Members: David Grant, Chair. David Cross, Alan Dettlaff, Sharon Fairchild, Andy Fort, Elizabeth Gillaspy, Ranga Ramasesh, and Peggy Watson.

Charges

1. Analyze various issues and concerns surrounding current grading policies by exploring:

   A. the current policy for retaking courses and replacing grades
   B. the current policy for taking courses off-campus
   C. the advantages and disadvantages of adding pluses and minuses to official grades
   D. grading trends and the official definitions of grades in the TCU catalog

2. Seek ways to further integrate the TCU academic mission into the First-Year Experience and explore ways to compensate faculty for involvement outside of their nine-month academic year employment

3. Act as a consultative body for the Senate representative to the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA)

Not Accomplished

Under charge 1, little was accomplished on items 1.A and 1.B. Some information was gathered regarding the policy for retaking courses and replacing grades, but most of the committee’s energy was focused on 1.C and 1.D. (See below).

Under charge 2, little was accomplished. Under charge 3, we stood ready to help with the CIOA representative, but she made her reports directly to the Senate and did not consult with us directly.

Accomplished

A study was undertaken in the fall concerning grading trends at the university. The work initially done by the Academic Excellence Committee in 1997-98 was updated with more recent data. The results were presented to the Senate in the fall and can be summarized in the following charts:
This graph represents the average graduating GPA of undergraduates at TCU since 1986, which indicates that grades are definitely getting higher. Is this the result of better students or of grade inflation? Below is a graph that represents the average 25/75 percentiles SAT verbal and math scores (top) and the average 25/75 percentiles ACT scores (bottom). Whether the slight increases found there reflect the increased GPAs is a question worthy of further exploration.
An extensive exploration of plus/minus grading was the Committee’s main focus this year. As a result of that year long study, the Committee brought before the Senate the following report at the May meeting, proposing that a resolution be adopted at our September meeting in 2005 recommending that TCU adopt a plus/minus grading system:

Academic Excellence Committee
Report to the TCU Faculty Senate
May 5, 2005

The Academic Excellence Committee brings the following motion to the TCU Faculty Senate for action at the first meeting of the Faculty Senate in fall 2005.

Resolved, That beginning in fall 2006 TCU adopt a grading system that includes plus and minus grades as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Grade Points</th>
<th>Grade Descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>Failing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rationale
This year, the Academic Excellence Committee of the Faculty Senate undertook a study of plus/minus grading. We examined the grading systems of the top 120 national universities listed in the U.S. News and World Report’s America’s Best Colleges 2005 and found that 83.3% of those institutions have adopted grading systems that include grade designations between the five straight letter grades we currently use: A, B, C, D, and F. There are some differences in the systems, but many have adopted the above system that we propose for TCU. By continuing to use only five letter grades, TCU stands in a shrinking minority of universities that we consider our peers.

The main reason for adopting plus/minus grading is that it will more accurately reflect differing levels of student performance. Differentiation can be made, for example, between a student who just misses earning an A and the one who barely earns a B. In our current system, both students would receive the same grade, a B. With plus/minus grading, however, the one would receive a B+ and the other a B-.

You’ll note that our proposal includes neither an A+ nor an F+. We found only a few universities that use the equivalent of an F+, and no one on the committee thought it a good idea to adopt such a grade. However, we did discuss whether to propose an A+, but decided to put forward our recommendation...
without it. Some institutions include an A+ along with an A, but both an A and an A+ count the same, namely 4.0. We believe that formally designating an A+, but numerically not distinguishing it from an A, accomplishes little, since, for example, a student with all A+s will have the same GPA as a student with all As, thus negating any significance of the A+ designation.

Other institutions give a numerical value of 4.33 to an A+. But such systems expand a 4-point scale to a 4.33 scale, with the result that numeric equivalencies reduce the value of other grades. For instance, a 4.0 on a 4.33 scale is equivalent to a 3.72 on a 4.00 scale. We think it important to keep the 4.00 as the maximum possible grade.

One can argue that not having an A+ disadvantages students who earn grades in the A range: a student who earns a B- (2.67) can balance that grade with a B+ (3.33), thus maintaining the grade average at a B (3.00), whereas a student who earns an A- cannot do the same with an A+. But this is true of any grading system with a maximum grade, our current system included: a B student who earns a C (2.0) can balance that grade with an A (4.0) so that those two grades average out to keep the average at a B (3.0). But an A student who makes a B is not able to maintain a 4.0 by earning a grade higher than an A.

In April, an e-mail survey was sent to all regular faculty at TCU. Ninety-six responded. Sixty-nine favored adding pluses and minuses, and twenty-two were opposed. Five replied with "maybe."

**For 2005-2006**

Obviously, the Academic Excellence Committee needs to continue its “shepherding” of the plus/minus proposal through the appropriate university channels. Also, the charges not accomplished this year should be reexamined and readdressed where appropriate.

Respectfully submitted,

C. David Grant
Chair