



Grading and Examination Policy

**Graduate School of Nursing
Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences
Bethesda, Maryland**

TITLE OF POLICY: #94-05, Grading and Examination Policy

ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: 12 Aug 1994

LAST REVIEW/REVISION DATE: 19 December 2012

POLICY

A. **Purpose**

This instruction establishes USU GSN policy concerning course grading criteria and examinations.

B. **References**

GSN #94-06 Student Promotions Committee Policy

C. **Applicability**

This instruction applies to students enrolled in the GSN Masters (MSN), Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) programs, or PhD program and provides guidance to the GSN faculty.

D. **Policy**

1. **Examinations and Assignments**

- a. Course coordinators will provide educational objectives for material presented to guide students in the study and preparation for written examinations or other methods of evaluation and grading.
- b. The faculty must establish methods for evaluating student performance and ensure students receive feedback about their performance in a timely manner. The faculty may use written examinations, essays, research papers, class participation, or other recognized methods for evaluation of student performance. Objective criteria will be set for each graded exercise.
- c. Students who miss scheduled GSN examinations for a justifiable reason (as determined by the course coordinator) will be administered the same or a comparable examination as soon as possible after the original examination.

2. Grading Definitions and Policies :

- a. Letter grades with modifiers are assigned as defined below for GSN programs.

| Letter | Score | Grade Points |
|--------|--------|--------------|
| A | 93-100 | 4.00 |
| A- | 90-92 | 3.67 |
| B+ | 87-89 | 3.33 |
| B | 83-86 | 3.00 |
| B- | 80-82 | 2.67 |
| C+ | 77-79 | 2.33 |
| C | 73-76 | 2.00 |
| C- | 70-72 | 1.67 |
| D | <70 | 1.00 |

- b. Letter grades used without modifiers will encompass the complete numerical score range for that letter.

| Letter | Score | Grade Points |
|--------|--------|--------------|
| A | 90-100 | 4.00 |
| B | 80-89 | 3.00 |
| C | 70-79 | 2.00 |
| D | <70 | 1.00 |

- c. Advance Practice Nursing Programs (MSN & DNP) may choose to use letter grades with or without modifiers, but the decision to use or not use letter grade modifiers must be consistently applied across all courses within both Programs and across all program options.

The PhD Program may choose to use letter grades with or without modifiers, but use of modifiers or absence of modifiers for letter grades must be consistently applied across all courses within the PhD Program.

Use of modifiers and grade point values must be clearly communicated in student handbooks for all Programs and could be different for APRN and PhD Programs.

If a course is taken at USU but outside the student's Program, then the grading scheme of the Program in which the course resides must be used. Per policy, transfer courses from outside the University are not factored into the cumulative GPA (GSN P&P 01-01).

- d. Definitions of abbreviations used in the grade sheets/transcripts beyond the traditional A, B, C, D letter grade, consist of the following:

| Grade | Description |
|----------|-------------|
| P | Pass |
| F | Failure |

| | |
|-----------|--|
| W | <p>Withdraw <u>MSN/DNP Program</u>-Withdrawal grade designation is used when a student withdraws from a course prior to the end of the semester without completing all the course requirements. Withdrawal grade designation carries no credit and is not averaged into the cumulative grade point average. <u>PhD Program</u>-A student may use the drop and add options within the first two weeks of the semester. After that point the withdrawal option will be used. Withdrawal grade designation is used when a student withdraws from a course prior to the end of the semester without completing all the course requirements. Withdrawal prior to the drop date recorded on the transcript carries no credit and is not averaged into the cumulative grade point average. If the withdrawal occurs after the drop date, the course grade will be designated Withdraw Passing (WP) or Withdraw Failing (WF) depending on the student's performance in the class.</p> |
| NR | <p>No report. The grade "NR" may be used for courses which extend over more than one semester. It may also be used if, through no fault of the student, the department faculty cannot complete grading procedures within the specified time for reporting grades. The grade "NR" is temporary and must be converted to a permanent grade within one year, as arranged by the Program Director.</p> |
| TC | <p>Transfer credit. A Program Director may exempt a student from fulfilling a course requirement based upon proven expertise, "testing out", or academic degree(s), i.e., masters and/or doctoral. For each course for which exemption can be requested, the responsible Program Director should have written policies concerning the requirements for exemption. The decision to allow Transfer Credit is a decision made on an individual basis based on an assessment of the student's program requirements, the previous course syllabus and student's performance in the course.</p> |
| I | <p>Incomplete. The student has not completed the requirements at the conclusion of the course. Prior to issuing a grade of Incomplete, the course coordinator and student must sign a contract that specifies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The course assignments that must be satisfactorily completed to remove the grade of incomplete. b. A timeline for those assignments to be completed. <p>The grade of "I" will be assigned only with the approval of the Program Director of the responsible department. The Program Director will notify the Registrar of the temporary "I" grade and the date by which the "I" grade must be converted to another grade. Failure to fulfill the stipulated requirements by the specified date will result in conversion of the "I" grade to a grade of "F."</p> |

- e. Standards of performance for graduate students.
 - MSN/DNP Program:*
 - (1) Satisfactory academic standing for Master's or DNP degree candidates is defined as a cumulative grade point average of B (3.0) or above. Individual program options may have specific requirements for minimum grades in selected courses. See student handbook for program specific course requirements.
 - PhD Program:*
 - (1) Satisfactory academic standing for PhD students is defined as a cumulative grade point average of B (3.0) in all courses. No grade less than a B in a doctoral level course may be used to satisfy any part of the minimal credit hours required for the PhD.
 - (2) A cumulative grade point average of B is a prerequisite for the administration of the qualifying exam in the PhD program.
 - (3) If deemed appropriate by PhD Program Director or SPC, a deficient grade may be remediated by repeating the course in its entirety and receiving a grade of B or higher. Core courses or courses that are prerequisites must be repeated the next time the course is offered. Other courses must be repeated no later than the next academic year if recommended by the SPC. No more than two courses during the student's program of study may be remediated. Upon completion of the repeated course, the previous grade is deleted from the grade point average but remains on the transcript.
- f. Grading criteria for both didactic and clinical courses are determined by the course coordinator.
- g. Selected courses can be determined as "Pass/Fail" based on the recommendation of the course coordinator and the Program Director (Program Directors in the case of core courses [MSN/DNP] or cognate courses [PhD]) prior to commencement of the course and approved by the curriculum committee.
- h. In courses that have both a didactic and a clinical component, a student cannot achieve a passing grade without achieving a passing grade in both the didactic and the clinical portions of the course. The Program Director determines which courses have combination elements, and what constitutes a "passing" grade in each component.
- i. Curving the mean of an individual test will not routinely be done. In the event of an individual test mean score falling below approximately 80%, the course coordinator, in consultation with course faculty, may choose to adjust the exam mean up to but generally no higher than 85%.
- j. Grading of written assignments will be outlined in the course syllabus. Elements for consideration in creating the grading rubrics include: whether or not written assignments can be re-submitted for grading; procedures and grade consequences for late assignments, etc.
- k. In the event there is more than one faculty member that is expected to grade papers within a course, control of subjectivity becomes critical. To control inter-rater reliability, critical elements will be established:
 - (1) Content,
 - (2) Creativity/Originality, and
 - (3) Organization and quality of the content.
- l. The assignment will be evaluated using a structured tool developed by the course coordinator. A copy of this tool will appear in the syllabus.
- m. The course coordinator has the overall responsibility for posting grades within 10 working days after the last day of class.

- n. The course coordinator has the overall responsibility for ensuring that grading is equitable across graders. The course coordinator has the authority/responsibility to adjust grades prior to the products being handed back to ensure equity across students. Ultimately, the course coordinator accepts the legal responsibility for the grades on all assignments.

3. Student Requests for Review of Grades/Appeal of Grades

- a. The purpose of the Student Appeal Process is to provide a mechanism for objective internal review of faculty and staff actions or School Committee decisions. This Review Process may be utilized by students enrolled in courses in the Graduate School of Nursing (GSN) who believe these decisions resulted from inequitable and/or discriminatory decision-making procedures or processes. The wisdom of a decision cannot be grieved. Only the process that is believed to be inequitably applied, within the referent group, can be grieved. Implicit in this process is the need for the cooperation, openness, and good faith of all parties involved.
- b. Students who wish to appeal a grade (exam, paper, presentation or final course grade), may request to do so in a written letter to the course coordinator. The chart below provides details regarding submission times, response times, and levels of appeal. All replies to the student will be in writing, and copies of the request and all subsequent correspondence will be maintained by the Program Director.

| Type of Grade | Appeal Time Limit | Submission Process Must Progress In The Following Order | Decision Time Limit |
|-------------------------------|---|--|------------------------------------|
| Exam Paper Presentation | 3 working days after posting of the grade | 1) Submit to Course Coordinator 2) Submit to Program Director 3) Submit to Associate Dean for Academic Affairs 4) Submit to Dean, GSN if second appeal is requested | Within 2 weeks of original appeal. |
| Final Course Grade | 14 working days after receipt of grade. | 1) Submit to Course Coordinator 2) Submit to Program Director 3) Submit to Associate Dean for Academic Affairs 4) Submit to Dean, GSN if second appeal is requested 5) GSN Registrar for recording | With 30 days of original appeal. |

4. Progression Requirements for PhD Students in the GSN

Time Limitations: Part-time and full-time students are expected to complete their program of study in 7 years from the time of official enrollment. Once the student is admitted to candidacy, both the written portion of the dissertation and the oral defense should be successfully completed within 2-3 years. Students who have unusual circumstances may appeal to PhD Program Director for an extension.

- a. **Failure to Progress:** Instances may arise when the PhD Director or Dissertation Chair believes that, despite provision of a variety of resources through which a student might improve, the quality of the student's course of study is unacceptable. Students who experience such instances will be considered on an individual basis in keeping with the guidelines set forth in the Student Promotions Committee Policy. Recommendations will be

made by the Program Director and the course faculty and/or faculty advisor to the SPC for their consideration. A recommendation is then forwarded to the GSN Associate Dean for

Academic Affairs for a decision, and if a second appeal is required, the Dean, GSN will make the final decision.

5. Criterion for Referral to the Student Promotions Committee (SPC)
Guidelines outlining criterion for referral to the Student Promotions Committee (SPC) are outlined under the GSN Policy and Precedent (P&P) document: #94-06 Student Promotions Committee.
6. Transcripts and Examination/Credentialing Recommendations
 - a. At the end of each semester/quarter the registrar will insure that a transcript is available to each student and to the appropriate Program Director.
 - b. Upon graduation, the following transcripts will be provided:
 - (1) An unofficial transcript will be given to each student.
 - (2) An official transcript will be sent to the student's sponsoring service at graduation by the registrar.
 - (3) Official transcripts will be provided upon the graduate's request to academic institutions or treatment facilities where the graduate is applying for admission/employment.
 - c. Recommendations for national certification examination or credentialing of students will be sent to certification agencies or treatment facilities where graduates are assigned or applying for credentials. Recommendation packages may include an official transcript.
 - (1) Prepared on all graduates by the appropriate Program Director prior to the departure of the individual.
 - (2) Recommendations will be prepared in accordance with requirements of the respective uniformed service, certification agency, or treatment facility.
7. Requirements for Graduation
 - a. The following graduation requirements apply to all USU MSN/DNP graduates:
 - (1) Completion of specified program curriculum requirements for: MSN, Post Masters or DNP program.
 - (2) A scholarly initiative is required of all candidates for the Master of Science in Nursing or Doctor of Nursing Practice degree.
 - (3) Practicum, and when appropriate, residency requirements must be successfully completed.
 - (4) Additional program requirements may be required specific to the program option the student is enrolled in.
 - b. The following graduation requirements apply to all USU PhD graduates:
 - (1) Passing Dissertation Defense and signature of the Dissertation Committee.
 - (2) Filing the final copy of the dissertation with the USUHS LRC.


(Signature)


(Date)

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Approved by GSN All Faculty: 12 August 1994

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