

To: St. Olaf College Faculty
From: CEPC
Re: Grade and Marking System

At the May faculty meeting CEPC will move the approval of changes to the “Grade and Marking System” section of the College Catalog.

Proposed changes to the Catalog: The “Grade and Marking System” section of the College Catalog will be as seen below. In addition, each category, such as “Superior Achievement” will link to a list of grade benchmarks and achievement levels (listed on pp. 2-3 of this motion).

Grade and Marking System

Final letter grades and their corresponding grade point values are listed below along with short descriptions at each grade level. The descriptions give students, faculty, graduate schools, and employers of St. Olaf College graduates a general sense of the gradation of academic expectations at a glance.

In the leftmost column below, one can link to a list of grade benchmarks that is meant only as a guideline for St. Olaf College faculty and students. Individual faculty members are free to grade according to their own systems; students should consult with their professors for accurate information about course requirements and expectations.

Links to benchmarks	Description	Grade	Grade point
Superior achievement	Outstanding	A/A+	4.0
	Excellent	A-	3.7
Good achievement	Very good	B+	3.3
	Good	B	3.0
	Generally good	B-	2.7
Adequate achievement	Satisfactory	C+	2.3
	Sufficient	C	2.0
	Marginal	C-	1.7
Limited achievement	Poor	D+	1.3
	Very poor	D	1.0
	Extremely poor	D-	0.7
Inadequate achievement	Failure	F	0.0

For P/N courses	meets course expectations	P	no grade points
	fails to meet course expectations	N	no credit

For S/U courses	C- or higher D+ or lower	S U	no grade points no credit
Withdrawals	with passing grade with failing grade	WP WF	no credit no credit
Incomplete		I	no credit
Audits	Successful audit Unsuccessful audit	AU UA	no credit no credit

Grade Benchmarks/Achievement levels

Superior achievement (A level):

The grade of A recognizes exceptional performance and achievement that exceeds course expectations. Such work consistently demonstrates many of the following qualities:

- Thorough, deep, and mature understanding.
- Genuine comprehension, insight, and synthesis.
- Significant mastery of challenging topics and issues.
- Extensive familiarity with relevant literature and previous work.
- Highly developed communication skills.
- Thorough preparation and extensive, thoughtful class participation.
- Integration of knowledge, concepts, and principles across disciplines.
- Originality of analysis and interpretation.
- Technical competence in skills and procedures.
- Precision of ideas and clarity of expression.
- Thinking that is independent, creative, and focused.
- Understanding of nuance and subtlety.
- Consistent coherence in argument and discussion.

Students who receive the grade of A consistently demonstrate many of the following abilities: to

- Analyze arguments using specific examples and original sources.
- Think logically, draw inferences, and make predictions in complicated situations.
- Communicate reasoning clearly and concisely.
- Think abstractly.
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in arguments, policies, and practices.
- Integrate information to draw well-founded conclusions.
- Connect course content to issues of other courses and world affairs.
- Use models appropriately; recognize their strengths and accommodate their inherent limitations.
- Foresee and evaluate consequences of proposed policies and actions.
- Use technology creatively and effectively.

Good achievement (B level):

The grade of B recognizes work that meets course expectations. Such work typically demonstrates many of the following qualities:

- Clear understanding without much originality.
- Competent grasp of course materials and subject matter.
- Familiarity with relevant literature.
- Competence in communication skills.

- Regular preparation for and participation in class.
- Integration of course knowledge, concepts and procedures.
- Some evidence of critical and creative thought.
- Clear connections between inferences and evidence.
- Care in the use of evidence and quotations with only occasional thinness in argument, detail, or precision.

Students who receive the grade of B typically demonstrate many of the following abilities: to

- Extend ideas by connecting with personal experiences, reading, or world events.
- Analyze data in various forms and from varied sources.
- Utilize information to explain events, draw conclusions, and apply results.
- Present comprehensive answers in a clear and logically correct style.
- Understand and compare various models.
- Distinguish inputs from outputs, and causes from effects.
- Recognize consequences of complex interactions.
- Use technology effectively.

Adequate achievement (C level):

The grade of C recognizes work that is minimally sufficient to prepare for continued study in the field. Such work generally demonstrates some of the following qualities:

- Adequate grasp of course concepts.
- Partial mastery of knowledge and skills required for understanding.
- Incomplete familiarity with relevant readings or references.
- Writing that lists facts rather than a develops well-reasoned arguments.
- Frequent neglect of important information.
- Partial appreciation of the meaning or implications of a question.
- Answers that are insufficiently developed.
- Minimally complete assignments with many areas for improvement.

Students who receive the grade of C generally demonstrate some of the following abilities: to

- Assimilate and communicate simple knowledge and procedures.
- Extend ideas by making simple inferences.
- Make connections among and draw conclusions from course concepts.
- Interpret simple information provided in various formats.
- Organize and display data in tables and graphs.
- Use technology competently.

Limited achievement (D level):

The grade of D indicates a lack of readiness to continue in the field. Such work usually demonstrates some of the following qualities:

- Minimal understanding of the subject matter.
- Poorly developed communication skills.
- Inability to apply subject matter understanding in other contexts.
- Little evidence of critical or creative thinking.
- Lack of apparent seriousness.
- Frequent carelessness in fulfilling assignments.

Inadequate achievement (F):

The grade of F indicates that course work is insufficient to merit academic credit. Students who receive an F usually demonstrate some of the following qualities:

- Inadequate understanding of subject matter.
- Inadequate or inconsistent preparation.
- Frequent failure to complete assignments in a timely manner.
- Little evidence of critical thought.
- Very poor communication skills.

- Frequent misunderstanding of facts or references.
- Little or no analysis.
- Confused or incomprehensible writing.
- Little or no work offering evidence that course objectives have been met.

Comment on the motion:

A parallel set of grading benchmarks for performance studies, dance technique, and studio art courses in the Fine Arts curriculum will be brought to the faculty for a vote at a future date.

Rationale for the motion:

The College Catalog is the public face of our academic program. As such, the Registrar and CEPC make every effort to update it as needed, and to include information that can be valuable to our own community as well as to visitors, parents, graduate and professional schools, and employers.

The current grade descriptions on p. 45 of the College Catalog are out of date. For example, the grade of B+ is listed as an “excellent” grade, but, in fact, has become the *average* course grade at St. Olaf. This motion updates the grade descriptions and provides a guideline that connects grade levels to certain achievement benchmarks. Faculty are encouraged to use the benchmarks to assist them in grading student work, and to include the benchmarks in their syllabi.

Different achievement levels in performance and artistic activities are not fully reflected in the proposed benchmarks. Rather than delay the motion until a parallel set of benchmarks is written, a group of Fine Arts faculty will propose a supplement to this motion that will be voted on at a later date.