

Rutgers University Senate
Academic Standards, Regulations, and Admissions Committee
Response to Charge S-1206
January 2014

Charge S-1206 Academic Regulations, Student Achievement, and Effective Use of Resources: Examine how well current academic regulations and procedures serve to maximize student academic achievement and result in the most effective use of our resources. In particular, look at the effect on student achievement and use of resources of regulations and procedures related to (1) students retaking courses they have failed or withdrawn from many times; (2) replacement of grades when a student retakes a course; (3) dismissal of students for poor academic performance and readmission of students who have been dismissed; and (4) deadlines for withdrawal from courses. Suggest changes in policies and procedures where needed in order more effectively to foster student success and use limited resources.

Background

This charge arose from faculty complaints about a number of areas in which academic regulations and practices seem to hinder, rather than promote, optimal student achievement and the most efficient use of resources. These complaints led to ASRAC being asked to look at regulations, procedures, and practices related to the four areas listed in the charge.

Members of ASRAC discussed this charge at a number of committee meetings during the 2012-13 academic year and the fall 2013 semester and spoke at length about aspects of the charge with Lenore Neigeborn, Associate Dean for Academic Services at SAS, New Brunswick, with Kenneth Sanders, Dean for Academic Services at NCAS, Newark, and with University Registrar Ken Iuso and IT staff member Bert Torres.

In the following section of this report, the four areas of concern are discussed in turn and several recommendations are offered.

Discussion and Recommendations

Students Repeatedly Failing the Same Course

According to University Registrar Ken Iuso, in the fall 2013 semester, there were 481 registered Rutgers undergraduates who had failed the same course two or more times and many others who had withdrawn from a course multiple times. The most egregious example known to members of ASRAC is a student who passed the first semester of organic chemistry on his eighth try, but we have been told that there have been students who failed a particular math course nine times. Clearly, allowing a student to keep taking and failing a course without getting appropriate help or advice is not in the best interest of the student, who risks removal of financial aid and/or dismissal for low GPA. Nor does it represent an effective use of university resources. ASRAC decided, therefore, to recommend that a student who has failed a given course two or more times and wishes to register for the course again be barred from doing so by the registration system unless the student has spoken with the instructor of the course or with an adviser designated by the department and received permission to register for the course. Ideally, we would like this process to apply to all students who fail any particular course two or more times but having to screen every student request to register for

any course to see if the student failed the course twice would clearly not be practical given current IT facilities. Therefore we are recommending that this screening of students for multiple failures be done only for students seeking to register for one of a relatively small set of courses where multiple failures are most common. We have been assured by Registrar Iuso that the latter can be done without slowing down the registration system to a significant extent. Our formal recommendation is therefore as follows.

Recommendation 1: Any student who has failed any one of a specified set of courses two or more times and wishes to register for the course again should be barred from doing so unless he or she has spoken with the instructor of the course or with an adviser designated by the department and obtained permission to register for the course.

Note: If this recommendation is accepted in principle, ASRAC will continue to work with the Registrar's staff to determine how the recommendation can be implemented most effectively, given the technological limitations of our IT systems.

Replacement of Grades When a Student Retakes a Course

In most Rutgers undergraduate schools and colleges, a student who retakes and passes a course he or she previously failed may have the F replaced by the new grade in his or her GPA but the F remains on the student's transcript. There are, however, substantial differences in the policies regarding grade replacement among different schools. For example, in SAS and a number of other New Brunswick schools, a student can replace F's in a maximum of four courses but D's cannot be replaced; in CCAS, a student can replace F's and/or D's in a maximum of four courses; in NCAS, there is no limit on the number of courses for which F's and/or D's can be replaced.

In addition to Rutgers policies, ASRAC looked at grade-replacement policies at other institutions. Mike Haibach, a graduate student member of ASRAC, did an online survey of the grade-replacement policies of 21 other AAU public universities. His findings can be summarized as follows:

- Six institutions allow no grade replacements; i.e., all grades obtained go into a student's GPA.
- Six institutions allow students to replace any D or F up to some maximum number of replacements (usually 3 or 4).
- Four institutions allow students to replace any number of D's or F's obtained during the first 30 to 60 credits taken.
- Five institutions have no limits on the number and type of grades that can be replaced at any time during a student's undergraduate studies.

The policies of all 21 institutions are, however, identical in two respects: (1) all grades obtained appear on the student's transcript no matter how the GPA is calculated after the student retakes a course and (2) grades of D and F are treated the same way with regard to the rules for replacement. Rutgers – New Brunswick is thus unique among the AAUs considered in treating D's and F's differently in terms of replacement of grades.

Members of ASRAC concluded that the New Brunswick policy of allowing students to replace F's but not D's clearly does not promote optimal student achievement, since it results in some students begging instructors to give them an F rather than the D they deserve and in other students intentionally failing a course if they think they are in danger of getting less than a C. Likewise, we concluded that the policy of allowing students to replace unlimited numbers of F's or D's does not serve the best interest of students since it often results in loss of financial aid due to failure to make required academic progress and the presence of a substantial number of F's and/or D's on the transcript certainly does not enhance a student's employment prospects.

There were, however, initially a range of opinions about how many D's and/or F's a student should be able to replace and when they should be able to replace them. Some ASRAC members thought that there should be no replacement of grades allowed in the GPA; others thought that a student should be able to replace a limited number of D's/F's only in courses originally taken during the student's first 30 or first 60 credits at Rutgers; still others thought that there should be a limit to the number of D's/F's that can be replaced but not on when in the students educational career the courses were taken. After much discussion, it was agreed to recommend the last option (i.e., the Camden policy) as the Rutgers default policy on replacement of grades with the proviso that individual schools should be free to adopt a stricter policy. Our formal recommendations are as follows.

Recommendation 2: D's should be treated the same way as F's in the rules specifying when unsatisfactory grades may be replaced in the GPA if a student retakes the course and obtains a satisfactory grade.

Recommendation 3: Rutgers should adopt a default policy in which students are allowed to replace a maximum of four F's or D's if they retake the given course and obtain a better grade. Students should be permitted to replace a D or F in a course taken at any point during their undergraduate studies provided(i) they have not previously replaced a D or F in the same course, and (ii) they have not already replaced four F's/D's.

Recommendation 4: Individual schools should be free to adopt a policy on replacement of D's and F's that is stricter than the default policy, including a policy that does not allow replacement of any grades in the GPA. Individual schools are strongly discouraged, however, from adopting a policy less strict than the default policy.

Disparate Deadlines for Withdrawal with a W

According to section 10.2.2.E of the University Policy Library: "A W may be assigned for a course dropped after the completion of eight weeks of any regular term only when authorized by the appropriate authority designated by each legislative body." Most Rutgers schools and colleges do use the end of the eighth week of the semester as the last time a student may drop a course with a W without special permission from a designated dean. There are, however, a number of units with a later deadline. For example, the Camden Campus has an official deadline and the School of Engineering has a *de facto* deadline for withdrawal with a W that is nearly a month after the end of the eighth week of the semester. This causes problems when students from two schools with different deadlines are in the same course. In organic chemistry in New Brunswick, for example, Chemical Engineering students have nearly a month longer than SAS students to decide if they wish

to withdraw or stay in the course, which is patently unfair to SAS students. We would like, therefore, to make the following recommendation.

Recommendation 5: When students from two schools with different deadlines for withdrawal with a W are taking the same course, the deadline of the school offering the course should hold for all students in the course.

Possible Problems with Dismissal of Students and Monitoring of Readmitted Students

In our consideration of aspects of this charge, ASRAC came across anecdotal evidence that some SAS students are able to manipulate the SAS monitoring system to stay matriculated for a number of semesters after they should have been dismissed. We do not believe, however, that this is a general problem that needs to be considered by the Senate.

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