

# Academic Standards, Curriculum and Pedagogy Committee

## Report to Senate

At its meeting of 22 October 2020

### For Action

#### 1. Revisions to the *Common Grading Scheme for Undergraduate Faculties and Honours Progression Requirements*

ASCP recommends that,

Senate approve, effective FW 2023-2024,

1. The establishment of the *Policy on York University Grading Schemes*, as set out in Appendix A;
2. The rescission of the *Common Grading Scheme for Undergraduate Faculties, Progression Requirements to Maintain Honours Standing, and Progression Requirements to Maintain Honours Standing in Bachelor of Engineering (BEng)*, provided as Appendix B; and
3. The establishment of corresponding qualitative descriptors for the Undergraduate Grading Scheme as an appendix to the *Policy on York University Grading Schemes*, as set out in Appendix C.

### Rationale

Having originally made the above recommendations at the 24 September Senate meeting and withdrawn them in response to the discussion, ASCP brings them back to Senate for review and approval. Details about adjustments made to the Policy framework in response to feedback from Senators at the September meeting is covered below.

In November 2017, Senate approved in principle the following revisions to the *Common Grading Scheme for Undergraduate Faculties*:

- change the undergraduate 9-point letter grade to a 13-point letter grade scale to include minus grades and eliminate the “E” grade, with grades to be calculated to a weighted GPA based on a 4.0 maximum

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- establish corresponding numerical ranges for each letter grade and qualitative descriptors for each letter-numerical pair
- broaden the scope of the grading scheme to apply to undergraduate and graduate programs, and align the letter grade scales for both up to “C-”
- retain the grading scale in use for the JD program housed in the Osgoode Hall Law School (no minus grades) but convert its numerical scale to a 4.0 maximum
- retain the Pass / Fail grading scheme for graduate programs housed in the Faculty of Environmental Studies
- change the name of the legislation to the *Policy on York University Grading Schemes*

The rationale for the change to the grading scheme is set out in the ASCP Report in the [November 2017 Senate agenda package](#). Senators are reminded that the November 2017 approval in principle encompassed the Undergraduate, Graduate and Osgoode grading schemes set out in section 4.1 of the Policy.

Following Senate’s approval in principle of the transition to the new grading scheme, ASCP was tasked with shepherding the implementation of the transition. Since then, ASCP has been working in collaboration with the Office of the University Registrar (OUR) and Faculty partners to prepare the policy and academic regulations framework to implement the new scheme. The implications of the change are not limited to central policy and systems, but extend to policies, academic regulations, requirements and procedures that are based on the 9.0 letter grading scale and GPA calculations. For example, changes to be made concurrently with the revised grading scheme include degree and progression requirements; program admissions requirements; criteria for awards and other academic honours; and criteria for monetary scholarships, bursaries and awards tied to a GPA requirement.

In Fall 2019, ASCP agreed that the transition to the new grading scheme presents a timely opportunity to review the University’s approach to Honours progression and to establish University-wide standards for academic standing and sanctions. An Academic Standing Working Group, comprised of registrarial staff and academic advisors from each Faculty, was tasked with considering approaches to academic standing, progression requirements and academic sanctions in the new scheme with a view to making a recommendation to the Committee. Over the course of Fall 2019 and

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Winter 2020, the Working Group, in consultation with ASCP and its Coordinating & Planning (C&P) Sub-Committee, developed preliminary new models, articulated in the *Policy on York University Grading Schemes*.

Consultations on the proposed Policy were launched with the University community by way of a memo to Associate Deans Academic and Academic Advisors, discussions at the June and September 2020 Senate meetings, and meetings with students and administrative staff in the Faculties. Through these outreach activities, ASCP received thoughtful and helpful comments and questions, and confirmation of overall support for the proposed new approach. The Committee is extremely grateful to all who have shared their perspectives on the Policy. In response to the comments and questions that surfaced, the Committee has:

- incorporated language into the Policy regarding Honours progression assessment for students admitted to York with transfer credit (Sections 4.3.a.iii. and 4.3.b.)
- strengthened the language in the Policy about its intended goal of serving as a retentive tool
- confirmed the inclusion of the percent ranges in the Undergraduate Grading Scheme, as was approved in principle by Senate in November 2017
- committed to providing clear communications and support for Faculties and/or programs about required implementation actions and timelines, and to facilitating clear communications to all community members to help ensure a smooth transition

Following on from the original rationale for the revision to the Grading Scheme, the review of academic standing, Honours progression and academic sanctions was underpinned by the twin principles of enhancing student success, tempered by maintaining rigorous academic standards, and enhancing internal consistency across the University. In terms of enhancing student success, the proposed Policy seeks to promote retention and simplify Honours progression by de-linking it from students' study level, enabling students to remain in an Honours program for a longer period of time with a view to giving them opportunities to master content and progress in their learning. While the number of assessments of students' eligibility to progress in an Honours program will be reduced in the new model, their academic standing will

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continue to be assessed after each academic session once they have taken 18 credits at York, keeping them regularly apprised of their standing. Further, by introducing a pan-University definition of good academic standing, a cumulative GPA of 1.70, students will have a range of opportunities to complete a degree program at York if they are not able to meet the requirements of their original program. With respect to enhancing internal consistency, the Policy harmonizes the variation in academic regulations and terminology that currently exists across the Faculties.

In addition to the two core principles, an important consideration in the review was balancing a respect for the customs and culture within York regarding academic standards with consideration of practices at other universities and external perceptions of the relative value of a York degree. Accordingly, the minimum cumulative GPA to progress and graduate from an Honours program at York is set at 2.00 / C / 63%, comparable both to the 5.0 / C+ / 65% in the current scheme and to graduation requirements at other Canadian universities. In recognition of the need or desire of some academic programs to maintain higher standards for Honours progression, the Policy allows for programs to set requirements above and beyond the University-wide standard.

ASCP also is recommending the adoption of corresponding qualitative descriptors for the Undergraduate Grading Scheme as an appendix to the Policy, set out in Appendix C. While the November 2017 recommendation to Senate imagined the establishment of descriptors for each letter-numerical grade pair, after much consideration, efforts to define each pair and a survey of practices at other Ontario Universities, ASCP recommends a different approach whereby the descriptors define grade clusters using single words in combination with brief phrases. The descriptors were provided to Senate for discussion at the June 2020 meeting and presented at various consultation sessions over the spring and summer.

### ***Implementation Plan***

Following Senate's approval of the policy framework, implementation efforts will be monitored by ASCP, with the C&P Sub-Committee overseeing the majority of activities and keeping the full Committee regularly apprised and engaged. Included among ASCP's implementation activities are:

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- Monitoring and/or supporting Faculty- and program-level academic regulation changes required by the move to the new scheme, including the development of a process by which these changes can be reported to ASCP in a straightforward manner.
- Working with Faculties or programs that wish to create academic standing or Honours progression requirements in addition to the minimum University standard.
- Updating Senate policies that reference a GPA value to reflect the conversion and recommending amendments to Senate.
- Liaising with Student Financial Services and Faculties to initiate a review of the Awards Manual and other awards criteria referencing a GPA value.
- Providing guidance to the OUR on systems updates as appropriate, particularly on the development of principles regarding the impact of the transition on continuing students and changes to the transcript.
- Providing ongoing updates to Senate about implementation efforts, including reporting or recommending Faculty- and program-level academic regulation changes as appropriate.

The process for the reporting of Faculty- and program-level academic regulation changes will be as follows.

- Regulation changes may be reported to ASCP for information if they meet the following criteria: 1) the change consists of a mathematical conversion of GPA requirements from the 9.0 to the 4.0 scale, or 2) the regulation change aligns with the minimum thresholds outlined in the Policy.
- Regulation changes that do not meet these criteria will be required to undergo review and approval through the usual Faculty- and Senate-level governance process.

Following Senate approval of the policy framework, ASCP will send a communication to Faculties outlining the details and timelines associated with this process, with an anticipated deadline of April 2021.

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### *Chronology*

A chronology of major milestones in the grading scheme transition to date are listed in the table below.

<b>Timing</b>	<b>Activity</b>
November 2017	Senate approval in principle of transition to new grading scheme
2018-2019	ASCP's review of mathematical conversion to new grading scheme and implications on Honours progression
January 2019	Transmission of written report from ASCP to Senate on implementation activities
April 2019	Consultation with Associate Deans on the possibility of reviewing Honours progression
Fall 2019	Academic Standing Working Group established
December 2019	Transmission of verbal report from ASCP to Senate on implementation activities
Winter 2020	Academic Standing Working Group recommendation confirmed by ASCP C&P Sub-Committee
March 2020	ASCP confirmation of new models and draft Policy
May to August 2020	University-wide consultations on draft Policy and qualitative descriptors (e.g. Associate Deans Academic, Academic Advisors, students, non-academic staff)
June 2020	Facilitated discussion of draft Policy and qualitative descriptors at Senate
16 September 2020	ASCP review of community feedback and approval of Policy and qualitative descriptors
21-22 September 2020	ASCP review and approval of editorial revision via electronic canvas
24 September 2020	Senate review of Policy and qualitative descriptors for approval; recommendation withdrawn
7 October 2020	ASCP review and approval of revised Policy incorporating language re students with transfer credit
22 October 2020	Senate review of revised Policy and qualitative descriptors for approval

In addition to the three appendices, supplementary documentation, including charts depicting a visual representation of the Policy, is available on the Senate website.

**Approvals:** ASCP 16 and 22 September and 7 October 2020