CAPP Proposal to Adopt a Grade Replacement Policy
Mānoa Faculty Senate Meeting
4 May 2011 • Art Auditorium

CAA Response

Background: In February, the Mānoa Faculty Senate’s Committee on Academic Policy and Planning (CAPP) invited UHM’s Council of Academic Advisors (CAA) to discuss their earlier proposal on changing UHM’s repeat policy and introducing a grade replacement policy. CAA appreciates their taking the time to meet and was gratified to see the extensive revision in this new proposal, which focuses solely on introducing a grade replacement policy.

Feedback from academic advisors: When the current proposal was released on Monday, April 11th, CAA circulated it among academic advisors across campus. What follows is a summary of responses received.

1. Justification: CAPP has not made a compelling argument to justify this new policy, and it remains unclear what problem this policy is designed to address. In its report, CAPP states that the policy is meant to help students who are struggling and summarizes its survey of other institutions.
   ➔ Advisors have seen nothing to indicate that students stop out or become discouraged because they are unable to replace grades. Advisors question that assumption and would like to see supporting data before supporting this proposal. CAA does not consider the fact that other institutions have grade replacement policies to be a compelling argument.
   ➔ CAA recommends that the Mānoa Faculty Senate consider initiatives more likely to help students who are struggling, such as an early response system, mid-term grade reports, increased access to tutoring and services, and so on.

2. Lack of Support: CAPP mentioned that it consulted the Council of Chairs, the Council of Academic Advisors (CAA), and Arts & Sciences advisors when writing this proposal. CAA believes that CAPP’s report should include the fact that CAA and the A&S advisors strongly oppose the policy. CAA understands that the Council of Chairs also oppose this policy. To be clear, CAA also strongly opposes the current proposal.

3. Discrimination: This proposal unfairly disadvantages lower-income students, who can ill afford to pay for three extra courses; the proposal thus runs counter to UHM’s mission as a public institution. In effect, this policy allows higher-income students to buy a higher GPA, which advantages them in the job market and graduate programs. Even if students use financial aid to pay for these extra courses, most aid today consists of loans; encouraging students to take on additional debt in order to raise their GPAs does not seem ethical.

4. Scope: The policy does not address numbers or the likelihood of students repeating to replace grades; in discussion, CAPP members doubted that students with high grades would take advantage of the policy. From their long and extensive experience with students, advisors believe that most students who can afford to will repeat courses in order to replace grades. Competition for high GPAs should not be underestimated, and our highest-achieving students are some of our most motivated. Of our over 13,000 undergraduates, advisors expect that most will take advantage of this opportunity: in the competition for jobs, scholarships, internships, graduate schools, and professional degrees, both low- and high-GPA students will repeat to raise their GPAs. Only those who cannot afford to repeat will be left out, and behind.
5. **Competitive Level of Courses:** As a result of this policy, more students will choose to repeat, which means that there will be more repeaters in classes (especially in challenging classes), which will raise the competitive level of those classes, and in turn impact how they are taught. CAA believes this policy will make courses harder for first-time-takers and for students who are struggling. CAA is concerned that encouraging repeats will become a vicious cycle, so that students will eventually have to repeat the more challenging courses just to get the grades they are currently earning as first-timers.

6. **Access to High-Demand Courses:** Allowing students to repeat high-demand courses exacerbates access. In general, students who have already taken a course have more credits and thus register earlier than students who have not yet taken it. Repeaters should not be allowed to take seats from first-timers.

7. **Impact on Time-to-Graduation:** Encouraging students to repeat in order to improve their GPA works counter to UHM’s initiative to improve time-to-graduation, in effect turning UHM’s 120-credit degrees into 129-credit degrees.

   ➔ UHM needs to be clear about its priority: is it improving time to graduation or replacing grades? Before this policy is adopted, CAA would like to see a plan for expanding the number of available seats to accommodate over 13,000 undergraduates repeating three courses each.

8. **Message to Students:** This proposal allows students to not take seriously their first time through a course. Advisors believe this kind of “forgiveness” policy enables poor academic behavior and exacerbates students’ transition from high school.

9. **Logic of Parameters:** This proposal allows students to replace strong grades (‘C’ or higher, including, e.g., an A-minus) but not No Credit grades, which seems illogical for a policy trying to help students who are struggling.

10. **Implementation:** In this proposal, CAPP chose not to address implementation issues. Unfortunately, implementation of this policy poses considerable challenges in terms of practicality, complexity, and workload. CAA believes that feasibility is an integral part of policy and there should be a reasonable chance of being able to implement a policy before it is passed.

11. **Integrity of UHM Grades:** This proposal weakens the integrity of UHM’s grade point averages:
    - Currently, UHM GPAs have high integrity and are accepted as reported on student transcripts. However, many professional schools (e.g., medical, etc.) and competitive graduate programs recalculate applicants’ GPAs into norms that do not allow for grade replacement. If this policy is adopted, UHM’s GPAs will no longer be accurate and students will think they have higher GPAs than they do.
    - Grades are not only feedback for students but also communication with employers, graduate programs, and professional schools. Advisors believe there is an appreciable difference between students who earn ‘A’ grades the first time through and students who earn ‘A’ grades the second or third time through.
    - Most UHM students are transfers. In the interests of fairness, once UHM starts “forgiving” grades for its own students, will it also “forgive” UH community college grades when deciding whether to grant admission?