

CAP's Final Recommendation Incomplete Grades

TO: Steering Committee
FROM: Committee on Academic Programs
RE: Final Recommendation on Incomplete Grades
DATE: April 1st, 2015

Background:

On December 20th, 2014 CAP received a charge from the Steering Committee regarding the incomplete grade policy currently in place at the College. The charge outlined a memo that had been sent to Steering that discussed a potential problem regarding incomplete grades in that incomplete grades automatically default to an "F" grade after "a certain period of time." The memo expressed a concern that this policy unfairly penalized students and that students can receive an "F" grade that is "undeserved." For example, if student received an incomplete for not turning in an assignment worth 20% of the course grade, and that incomplete subsequently turned into an "F," then the one assignment is in reality counting for 100% of the course grade and not 20%. Even if the student had completed other work for the course, this work would not be factored into the final grade. The memo went on to recommend that "in order to grant an incomplete for a course, the faculty member be required to enter (on PAWS) the appropriately individualized default grade (the grade, that is, that the incomplete should default to, under the terms of the syllabus and in accordance with college policy." Steering in turn directed that CAP should collect testimony to determine the concern noted in the memo outlined above is "widely shared" and to craft a "preliminary recommendation and "seek wider testimony."

Testimony:

CAP collected testimony on this matter through open fora held during the Faculty and Staff Senate meetings on February 18th, 2015 and through its student government representatives. Feedback indicated that while there was shared concern for the situation outlined in the memo, there was also significant disagreement about the proposed solution. Some testimony indicated support for the idea of a default grade, but other testimony was strongly opposed to this idea. Those in favor of the suggested change argued that it gave students control over their academic lives and also would rectify the unfairness embedded in the current policy. Those opposed to the change argued that it might undermine specific learning goals for a course (by allowing students to choose not to complete certain assignments knowing that they had already achieved a satisfactory grade) and would allow students to pick and choose when they stopped doing work for a course. It is CAP's belief that the proposed policy would engender significant disagreement if it was implemented.

Final Recommendation:

In conjunction with this charge, CAP also consulted the Office of Records and Registration. Feedback from this office indicated the following. First, to configure PAWS to handle the suggested default grade option would require approximately a year and half and many hours of labor. Using the Fall, 2014 semester a sample, Records and Registration indicated that during

this term 39, 611 grades were given at the College. Of these entered grades, 185 were Incompletes. Records and Registration indicated that it did not feel that it was a productive use of time or resources to implement a time consuming change in policy that is only impacting 0.5% of grades that are entered at the College. Moreover, in conjunction with the memo noted above, Record and Registration instituted two new measures in Spring, 2015 (for "I" grades given in Fall 2014) using a more proactive emailing process than had been used previously. In that past when an "I" grade had not been resolved, an email was sent only to instructor of the course that indicated that the grade was about to default to an F. This semester, a warning email was sent to both the student and the faculty member. Moreover, as the deadline drew nearer, a second email warning was sent to each student who had received an incomplete grade. This new process yielded the following results. Of 185 Incomplete grades given in the Fall, 2014 semester, 20 were resolved before the emails from Records and Registration were sent. Of the 165 remaining incompletes, 54 extensions were granted and 49 more were converted into letter grades after the emails were sent out. As such, for the Fall, 2014 semester only 64 grades, amounting to less than 1% of all grades awarded (0.16%), defaulted to a "F" from a "I".

Given the findings that emerged in testimony, CAP has concluded that that: a) the data do not support the need for the change suggested in the memo; b) the proposed change, if implemented, would generate significant controversy; c) the proposed change would necessitate a time consuming and labor intensive process whose necessity is not borne out by the data; d) that the Office of Records and Registration's new email policy may have corrected the problem noted in the memo and that only a statistically insignificant number of incompletes are, in fact, defaulting to "F" grades.

CAP believes that the new policies implemented by the Office of Records and Registration may have corrected the problem that was noted in the memo sent to Steering. CAP recommends that the policy change suggested in the memo is not presently necessary, and that more time be given to monitor the data regarding incomplete grades in upcoming semesters.

CAP also notes that the current policy cites an "Incomplete Grade Form" as being the appropriate means for establishing deadlines for completion of course work past the end of the semester. According to the Office of Records and Registration, this online form system was retired in June 2013 (<http://recreg.pages.tcnj.edu/incomplete-and-in-progress-grade-change-form/>). The policy should be amended accordingly."