Proposed Changes to UI Catalog, from the Teaching and Advising Committee, recommended to take effect Fall Semester 2023 to Enact Shift to Plus/Minus Grading System

Note: This proposal excludes the grades of A+ and D-. See supplemental notes on these recommended changes, a rationale, and responses to select questions and concerns, below the specific changes highlighted in the catalog language (deleted language highlighted in red, with strikeouts, and new language to be added, highlighted in blue).

https://catalog.uidaho.edu/general-requirements-academic-procedures/e-grades/
UI 2018-2019 Catalog

E-1. Grading System
E-1-a

For purposes of reporting and record, academic work is graded as follows: A-superior; A–; B+; B–above average; B–; C+; C-average; C–; D+; D-below average; F-failure; I-incomplete work of passing quality (see regulation F); W-withdrawal; WA-withdrawal to audit; WU-withdrawal from the university; P-pass (see below); IP-in progress (see E-2); N-unsatisfactory and must be repeated (used only in ENGL 101 and ENGL 102); S-satisfactory (used only in CEU courses); CR-Credit, and NC-No Credit (may be used only in professional development courses).

E-2. In-Progress (IP) Grades.
E-2-a. Grades in Undergraduate Senior Thesis or Senior Project

The grade of IP (in progress) may be used to indicate at least minimally satisfactory progress in undergraduate courses such as senior thesis or senior project that have the statement "May be graded IP" in the course description. When the thesis or project is accepted, the IP grades are to be removed (see E-2-c). Grades of IP in undergraduate courses are considered to represent grades of at least C or P. If, in any given semester, the instructor considers the student's progress unsatisfactory, an appropriate letter grade (C–, D+, D or F) should be assigned for that semester.

E-2-b. Grades in Graduate Research Courses

The grade of IP (in progress) may be used in courses 500 (Master's Research and Thesis), 599 (Non-thesis Master’s Research), and 600 (Doctoral Research and Dissertation). When the thesis, dissertation, or other research document is accepted, or when a student ceases to work under the faculty member who is supervising his or her research, the IP grades are to be removed (see below). Grades of IP in graduate courses are considered to represent at least grades of B or P. If, in any given semester, the faculty member supervising the student's research considers the student's progress unsatisfactory, a regular letter grade (C+, C, C–, D+, D, or F) should be assigned.

E-2-c. Removal of IP Grades
Departments may use on a department-wide basis either the P/F grading system, or regular letter grades, as well as P, when removing the previously assigned IP grades (e.g., a student who enrolled for six credits in course 500 one semester, four credits another semester, and five credits an additional semester could have 15 credits of IP grades removed with different grades for each of the blocks of credit registered for each semester, such as six credits of A, four credits of B, and five credits of P).

E-4. Computing Grade-Point Averages

Grades are converted by assigning the following number of points per credit for each grade: A- (4.0); A- (3.7); B+ (3.3); 4, B (3.0); B- (2.7); C+ (2.3); ~3, C (2.0); C- (1.7); D+ (1.3); ~2, D (1.0); ~1, F (0.0)-0. In computing the grade-point average, neither credits attempted nor grade points earned are considered for the following: courses graded I, IP, P, S, W, WU, N, CR, NC, correspondence courses, continuing education units, credits earned under regulation I, or courses taken at another institution. Credit earned at non-U.S. institutions is recorded as pass (P) or fail (F), except for some courses taken through an approved study abroad program.

[The UI considers only the Institutional grade-point average official. Although both institutional and overall grade-point averages are printed on transcripts, the overall grade-point average (which includes transfer courses) is informational only. To calculate a grade-point average divide the Quality Points (course credits times the points assigned for the grade earned) by the GPA Hours (course credits attempted not including grades of I, IP, P, W, WU, or N). Earned Hours indicate the total number of semester credits successfully completed (course grades of A, A-, B+, B-, C+, C-, D+, D, or P earned). Grades of P are included in Earned Hours but do not earn any quality points; grades of F are included in GPA Hours, but not in Earned Hours.]

E-5. Replacing Grades

E-5-b. Replacing a Grade by Repeating a Course

A student who has received a D+, D or F in a course at UI may repeat the course at the UI provided credit has not been earned in a more advanced vertically related course in the same subject area. Although all grades remain on the record, the first repeat will replace the grade and credit earned initially in the course. The second and subsequent repeats of the same course will be averaged in the student’s institutional GPA. See the College of Law section for the exception to this regulation applicable to students in that college.

Supplemental Notes and Observations on the Proposed Changes:

1. Plus/Minus grading to be implemented beginning Fall semester 2023. This should provide sufficient time to transition to a plus/minus grading scale and provide for advance notice to incoming undergraduate and graduate students about this upcoming change.
2. A grade of C or better is still required to receive a grade of S.
3. The plus/minus system proposed above provides for a full range of grades from A to D, and does not use plus or minus grades for the failing grade of F. There is not an A+ grade available in this scale—this maintains the grade of A as well as the 4.0 as the top of the grading scale; the D- is not available—to maintain our current grade system criteria, this continues to draw a line at D rather than D-, for a passing grade and may prevent inadvertent awarding of a D- grade by faculty who either think it would be a passing grade, or who think it would not be a passing grade. The perception that a D- grade is too marginal to be considered in the same category as “below average” in the way that a D+ and D may be considered, and yet also too close to register a meaningful distinction from a failing grade, may be reasons why some institutions do not include the D- in their grading systems. These proposed changes would match the same range of plus/minus grades
Rationale for Shifting from a Whole Letter Grade system to a Plus/Minus Grading System

- Plus/minus grades letter grades provide for a more specific representation of a student’s performance than a whole grade letter system.
- An academic transcript with plus/minus grades provides a more nuanced account of a student’s academic performance.
- A transcript of plus/minus grades can sharpen academic advising to support students’ progress towards degree.
- Plus/minus grades can support and clarify a sense of academic integrity, both in the student’s individual academic record and in differentiations/distributions of grades assigned among students.
- Transferring credits and grades from other Idaho colleges and universities, and also cooperative/shared degree programs between the University of Idaho and Washington State University (which uses this proposed plus/minus system) will enable one-to-one equivalencies, be more transparent, and more equitable.
- Other Idaho institutions use plus/minus grading, and it may be that the Idaho State Board of Education supports continued efforts to align the grading systems of the state’s institutions, as the institutions work in other ways to align and to clarify what institutions share in common, such as ongoing efforts to align select courses in general education.
- USAC and other study abroad program grades may be easier to transfer.
- Students may be motivated to persist to achieve a higher grade when there are at least ten passing grades possible in a plus/minus system compared to four grades in a whole letter grade system: with sustained effort, incremental improvement may enable a student to achieve the next higher grade.
- Faculty would have and may appreciate the flexibility to decide grades more readily in borderline cases.

Responses to Several Perceptions and Concerns Expressed by Faculty and Students about Shifting to Plus/Minus Grading

Concern: Students with 4.0 GPAs may have their ‘perfect record’ undermined.  
Response: This may occur in a transition to a more accurate record of a student’s academic performance. Note, however, that the number and percentage of seniors who graduate with 4.0 GPAs is small, less than 3%. For UI graduates earning undergraduate degrees from 2015-2017, 2.9% (104 students of nearly 3500 graduates) graduated with 4.0 GPAs (104/3492 = .029).

Concern: Students may be more likely to challenge grades when they just miss achieving the next higher grade increment.
Response: As at present, faculty determine grades that students earn and achieve, and as before, continue to need to communicate as fully as possible criteria for evaluation to support student’ education and learning. As noted above, some faculty may decide that they can decide borderline grade situations more readily, when in a plus/minus system shifting a grade increment involves a significantly smaller percentage than in a whole letter grade system. The priority remains awarding grades that are more closely commensurate with students’ performance than what is possible to specify under a whole letter grade system.

Concern: Might the shift to plus/minus grading affect enrollments and morale among students?
Response: Other peer and regional institutions with plus/minus grading have experienced strong enrollments, and once established, the plus/minus system in due course becomes the anticipated ‘norm,’ as it is with all other university and colleges in Idaho, as well as with several of designated official peer- and aspirational-institutions, and also at Washington State University.

Concern: Might some students’ overall cumulative GPAs be affected negatively under a plus/minus system, particularly with students whose C average (2.0) may slip to C- (1.7), placing them on academic probation?
Response: As research and the Teaching and Advising Committee report shows, studies vary a bit on this question, with some institutions showing no shift in the mean GPA following a change to plus/minus grading, another study showed a slight shift downward (-0.03) that was not statistically significant, while another study also showed a very slight decline. As the University of Texas stated when announcing its shift to plus/minus grading (to match all other institutions in Texas), for the substantial majority of students “effects on GPA will likely even out.”