more confusion and possibly even a distraction from learning, because they would be so concerned about their grades.

Joan Callahan (Arts and Sciences) asked if there was any consensus among Carnegie I Institutions that they should have a plus/minus system? If they were to not have the system, would that affect perception of this institution, among research institutions.

The Chair answered not to her knowledge.

David Hamilton (History) said that in his two undergraduate classes for this term, the plus/minus is a wash. It is highly anecdotal, but he did have a student in his office who was very

upset about plus/minus because he would have to study much harder for the final than he would have otherwise. That suggests that some students are concerned about the impact of the grading system. He hopes it translates not into grade consciousness but more learning. He favors plus/minus, because he feels it is a fairer, more accurate system.

Heather Burris (Allied Health - student senator) does not see how students are for this system, no matter how many surveys are done, the students will still be against the system. It is mainly because of the minus part of the system. It will lower GPAs, students will lose their financial aid. She believes this system is inconsistent with other universities. The faculty wonders why there is a low retention rate among the students and one reason is because the students feel that the faculty is not listening to them. If they want the retention rate to improve, they should listen to the students, they do know about their grades and what is best for them. They should not go to this system, because it will hurt the individual.

Michael Walker (student - Agriculture) stated he was a sophomore in the College of Agriculture and also in his final year in the Modern Studies Program. In the two Modern Studies courses he has one of his teachers is doing plus/minus and the other teacher is not. He said he would if the majority of the class wanted to. In the class where there is no plus/minus there is more discussion among students about what is going on in the class, more academically enriching discussion. In the class where there is plus/minus, people are pulling their hair out about grades. Plus/minus, especially for pre-professional students, is making the students focus more and more on the grades than on the full academically enriching experience at UK. Focusing more on classes and not trying to broaden one's horizons.

A student from Arts and Sciences stated his concern is being a senior this year. He feels it is wrong to implement a policy on seniors, it should be started with freshmen coming into the system. He feels the upperclassmen should be exempt from the plus/minus system.

Joe Schuler (student - Social Work) referred to the article in the Kernel about NC State, where they are considering eliminating the plus/minus system that is in existence. He resented the faculty member who said it was fear of the unknown. These students know what it is going to do and what it has done and are still opposed to it. One of the problems that the Student Government at NC State pointed out was the fact that less than 50% of the faculty were actually using the system. That is not consistency.

Heath Lovell (Engineering - student senator) wanted to make a point about the survey not representing all the colleges. He went to the College of Engineering student council and asked every organization to go back to their students and poll them. Everyone came back and said that they were not in favor of plus/minus. He also had a student come to him who had a class where the professor had the students vote on whether they wanted plus/minus grading. He was upset because his GPA is being effected by who is in his class and what they are voting on, rather than how much he was learning. It scares him to think that the University would do something that would hurt the top level students. How can the faculty present this with such strong opposition from the students?

Mike Cibull (Medicine) said that as a parent of a UK student, the low level courses tend to be taught in sections and the tests are given over all the sections, each individual section is taught by a different person. He questions the precision of giving

even ten point grades, let alone three point grades, considering the differences section to section. It goes far beyond our ability to measure students. He has been teaching for 18 years in the Medical School. There they essentially use two grades, and he can understand the need for ability to differentiate students who they know very well and there is a very limited ability to give them a grade such as A or B. That argument should only pertain to things like graduate schools, where B is the minimum acceptable grade and not to undergraduate schools, where he would hope that they would encourage the faculty to use the whole grading system.

Carolyn Brock (Chemistry) said she defended the position of faculty as being the ones that make the decisions about what grades shall be given. Learning cannot exist without some level of trust between students and faculty, if that trust is broken learning stops. It is clear to her that the students do not trust this system.

The Chair stated that a number of colleges and programs had been approved for plus/minus. The Senate came to the point where it also approved the College of Arts and Sciences and Communications proposal. It was decided then by the Senate Council that they would precede on a College by College basis with new proposals versus attempting another university-wide proposal. The Social Work College and Human Environmental Sciences thought it would be a fairly smooth process but found out it was not. The Senate is now at an impasse. Some decisions need to be made about what the policy is going to be in the future. The Chair asked the following question, should the grading system at the University of Kentucky be uniform?

Anna Keene (student - A&S) said that whether or not she agreed with the plus/minus grading scale, what they need to think about here is that each college across the University has chosen for itself whether or not they want to implement this scale. Definitely each college curriculum is going to be different and it is very hard to compare two colleges curriculums. We are all pursuing higher learning and in that thought we have to say at some point that it will be all equally difficult and they all deserve that same type of grades. If there is going to be a system it must be university-wide.

Louis Swift - (University Studies) felt it was very important that there was a uniform system across the campus. If the issue comes back to this floor again, they should follow the procedure of first arguing that point, making a decision on that issue, whether it shall be uniform or not and only when they have decided that then proceed to the next issue about whether there should be plus/minus or not. We must decide on a uniform system and that principle should be argued first.

The Chair said that a university-wide proposal had come before the Senate three times and failed. The question is, does it depend on the nature of the proposal that goes university-wide? There are some alternatives; one with an A+, one with all pluses and no minuses, (the University of South Carolina has that,) and one with pluses and minuses only for the B, C, and D categories not for the A categories.

Dr. Swift stated the point he was trying to make was that first of all they needed to establish the principle on whether it shall be uniform no matter what it is. If we open up the discussion to three or four different possible proposals, then we lose the principle.

Michael Friedman (Fine Arts) asked if was remotely within the realm of possibility that students could declare a plus/minus preference. Betty Huff, University Registrar said it would take

extensive programming.

Virginia Davis-Nordin said there was the plus/minus controversy and then the idea of college autonomy. The University is a collection of colleges and for some purposes have to be uniform. One of the governing structures that preserve some small faculty impact on what goes on is the idea of college autonomy and college faculty talking things over. It is important that what they come to preserves college autonomy as well as they can, as well as serving the students.

Chancellor Zinser stated on the point of uniform or not uniform. She would advocate that they do work for uniformity from the point of view of the students' experience here. There are lots of choices that need to be made by students; when during the day, what time in the semester, what faculty member they might want to work with in trying to choose the class they are going to take, after they have decided what major. She would hate to see them trying to decide whether or not to take a particular class based upon whether or not they were using plus/minus. Across the colleges it should be uniform. We are trying to encourage a lot of interdisciplinary study, trying to encourage students to take classes in other colleges across the university to get a very broad education. Having that uniformity in the concept of the grading system is important.

Joan Callahan (Philosophy) said that uniformity is impossible. She was in principle in support of the plus/minus system. Students do perform differently. The fact that the system might disadvantage some students is not necessarily unfair. Under the current system some students are unfairly advantaged. The fact that some students would get lower GPAs does not entail anything. The crucial point is that they simply cannot guarantee uniformity, even if the system is across campus or in a college. Individual professors are still at liberty, and they must be to use discretion. Individual professors are opposed to the system and therefore will not use it. Individual professors need to be a liberty to retain that kind of discretion.

The Chair asked the question; should plus/minus be required or at the option of the instructor?

Doug Poe (Business and Economics) said that the answer was at the option of the instructor no matter how it is structured.

Kaveh Tagavi (Engineering) said that there seemed to be some confusion about uniformity. One point is that if there is plus/minus it should be all colleges. Another point of uniformity is that the grades should be the same from college to college. Even if professors were forced to say 93 is an A, they would make the exam harder or easier to get what they want.

Tom Blues (English) said he had deep reservations about a plus/minus system, but feels that if a decision is made after considerable discussion, debate, and the democratic process it seems that faculty are obligated to use the system that has been advanced. If the system is plus/minus how can he deny a student the opportunity to earn a B+ and by the same token how can he in conscious say a student is excused the penalty of earning a B-? Or maybe a B- is an advance over the possibility of a C+. It seems that there is a corollary to the principle that Professor Swift suggested that they decide what system they are going to use as a University and then they use it. He believes the answer to the question is yes, they are morally obliged to use the system by which they have reviewed the options.

A question of clarification was asked. Ombud Edgerton said that a faculty member could not be forced to use a grading scale set

by a college of university, that was his answer to whether the faculty were informed correctly for this semester. If that is true, does that mean that a faculty member would not have to use a certain grading scale no matter what was implemented? Can a system be put in place and all will use it, or will faculty still have the electibility of using it? If they do have the electibility than the grading scale is not enforceable and should not be put to use.

The Chair said it was her understanding that they currently have the A, B, C, D, E categories and there are certain quality points associated with each. There is not currently a percentage associated with each and there is no rule that says a faculty member has to give each grade. They can determine no Bs for whatever reason, but they are bound by A, B, C, D, E.

A student stated that he had a class this semester where on the first day of class the professor talked about grading. He said he was told he was supposed to use the plus/minus grading system. But since he did not like plus/minus his grading system would be 90 - 100 is a A+. He is still using the system but has adjusted it to what he thinks is fair. He feels there needs to be a universal grading system. He is a sophomore and taking University Studies requirements now. He does not understand how he can take one class and it be A-E and another class which is cross disciplinary and it be plus/minus.

Roy Moore (Communications & Information Studies) said that if they do go to a system they should make sure the people are expected to perform in good faith in complying with the system. It is important that there is a uniform system. Based on the information he has heard today, he would say they have not heard any useful information.

John Swintosky said that it sounded like one of the biggest concerns was one of semantics, that if they score a 90 they will be given an A- and then the associated drop in status. Maybe the A- should start at 87. If that is the logic that is of the biggest concern, it does not refute the value of the plus/minus system where the .3s and .7s in between are recognized and are valuable. No one has addressed that.

Joe Schuler (student - Social Work) said that if something is voluntary it cannot be uniform. You cannot have voluntary uniform.

Bill Freehling (Arts and Sciences) said that he was in favor of the plus/minus system and had not heard anything that makes him opposed to it. The system enables him to really carefully grade students. There is a real difference between a B+ and a B- and he values being able to put that difference on transcripts. The students have convinced him about two very important procedural issues. They are right that there should be an A+, there should be a mark that distinguishes excellent work from super work. They are also right that it should be phased in, a senior should not be given a different grading system than the one he has had all along. That will get rid of a many of the inequities that now exist and a lot of the resentment among the students.

Michael Tomblyn (Graduate Student) said there is a more pressing concern, even the faculty member who is for plus/minus is admitting that they are going to be doing something wrong in about two weeks to a lot of students. What they should be talking about is how they are going to rectify this for two weeks from now. They can not change the rule now, but they could move to suspend the that rule and then look at it.

Ashley Vancil said that she did not want to be an experiment for this semester. Waiting a year to implement plus/minus might be

a good idea instead of trying it out and seeing what happens.

Lee Edgerton (Ombud) said that he suspected there would be as many moves down as there are moves up in the scale but he wanted to reemphasize the fact that there is nothing in the rule that says the cutoff is in a certain place. They should not think that a decision on plus/minus or straight letter grade is going to provide some uniformity, there is some inherent variation in the system. He hoped that everyone would read William Raspberry's column in the paper yesterday; he is talking about the fact that we sometimes let issues become overblown. No one's is going to be ruined by a plus/minus. I hope that we will keep that in perspective and not put ourselves in positions that will be of embarrassment later on over something that ultimately is not going to have that much impact on our lives. We will all live if our GPA is a little lower. It is easier to faculty to say that than for students, but he hopes they will try to keep the debate in perspective and keep our community in tact.

David Hamilton (History) said, to follow up on that point, there is an apocalyptic sense that learning will cease if plus/minus is implemented. However Harvard, Michigan, Berkely, and Virginia have this system. Many of our faculty are from these institutions, we try to recruit new faculty from these schools. He does not think that learning has stopped and the students at these institutions are only grade conscious. They have had plus/minus for years and we are following up well behind.

A motion was made to suspend the rule.

Only 34 of the required 45 members to constitute a quorum were present. No motion could be entertained.

Chancellor Zinser made the following remarks:

It's late, and while the students are still here I'd like to add some comments for clarity. The collective views of the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences led to a request to the University Senate for a plus/minus grading system, and with the Senate's approval it is in effect. Based on the subsequent interpretation of the Senate Rules Committee that the policy is permissive rather than prescriptive, the College's new plus/minus grading system, in effect this semester, permits the individual faculty member to use pluses and minuses or not. Given this interpretation, it is crucial that the faculty member's decision about the grading structure for that class be communicated clearly to the student. Because it is late in the semester, it is very important to communicate to students anything that still needs to be said about the grading method for that class this semester. Given the permissive nature of the policy and the level of concern being expressed about the change to plus/minus grading, it will be up to the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences to discuss the wisdom of using the plus/minus option this semester or not. It remains the faculty member's choice. The permissive rule is in effect. I recommend that faculty in the College discuss this as quickly as possible because they are implementing their grading methods now. The fact remains, the option to use the plus/minus system is in effect, and the implementation of the option is a matter between individual faculty and his/her students in the class.

In preparing for the next stage of discussion on grading policies, we might take advantage of the fact that we have variable practices and some history to use. Some colleges have used plus/minus grading for a long time, others have just implemented it, some are not using it. There may be a good database for examining the pros and cons. I will do whatever I can, in collaboration with Betty Huff, Roseann Hogan, Lou Swift and others, to see that we

provide helpful information about past practices in time for the Senate's discussion of and action on the plus/minus grading matter in February. I think this would be helpful if you agree. Also, there must be some national information about the effects of different grading systems on student learning. I agree with the comments made today that decision making should be focused on the effects of a grading system on student learning.

My personal view is that the grading policy should be uniform across the colleges (at least in undergraduate programs.) I view the University not as a collection of colleges, but as a collection of colleagues. While we may disagree in the formation of a policy of this kind, once the representative body of the collective faculty makes a judgment about a policy, especially one as substantive and overarching as a grading system, each individual faculty member is obliged to follow it (contrary to a couple of suggestions otherwise today.) There are processes and an Ombud where a student may take up a concern that a faculty member is not following a policy. The individual faculty member has the right to give whatever grade he or she feels the student has earned within the context of the grading structure set by policy by this Senate. Academic freedom does not grant the right to operate outside the policy of the collective faculty as represented by the Senate.

Obviously, there is no perfect grading system. We have seen that by our own experience and looking at the experiences of other institutions. I believe the most productive thing to do right now is to implement current policy carefully, sincerely and fairly in light of the concerns. This means dealing with the present policy class by class through the relationship the faculty member has with the students in that class. And, it means getting ready for the next round of policy discussions and action by having for the February meeting any analyses of data that may be available to compare the effects of plus/minus versus simple letter grade on student learning. The feasibility of presenting such information will be determined by the Registrar and others.

Finally, I want to thank the students. This has been a nice opportunity to have a discussion with students and to hear from them. Yes, we do listen to you. Our listening does not necessarily lead to the results you want; but, yes we do listen.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:07 p.m.

Betty J. Huff
Secretary, University Senate

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