1 Context (Why have a grading policy?)

As stated in the UVic calendar “a primary purpose of evaluation and grading is to further effective teaching and learning.” As such, evaluation and grading practices should clearly reflect and differentiate expectations and standards of student learning with respect to learning outcomes. Over the years concerns have been raised about grading patterns and uncertainty about the roles and responsibilities of Chairs/Directors and instructors with respect to evaluation and grading. These include:

- an increase in average grades over the past 20 years at UVic, albeit consistent with patterns at other universities;
- marked differences in distributions of grades among instructors of the same course, among different departments, between winter and summer sessions, between sessionals and regular instructors, as well as extremely high occurrence of first class (‘A’ range) grades or failing grades;
- controversy and issues of fairness raised by students when grades have changed after they have been submitted by instructors; and
- uncertainty on the grounds of grading appeals by students.

The recent Senate Committee on Academic Standards Report and Recommendations Regarding Grading Patterns passed by Senate in November 2016 confirms that the specific management of grades is a responsibility that lies within faculties and units.

The Faculty of Social Sciences Grading Policy and Guidelines is intended to provide guidelines and regulations to instructors and Chairs/Director regarding their roles and responsibilities with respect to avoiding grading issues before they arise, reviewing grades, and addressing grading issues.

Guiding this policy are three primary tenets of the University of Victoria’s policy on grading:

1. “Any practices which assign a predetermined percentage of students a specific grade, that is, a certain percentage get A, another percentage get B and so on, without regard to individual achievement are prohibited”. (UVic Calendar - Grading)
2. The current UVic Undergraduate Grading Scale describes a general grade distribution pattern (e.g., B grades are “normally achieved by the largest number of students”) and

1 The SCAS Report and Recommendations Regarding Grading Patterns recommends that “Senate should re-examine the grading scale to confirm that the expectations for grade distribution are appropriate at each year level.” To date, this has not been undertaken.
qualifies the standards for grades (e.g., A grades “is earned by work which is technically superior, shows mastery of the subject matter …”) (see Appendix A)

3. “Instructors are permitted to release final grades informally to students in their classes, in request, as soon as the grades have been forwarded to the Office of the Registrar by the school or department” (UVic Calendar – Release of Grades)

2 Avoid Grading Issues Before They Arise

Pre-emptive practices to avoid grading issues before they arise are preferable to dealing with grading issues after they arise.

Chairs and Director:

- Be fully aware of the university and Faculty of Social Sciences grading policy, guidelines and regulations.
- Review grading information and patterns for the unit (see Appendix B for instructions to access grading patterns on SAS portal).
- Review the annual Faculty of Social Sciences Grading Report provided by the Dean’s office.
- Review grading patterns and rubrics with instructors who have had anomalous grading patterns.
- Circulate appropriate grading patterns information to unit instructors,
- Create an opportunity for the unit as a whole to review and discuss academic policy, guidelines and regulations related to grading, and grading patterns guided by the following questions:
  
  o Policy/General Questions
    - How familiar are members of the unit with the UVic grading policies and procedures? Distribute and discuss any issues, questions or concerns.
    - What are perceived as the purposes of grading and how do these relate to learning outcomes in the unit? How often does the unit discuss the purpose(s) of grades?
    - What information and resources regarding grading and grading patterns would be helpful to instructors?
  
  o Unit Level Questions
    - What differences in grades can be seen across different sections of the same course (within a single term/year or across a multi-year span)?
    - What methods of ensuring fairness in grading across multiple sections has the unit considered (rubrics, grade norming, etc.)?

2 The SCAS Report and Recommendations Regarding Grading Patterns recommends that a toolkit should be developed to assist Chairs/Directors in carrying out responsibilities and facilitating discussion in their units. To date, this toolkit has not yet been developed.
What courses stand out as having a grading pattern that is different from other unit courses at that size/level? Is there an agreed upon rationale for these differences?

- Individual Course Level Questions
  - How well does the range of grades reflect the performance of students in the class? How does grading compare with the historical grading spreads (mean, standard deviation)?

- Faculty Level Questions
  - At the faculty level, which units have a grading pattern that is different from other units? Is there an agreed upon rationale for this difference?

- Discuss academic policy, guidelines and regulations related to grading, and grading patterns particularly with new instructors, both regular and sessionals, and provide guidance as needed.

- Review rubrics of 1st time instructors and sessionals and provide guidance as needed.

Instructors:
- Be fully aware of the university and Faculty of Social Sciences grading policy and regulations.
- Review grading information and patterns for individual courses taught and other relevant courses in the unit (see Appendix B for instructions to access grading patterns on SAS portal).
- Review the annual Faculty of Social Sciences Grading Report provided by the Dean's office.
- Instructors of different sections of the same course should review and discuss grading patterns, rubrics and evaluation schemes, and assess the effects of different evaluation schemes and how to ensure grading consistency if course content and basis of evaluation standards are consistent.
- Develop and communicate to students a clear marking rubric for assignments, exams and other work that differentiates the expectations of each level in the grading scale. Expectations of grading must be made clear at the outset of a course and should be guided by university regulations, pedagogy and clear grading rubric. ” (SCAS Sub-Committee to Consider Grading Patterns, 2016, p4).
- Do not distribute, post or otherwise release the grade of the final assignment or exam such that students can calculate their final grade until the final grades have been approved by the Chair/Director.
3 Reviewing Grades and Identifying Anomalies (for an individual course)

Chairs and Director:\nChairs and Director are responsible for maintaining the highest grading standards. As such, when approving final grades, Chairs and Director must review grades for grading anomalies that do not reflect such standards.

- Assess how grading compares with the historical grading spreads (mean, standard deviation).
- Assess differences in grades across different sections of the same course (within a single term/year or across a multi-year span)?
- Assess whether the course stands out as having a grading pattern that is different from other unit courses at that size/level.

Instructors:
- Keep track of grading averages and distributions throughout the term of a course.
- Assess how well the range of grades reflects the performance of students in the class.
- Assess how grading compares with the historical grading spreads (mean, standard deviation).
- Discuss with the Chair/Director if/when grading anomalies are apparent.

4 Addressing Grading Issues

Chairs and Director
- Discuss with the instructor the reason for the anomaly.
- If relevant, request the instructor to provide grade distributions of all current assignments/tests of the course in question.
- Require an instructor to review/revise the rubric and regrade an assignment/test.
- Require the instructor to revise the rubric for future offerings of the course.

Instructors
- Determine whether there is a rationale that accounts for grading anomalies.
- Review the rubric and, if necessary, re-grade the assignment/test prior to submitting final grades.

3 The SCAS Report and Recommendations Regarding Grading Patterns, approved by Senate November 7, 2016, recommends that the Office of the Vice-President Academic and Provost prepare and distribute a document outlining the relevant authority, responsibilities and mechanisms for accountability of Chairs/Directors.
• Review the rubric and, if necessary, re-grade the assignment/test if requested by the Chair/Director prior to submitting final grades.
APPENDIX A: University Grading Scale

An A+, A, or A- is earned by work which is technically superior, shows mastery of the subject matter, and in the case of an A+ offers original insight and/or goes beyond course expectations. Normally achieved by a minority of students.

A B+, B, or B- is earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student’s full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application of the course material. Normally achieved by the largest number of students.

A C+ or C is earned by work that indicates an adequate comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and/or participating in class activities.

A D is earned by work that indicates minimal command of the course materials and/or minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.

F is earned by work, which after the completion of course requirements, is inadequate and unworthy of course credit towards the degree. (UVic Calendar)