



TO: Committee on Academic Policy and Programs

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DATE: March 11, 2009

AGENDA ITEM: 3

ITEM IDENTIFICATION: Faculty of Medicine: Change to Undergraduate Medicine (MD) program grade transcriptions for all courses to Credit/No Credit.

JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:

The Committee on Academic Policies and Programs has authority to approve major amendments to divisional practices and policies which are consistent with University-wide policy but have a major impact on the division.

PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:

The *Grading Practices Policy* was approved by Governing Council on April 9, 1998.

HIGHLIGHTS:

The Faculty of Medicine is proposing changes to the transcription system used in its Undergraduate Medical Education (MD) program to a Credit/No-Credit, two interval grade transcription system (i.e., Pass/Fail). The current three interval paradigm of grade transcription used in the MD program by the Faculty of Medicine is Honours (>80%), Pass (60-79%), Fail (<60%) (H/P/F). The attached proposal outlines the rationale for the change.

The University of Toronto grading policy recommends that Credit/No Credit be assigned for courses “in which only very broad evaluative distinctions in assessing the quality of student performance are judged appropriate”. The Faculty of Medicine will not change the ways students are currently evaluated and graded. Students will continue to receive feedback on their test performance after tests and exams. Examinations and assessments will continue to fulfill their purpose of certifying that students have successfully mastered education objectives, reached defined levels of competency and provide feedback for students and faculty. Academic awards for excellence will continue to be given. Students will not be disadvantaged in plans to proceed to graduate school with the proposed new system.

The Faculty of Medicine engaged in a broad consultation process with stakeholders and the proposal received support. The Faculty of Medicine Council unanimously approved the proposal on March 9, 2009.

FINANCIAL AND/OR PLANNING IMPLICATIONS:

Transcription changes will be implemented for all students in the program as of September 2009. The change will not be retroactive. This is consistent with past changes in grading practices across the University. The transcript will carry clear notation of when changes were made.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs approve:

THAT the Faculty of Medicine change the Undergraduate Medicine (MD) program grade transcriptions for all courses to Credit/No Credit, effective as described above.

The Transcription of Grades in the Undergraduate Medicine (MD) Program

March 11, 2009

Background:

Honours (>80%), Pass (60-79%), Fail (<60%) (H/P/F) is the current three interval paradigm of grade transcription used in the University of Toronto, Faculty of Medicine, MD program. Standing in a course is based on a student performance on a variety of evaluations within the course, including multiple choice questions, short answers, Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCE's), clinical ward and office performance, written assignments, oral presentations, and professional behaviors amongst others. A proposal is being made to change to a Credit/No-Credit two interval grade transcription system (i.e., Pass/Fail). The University of Toronto grading policy recommends that Credit/No Credit be assigned for courses in which only very broad evaluative distinctions in assessing the quality of student performance are judged appropriate.

No change in the ways in which students are currently evaluated and graded is being proposed. Students will still receive feedback on their test performance after tests and exams, as they had been. Examinations and assessments will continue to fulfill their purpose of certifying that students have successfully mastered education objectives, reached defined levels of competency and provide feedback for students and faculty. Academic awards for excellence will continue to be given.

Principle Reasons for Change:

1. As medical education focuses more on a competency-based model of education, a two interval system is seen by many as the most appropriate way to acknowledge if a competency has been achieved. Briefly, competency-based models of education focus on what learners are able to do, i.e. their mastery of an objective, rather than what they are expected to learn about.
2. Changed Landscape of transcription across Canada—14/17 medical schools in Canada are already either Pass/Fail or moving in that direction, some for more than 20 years.
3. Honours Standing has little meaning- Current course averages approximate 80% with a 6% standard deviation. Thus, with the normal distribution of marks, around 38% of students would fall within the range of 77-83%. Typically, 40% or more of students achieve an Honours standing, and thus the H/P/F system exaggerates differences between large number of students who are at the high pass or low honours range.
4. Institutions already using a Pass/Fail system have been found to have students that are significantly less stressed, less competitive, involved in more group work, and more cooperative. There has been no evidence of 'just passing behaviour' and the test scores have not decreased. When compared, students in a Pass/Fail system have shown an equally strong commitment to their medical education as those in a numerical grading system. Indeed, one of the medical courses at UT has been Credit/No Credit for over 10 years, and no decrement in student motivation or grades has been observed. Medical students by their nature remain highly self-motivated.

5. Students have overwhelmingly voted for this change. A student referendum was held, following background paper circulation and internet podcasts, town hall meetings, and debate by students in the University of Toronto Medical Journal.

The referendum questions were:

1. Are you adequately informed to make a choice? Yes/No and
2. Are you in favour of replacing the current form of grade transcription (Honours, Pass, Fail) with Credit/No credit for all four years of your medical education? Yes/No

Thresholds were set by the Faculty as follows:

- 1) Minimum class response rate: 80% for years I & II; 60% for year III & IV
- 2) Voted Yes threshold: minimum 50% of each class population; 75% of overall student body
- 3) "Well informed" ballots: If > 20% of any class do not feel adequately informed the referendum would be postponed.

Results: All thresholds met. Eighty-four percent overall response rate. Seventy-Seven percent of students supported change to Credit/No-Credit.

Approvals in place:

Following the referendum, The Preclerkship Committee, Clerkship Committee (all course directors and students), Undergraduate Medical Education Curriculum Committee, Examination and Student Assessment Committee, Students (referendum), Dean of Medicine & Vice-Dean, Undergraduate Medical Education, Clinical Department Chairs, and the Education Committee of Faculty Council have all approved this change.

Implementation :

The transcript will carry clear notation of when changes were made. Courses will be asked to again review standards for "Pass" or "Credit." The Medical School Performance Report, or "Dean's letter" which is sent to the Canadian Residency Matching Service will be reviewed, to ensure that clinical performance continues to be captured fully.