

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM: C – 2

DATE: October 7-8, 2014

SUBJECT: Revision to Board Policy 2:10 – Limiting Withdrawals

In April, an agenda item was presented to the Board recommending a change to policy that would establish a limit on the number of W’s a student could have transcribed. As was noted, in recent years several institutions have taken this step to promote student success. The California State University System and postsecondary institutions in Texas have had limits legislated. In other cases, such as the Georgia system, several institutions have established policy limits. During the past couple of years, AAC has discussed this topic a number of times. The Council received a summary of discussions with representatives from these systems. In addition, a policy brief outlining research which shows limiting withdrawals had a positive impact on degree completion was included from Georgia.

With this as background, each member of the Academic Affairs Council agreed to review this issue on campus. In addition, this was passed along to the Student Affairs Council and to MOCC for their review. Following examination of this feedback, all members of the Council and the majority of the campuses agreed to support recommended change to policy 2:10, establishing a limit of six withdrawals. This reflects the common elements found in other policies reviewed. As a note, the limit of six W’s is commonly applied in the states referenced above. To frame this, an analysis showed that annually the number of W’s assigned within the system is approximately the same as the number of F’s. The table below provides a summary of all grades assigned by year.

Table 1. Grades by Year, System

	n Sections	Sum Enroll	Avg. Enroll	A Grades	B Grades	C Grades	D Grades	F Grades	RS Grades	Other Grades	W Grades
2006-07	18,642	290,191	15.60	111,371	68,316	43,650	11,600	13,583	1,985	25,507	14,179
2007-08	18,920	294,636	15.60	114,555	68,983	43,621	11,456	12,918	2,000	26,120	14,983
2008-09	18,932	300,520	15.90	118,041	69,743	43,849	11,971	14,239	2,396	26,330	13,951
2009-10	18,900	309,460	16.40	123,533	72,005	43,436	11,635	14,762	2,434	26,662	14,993
2010-11	19,367	322,463	16.70	128,082	74,634	44,698	11,626	16,037	2,795	28,457	16,134
2011-12	19,221	324,406	16.90	128,322	75,982	44,726	11,778	16,272	2,976	28,353	15,997
2012-13	19,366	320,634	16.60	129,766	76,072	43,191	11,486	14,702	3,126	27,538	14,753
2013-14	19,806	325,517	16.40	131,275	76,234	42,613	11,756	14,524	3,003	32,045	14,066
Total	153,154	2,487,827	16.20	984,945	581,969	349,784	93,308	117,037	20,715	221,012	119,056

(Continued)

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Discussion and Recommendation.

Roughly 15,000 “W” grades are transcribed each year.¹ While there are no academic penalties applied, these grades for all intents and purposes have the same impact on student success as an “F”. Concern was voiced by Board members about this proposed change. This was referred back for further review with the expectation that more background be provided. To begin to frame this for consideration, it is understood that the Regental System has made student success a top priority. Participation in national initiatives such as Access to Success and more recently Complete College America has been used to focus efforts. To date, the system has implemented several policies and practices that are designed to increase the number of students progressing through and graduating from the campuses. These efforts include the “Ready Adult” project which focused on those students who had completed significant number of credits but had not earned a degree. A few years ago, the Board adopted a 120-credit hour degree requirement which shortened the time to degree, increasing graduation rates. More recently, the Board is supporting institutional work to review and redesign placement and remediation to more quickly enroll students into college-level course work, an effort that also increases completion rates.

The institutions recently turned their attention to course completion rates. Since graduation is a direct result of course completion, the institutions recognize that rather than concentrating on course enrollment, more attention should be paid to completion. In fact, this focus on course completion is one of the core foci of SDSU’s student success work. As part of their design work, a series of analyses were done which showed that the majority of students have very few withdrawals, but that there are sets that do accumulate significant numbers and these students are less likely to graduate. To evaluate this further, additional data were evaluated within the Regental system to track “W Grade” trends and the impact on retention and completion.

“W Grade” Patterns

The tables below provide additional detail with respect to W grades in the SDBOR system. Table 2 shows that roughly 15,000 W grades (a category combining “W” grades and blank grades by students with a registration status of “W” or “D”) are accumulated in the Regental system each academic year, a total that is roughly similar to the number of “F” grades distributed each year. Across all years, W grades have accounted for roughly 4.8 percent of all grades distributed in the Regental system.

¹ Includes “W” grades and blank grades with a registration status of “W” or “D”.

Table 2
Grade Distributions by Year

	<i>n</i> <i>Sections</i>	<i>Sum</i> <i>Enroll</i>	<i>Avg.</i> <i>Enroll</i>	<i>ABC</i> <i>Grades</i>	<i>D</i> <i>Grades</i>	<i>F</i> <i>Grades</i>	<i>Other</i> <i>Grades</i>	<i>W</i> <i>Grades</i>
2006-07	18,642	290,191	15.6	225,322	11,600	13,583	25,507	14,179
2007-08	18,920	294,636	15.6	229,159	11,456	12,918	26,120	14,983
2008-09	18,932	300,520	15.9	234,029	11,971	14,239	26,330	13,951
2009-10	18,900	309,460	16.4	241,408	11,635	14,762	26,662	14,993
2010-11	19,367	322,463	16.7	250,209	11,626	16,037	28,457	16,134
2011-12	19,221	324,406	16.9	252,006	11,778	16,272	28,353	15,997
2012-13	19,366	320,634	16.6	252,155	11,486	14,702	27,538	14,753
2013-14	19,806	325,517	16.4	253,125	11,756	14,524	32,045	14,066
Total	153,154	2,487,827	16.2	1,937,413	93,308	117,037	221,012	119,056

Table 3 examines students with W grades in FY2013 specifically. Moving downward through the table, it can be seen that 5,188 students received exactly one W grade, 2,028 students received two W grades, 612 students received three W grades, and so on. Overall, more than 500 students received five or more W grades in FY2013 alone.

Table 3
Students with W Grades in FY2013

<i>W</i> <i>Grades</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>Tot.</i>
1	757	594	367	317	1,370	1,783	5,188
2	191	166	120	128	921	502	2,028
3	67	43	39	45	254	164	612
4	59	30	28	31	159	85	392
5	35	20	19	20	89	49	232
6	14	15	22	14	69	27	161
7	9	6	4	6	33	8	66
8	2	3	5	3	22	3	38
9	1	0	2	2	8	1	14
10	1	0	1	0	4	0	6
12	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
16	0	0	0	0	1	0	1

Finally, Table 4 presents an analysis of W grades with respect to second-year retention outcomes. The table shows aggregate retention outcomes for three SDBOR federal cohorts (2010, 2011, and 2012 combined). Overall, SDBOR institutions retained 76.3 percent of all federal cohort students into a second year of postsecondary study. By comparison, those students (from this larger group) receiving one, two, three, or four W grades during their first year in the system were retained into the second year at a rate of only 57.1 percent. Of students with five or more W grades, a mere 11.3 percent were retained.

These data suggest that students receiving W grades are less likely to persist and earn a Regental degree. Further, the potential suppressing effect of W grades may become more pronounced as the number of W grades increases.

Table 4
Retention Rates for Federal Cohorts, 2010-2012 Combined

Group	BHSU	DSU	NSU	SDSMT	SDSU	USD	System
Total Federal Cohort²	1,672	862	988	1,262	6,273	3,166	14,223
Retention Rate	65.2%	70.1%	73.6%	82.7%	77.9%	79.2%	76.3%
Federal Cohort with 1-4 Ws	232	119	99	140	954	511	2,055
Retention Rate	44.4%	48.7%	49.5%	60.7%	60.9%	58.1%	57.1%
Federal Cohort with 5+ Ws	35	30	11	10	115	30	231
Retention Rate	5.7%	0.0%	18.2%	10.0%	15.7%	10.0%	11.3%

It can be inferred that students who have a significant number of withdrawals are less likely to graduate. In sum, implementing this policy will encourage institutional staff to intervene more quickly, especially with freshmen who are dropping multiple courses.

Additional Policy Background

A review published by Moore and Shulock in 2009, *Student Progress Toward Degree Completion: Lessons from the Research Literature*,³ provides an excellent summary of work in this arena. As stated in this report, a number of studies have found that excessive course withdrawals have a negative impact on degree completion. For example, a study included found that students who withdraw from or repeat 20 percent or more of their courses decrease their chances of earning a bachelor's degree by nearly half. Another study found that as the percentage of courses dropped increased among California community college students, the likelihood of completion declined. Conversely, other research summarized had reported that

² This row refers to the sum of (Fact Book) federal cohorts from 2010, 2011, and 2012. Federal cohorts comprise each institution's population of first-time, full-time, bachelor's degree-seeking students beginning their studies in a given fall semester.

³ See http://www.csus.edu/ihelp/PDFs/R_Student_Progress_Toward_Degree_Completion.pdf

students who withdrew from or repeated 10% or fewer of their courses were more likely to graduate.

As a note, assuming all courses are three-credit courses, a typically student would enroll in 40 courses to complete the required 120 credit hours. If a student withdraws from or repeats more than 4 courses (10%), their probability of graduation begins to decrease, and if they withdraw from or repeat more than 8 courses (20%), their probability of graduating is reduced by half. Because of this work, a number of institutions, systems and states have implemented policies limiting the number of withdrawals including California, Florida, Georgia and Texas.

Georgia State University was one of the first campuses to implement limits on withdrawals and their findings are particularly instructive. The institution established a limit of six W's and has seen marked increases in retention and graduation rates. They note that more students graduate because fewer are accumulating large numbers of W's. Not only does this keep students on track, it keeps them eligible for financial aid. As a side benefit, GSU observed that making this change helped students register for courses. Before limits were in place, some students would "course shop," which is detrimental to other students. This refers to a practice used by a set of students who deliberately register for more courses than they intend to complete. The student will elect to drop the most difficult course early in the semester, but once they withdraw, it is too late for other students to enroll. The institution also noted that this policy probably has some intangible benefits. Students who realize that they cannot drop without penalty will learn to persevere, an important trait for career success. Finally, the institution reported an external benefit. Specifically, this policy change makes the GPA a better reflection of academic ability. Since GPA's do not reflect course withdrawals, a student who accumulates a significant number of W's may have the same academic standing as a student who has completed all courses. By limiting W's, GPA's will be more accurate, as students will have to complete more courses and have the grade earned applied to their GPA.

1. Undergraduate Grades

Undergraduate Grades will be assigned to the undergraduate academic level and to all courses and sections with course numbers ranging from 001 to 499. Plus and minus grades are not used.

A	Exceptional	4.00 grade points per semester hour
B	Above Average	3.00 grade points per semester hour
C	Average	2.00 grade points per semester hour
D	Lowest Passing Grade	1.00 grade points per semester hour
F	Failure	0.00 grade points per semester hour
S	Satisfactory	Does not calculate into any gpa
U	Unsatisfactory	Does not calculate into any gpa
RI	Incomplete (Remedial)	Does not calculate into any gpa
RS	Satisfactory (Remedial)	Does not calculate into any gpa
RU	Unsatisfactory (Remedial)	Does not calculate into any gpa
W	Withdrawal	Does not calculate into any gpa, no credit granted
AU	Audit	Does not calculate into any gpa
I	Incomplete	Does not calculate into any gpa
IP	In Progress	Does not calculate into any gpa
EX	Credit by Exam	Does not calculate into any gpa
CR	Credit	Does not calculate into any gpa
TR	Note for NSE/MEDT	Does not calculate into any gpa, no credit granted
LR	Lab grade linked to Recitation Grade	0 credit course
NG	No Grade	0 credit tracking course
NR	Grade not Reported by Instructor	Does not calculate into any gpa
Grade*	Academic Amnesty	Does not calculate into any gpa, no credit given

An audit (AU) grade may be granted only when the student has elected the AU option on or prior to the census date of the term.

A credit (CR) grade may be granted only for non-course credit that is not related to an examination or to equating transfer grades to the BOR grading system. This grade is not used for any Regental university course.

An examination for credit (EX) grade may be granted only for non-course credit validation obtained through a validation process. This grade is not used for any Regental university course.

An incomplete (I) grade may be granted only when all of the following conditions apply:

- 1) A student has encountered extenuating circumstances that do not permit him/her to complete the course.
- 2) The student must be earning a passing grade at the time the Incomplete is necessitated. Anticipated course failure is not a justification for an incomplete.

- 3) The student does not have to repeat the course to meet the requirements.
- 4) The instructor must agree to grant an incomplete grade.
- 5) The instructor and student must agree on a plan to complete the coursework.
- 6) The coursework must be completed within one semester; extensions may be granted by the Vice President for Academic Affairs.
- 7) If the student completes the course within the specified time, the grades that may be assigned are A, B, C, D, F, S, RS, RU, or U.
- 8) If the student does not complete the course within the specified time, the grade assigned will be F (Failure) or U (Unsatisfactory) or RU (Remedial Unsatisfactory) if the student had requested S/U within the time specified in BOR policy 2:6.9.

An in progress (IP) grade may be granted only when all of the following conditions apply:

- 1) The requirements for the course (for every student enrolled in the course) extend beyond the current term.
- 2) The extension beyond the current term must be defined before the class begins.
- 3) The instructor must request permission to award IP grades for a course from their Department Head and Dean, and then approval must be obtained from the Vice President for Academic Affairs.
- 4) A definite date for completion of the course must be established in the course syllabus.

A grade of NG will be used only with those course sections that are designated as Tracking/Program Sustaining (Q) and those that are assigned the code for Master's Research Problems/Projects Sustaining, Thesis Sustaining, or Dissertation Sustaining (U).

Remedial grades (RI, RS, RU) may be granted only for courses numbered 001 to 099.

A Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) grade may be granted only when the entire course requires the S/U grade or the student has elected the S/U option on or prior to the census date of the term.

A grade of withdrawal (W) may be assigned only six times during a student's undergraduate career. If the student drops additional classes, a grade of failure (F) will be assigned. This limit will begin with the fall semester of 2013. Withdrawal grades assigned to continuously enrolled students prior to this term will not count against the limit. This limit does not include W grades assigned if a student withdraws from all classes in a given term. The campus chief academic officer may make exceptions to this requirement in those cases where there are unique factors.