

**UNC Educational Policy Committee
Annual Report, 2009-2010**

Approved by unanimous vote of the Educational Policy Committee, April 14, 2010

Membership: Andrew J. Perrin, (Sociology, chair); David Bevevino (undergraduate student); Andrea Biddle (Health Policy); Chris Derickson (Registrar, ex officio, March 15, 2010 to present); Beverly Foster (Nursing); Donna Gilleskie (Economics); Suzanne Havala Hobbs (Health Policy); Roberta Kelly (Registrar, ex officio, through March 15, 2010); Susan Klebanow (Music); Stuart MacDonald (Political Science); Lisa Norberg (Libraries, left University); Bobbi Owen (ex officio); Thomas Winkler (Graduate student, Pharmacy); Cecil Wooten (Classics)

Meetings: September 9, 2009; October 7, 2009; November 4, 2009; December 2, 2009; January 13, 2010 (meeting cancelled); February 3, 2010; March 3, 2010; April 14, 2010

EPC considered several important topics this year:

- Enrollment Excellence Task Force report
- Transcript comment requests for "Certificate of Attendance" and Gamma Sigma Epsilon
- Priority Registration Advisory Committee (PRAC)
- Eligibility requirements for Dean's List
- EPC/COSC survey on plagiarism and academic dishonesty
- Grading patterns and reform

The final three of these bear further discussion.

Eligibility Requirements for Dean's List

EPC considered the rising concern that as many as 40% of full-time undergraduates were eligible for Dean's List, threatening the honorific character of the List. We held two discussions of the issue, and passed an advisory resolution (attachment A to this report) on March 3. The advisory resolution noted that the Dean's List eligibility issue was most immediately a result of grade *inflation*, but also hid substantial *inequality* between instructors and departments with respect to grading patterns. We considered recommending that the Dean's List be abolished entirely due to concerns about the validity of GPA-based comparisons, but decided on a compromise measure.

The Deans' Council took EPC's recommendation and concerns into account during their discussion, but eventually chose a somewhat more limited reform. EPC and the Deans' Council spoke to the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) on March 22 on the matter. EPC remains concerned with the inequality problem, but is pleased that the Deans' Council has decided to tighten eligibility, but is concerned that it may exacerbate grade inflation and compression.

EPC/COSC Survey on Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

Following several complaints from faculty of problems with the Honor Court process for matters of plagiarism and academic dishonesty, EPC initiated contact with the Committee on Student Conduct, which is responsible for overseeing the Honor System. The two committees have collaborated on developing a survey, to be distributed to instructors this spring. The survey should illuminate instructors' experiences with the honor system and with plagiarism in their teaching experience more

generally. EPC and COSC may continue exploring the treatment of these matters in the next few years.

Grading Patterns and Reform

Building on the spring 2009 report on grading, EPC spent much time considering options for grading reform. We considered a set of reforms based on transparency—reporting of student and faculty grading patterns on transcripts and on faculty reports—as well as those based on post-grading corrections for grade-based comparisons. EPC remains very concerned about grade inflation, grade compression, and particularly about systematic inequality in grading patterns between instructors and departments. These grading characteristics make distinctions and rankings based on grades illegitimate and threaten the validity of our assessment of students' achievement. We believe it will eventually be necessary to take one or more of the following three steps:

- 1.) Ration the proportion of each letter grade that may be assigned in each class, or mandate a section-wide mean grade;
- 2.) Prohibit the use of grades for all university functions that rank or compare students, such as Dean's List, graduation with distinction, eligibility for honors and scholarship programs, and more; or
- 3.) Implement a statistical procedure to calculate cross-student rankings and distinctions in order to remove the unfair advantages and disadvantages experienced by students based on the mix of subjects and instructors of the courses they take.

As a first step, though, EPC recommends that Faculty Council pass the attached resolution (attachment B to this report) implementing a reporting strategy as a first step toward reform. This is a necessary but not sufficient measure that will help reduce grading disparities without threatening the intellectual diversity and autonomy we value greatly.

UNC Educational Policy Committee
Resolution on Reforming Standards for Eligibility for Dean's List
Adopted by Unanimous Vote of the Educational Policy Committee, March 3, 2010

Whereas, the undergraduate Dean's List is an old and venerable institution marking exceptional achievement at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), but
However, changes in grading patterns have increased the proportion of students qualifying for the undergraduate Dean's List, thereby threatening the value of the Dean's List designation, and
Recognizing that cross-departmental and cross-instructor grading inequality threatens the validity of Dean's List and other university-wide achievement comparisons using grades,

Now, therefore, be it resolved that

- In the short term, standards for eligibility for the undergraduate Dean's List should be increased in order to restore its value to current students.
- Beginning in Spring, 2011, for the 2011-12 academic year, undergraduate Dean's List GPA eligibility standards will be set each spring for the following academic year by the Educational Policy Committee with input from the Registrar's Office. The EPC will seek fixed GPA standards that are projected to set the proportion of students eligible for the undergraduate Dean's List at approximately 25% of the full-time student body.
- If a valid method for university-wide comparisons has not been adopted by the Faculty Council for use during or before the Fall, 2016 semester, the undergraduate Dean's List will be eliminated as a designation.

Proposed Language for the Bulletin:

The Educational Policy Committee, in consultation with the Registrar's office, will make known by June 1 of each year the GPA cutoff for Dean's List eligibility for the following academic year. Undergraduates must earn at least that GPA cutoff within a regular fall or spring semester with a minimum of 12 academic hours taken for graded credit that confer quality points and are available at the date when the Dean's List eligibility is calculated by the Registrar. This date is generally approximately January 15 for the preceding Fall term and approximately May 15 for the preceding Spring term.

UNC Educational Policy Committee
Resolution on Enhanced Grade Reporting
Adopted by unanimous vote of the Educational Policy Committee, April 14, 2010

UNC has the opportunity to become a national leader in reforming undergraduate grades to better serve our students and the public. It is widely acknowledged that three related problems plague grading patterns at UNC and elsewhere: (1) overall grade increases; (2) grade compression; and (3) systematic grade inequality. Together, these problems threaten the legitimacy of grades in one of their most important functions: evaluating students' performance relative to one another across classes, instructors, and fields.

This is not simply a technical issue. Grades are one of the primary ways instructors reward students for work well done and sanction them for work done poorly. They are also the primary permanent record of students' academic achievement during their college careers. Thus grades that both motivate and accurately record students' achievement are better for our students, for the public we serve, and for our reputation as a leader in higher education.

Grading reform needs to be sensitive to several important issues. We must cherish the diversity in personal and disciplinary approaches to pedagogy and grading, since these reflect the broader intellectual diversity of the university. We must respect the intellectual freedom of instructors to evaluate both relative and absolute student achievement within their classes in the ways that best express the core values and competencies of their fields.

We must also, though, insure that students are neither penalized nor rewarded simply for the courses of study they choose: that, instead, we encourage students to follow their intellectual interests and talents, rewarding them for academic success and documenting their achievement. Grades should serve as an integral part of the educational mission, an important element in instructors' teaching repertoire and a lasting record of students' intellectual achievement. We need grading reform that achieves each of these goals; when we produce that reform we will be viewed by our peer universities and the public we serve as a truly innovative institution.

Recognizing that one important element in the process of making grade comparisons accurate is insuring that full information is available across the board, EPC recommends the attached legislation (Resolution 2010-3) be adopted by Faculty Council.

Resolution 2010-3. On Enhanced Grade Reporting

The Faculty Council resolves:

Section 1. The Council endorses in principle and requests the University Registrar to develop and implement for student transcripts for undergraduate work a system of reporting contextual grade information about each undergraduate course section, such as the proportion of students in the section receiving each letter grade, the distribution of class years in the section, the percentage of majors in the section's department, and similar information.

Sec. 2. The Council endorses in principle and requests the University Registrar to develop and implement a system of distributing at the end of each semester to all instructors of undergraduate course sections information about their grading patterns relative to the grading patterns of others in the department, division, and school and across the University, thereby encouraging faculty and units to use this information to inform future grading practices.

Sec. 3. The chair of the Educational Policy Committee for the 2010-11 academic year is requested to appoint an advisory committee to work with the University Registrar and the Office of the Provost in designing and implementing these reporting systems. The committee should include no fewer than three members of the faculty engaged in undergraduate instruction and one undergraduate student.

Sec. 4. The Provost is requested to provide appropriate support for planning and implementing these reporting systems.

Sec. 5. The Educational Policy Committee is requested to evaluate these reporting systems in the Spring semester 2017.

Sec. 6. The Educational Policy Committee is encouraged to continue to explore additional measures to ensure the validity, accuracy, and fairness of grading and grade comparisons at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.