

GRADING POLICY CHANGE FOR “F” GRADES¹

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA OMAHA

What is the new policy?

Instructors will need to differentiate between two different types of failing grades when assigning an F grade:

- F: Earned failing grade awarded to students who complete the course but fail to achieve the course objectives.
- FW: Awarded to students who did not officially withdraw from the course, but who failed to participate in course activities through the end of the term. For FW grades, instructors will be asked to report **Attendance Status** (Stopped Attending or Never Attended) and the **Attendance to Date** (the date the student last participated in academically related activities). See guidelines below for the federal definition of academically related activities.

How do instructors determine if the student should be given an FW grade?

The key to the FW grade is the student failed to participate in course activities through the end of the term.

The procedure for faculty involves: (1) assigning an F to any student who completed academic activities through the end of the course but failed to earn a passing grade, and then (2)(a) assigning FW for reporting purposes only to any student who, looking backward from the end of the term, failed to complete academic activities through the end of the course, (b) reporting the date of the last qualifying academic activity the instructor is able to document for that student, and (c) preserving the relevant documentation in those cases for three years.

- Example 1: Student attended class on a regular basis, completed assignments/quizzes/tests and took the final exam. Student completed the course but not at a passing level (failed to achieve the course objectives). Grade assigned is F.
- Example 2: Student attended class on a regular basis through the end of the term and completed some assignments/quizzes, but did not turn in others (e.g., skipped the midterm exam but turned in final paper or completed final exam; missed several quizzes yet completed other course requirements occurring at later dates in the term). Student participated in academically related activities throughout the duration of the term, but because of missed course requirements, did not earn sufficient points to receive a passing grade. Grade assigned is F.
- Example 3: Student attended class and completed course activities (assignments/quizzes/tests), but only up to a certain point in the semester. For example, there is record of the student submitting an assignment on November 1, but that is the last date student participated in any course activities. Student did not take the final exam. Grade assigned is FW, Attendance Status is reported as Stopped Attending and the Attendance to Date is reported as November 1.
- Example 4: Instructor does not take attendance. There is no record of student participating in the class. Student did not have any graded homework, no assignments were turned in, no grades for quizzes or tests, etc. Grade assigned is FW, Attendance Status is reported as Never Attended.

¹ Policy draft 11/02/15 by Financial Support and Scholarships Office, updated 11/16/15. Revised 12/8/2017. Updated office names 12/12/2024.

What records need to be retained by the instructor?

As with other Title IV program records, documentation pertaining to FW grades must be retained and available for examination in accordance with the regulatory provisions for recordkeeping for a period of three years after the end of the award year for which the aid was awarded (34 CFR 668.24). Because of this and the University of Nebraska Board of Regents policy on student records, faculty are encouraged to download final gradebooks from Blackboard and Canvas at the end of the term and retain them for a period of three years after the conclusion of current academic year (e.g., through June 2019 for courses taught in Fall 2015 or Spring 2016). Storage of gradebooks need be stored in Box, a secure environment for this data. Once stored in Box delete the gradebook from your computer. If you have questions about the secure location of your gradebook contact the UNO Public Safety office at unopublicsafety@unomaha.edu or 402.554.2648.

What is the reason for the change?

The reasons are twofold. First, federal regulations require that a procedure be in place to know whether a financial aid recipient has begun attendance in all classes to be eligible for financial aid. For students who “unofficially withdraw” and are given an FW grade, we must be able to determine if the student began attendance in the class. An assigned FW grade with a last date of academic activity will enable us to determine if the student began attendance.

Second, financial aid funds are awarded to a student under the assumption that the student will attend school for the entire period for which the assistance was provided. When a student “officially withdraws” from all courses, the student may no longer be eligible for the full amount of financial aid that was originally awarded as determined by a Return to Title IV (R2T4) calculation. In addition, if a student fails to earn a passing grade in at least one course offered over an entire semester, the institution must assume, for Title IV purposes, that the student has “unofficially withdrawn” and the school must perform the R2T4 calculation. The school does not have to perform the R2T4 calculation if they can document the last date of academic activity is beyond a certain point.

How will the FW grade appear on the student’s transcript?

Regardless of if the student is given an F grade or the new FW grade, an F will appear on the student’s official academic transcript.

Academically Related Activities

Below are the federal guidelines that define an academic related activity for this purpose.

Academically related activities include but are not limited to:

- Physically attending a class where there is an opportunity for direct interaction between the instructor and students;
- Submitting an academic assignment;
- Taking an exam, completing an interactive tutorial, or participating in computer-assisted instruction;
- Attending a study group that is assigned by the school;
- Participating in an online discussion about academic matters; and
- Initiating contact with a faculty member to ask a question about the academic subject studied in the course.

Academically related activities do not include activities where a student may be present but not academically engaged, such as:

- Living in institutional housing;
- Participating in the school’s meal plan;

- Logging into an online class without active participation; or
- Participating in academic counseling or advisement.

Distance Education Courses

In a distance education context, documenting that a student has logged into an online class is not sufficient, by itself, to demonstrate academic attendance by the student. A school must demonstrate that a student participated in class or was otherwise engaged in an academically related activity, such as by contributing to an online discussion or initiating contact with a faculty member to ask a course-related question. Examples of acceptable evidence of academic attendance and attendance at an academically-related activity in a distance education program include:

- Student submission of an academic assignment,
- Student submission of an exam,
- Documented student participation in an interactive tutorial or computer-assisted instruction,
- A posting by the student showing the student's participation in an online study group that is assigned by the institution,
- A posting by the student in a discussion forum showing the student's participation in an online discussion about academic matters, and
- An e-mail from the student or other documentation showing that the student initiated contact with a faculty member to ask a question about the academic subject studied in the course.

Additional Questions

Does the F/FW distinction need to be included in the syllabus so that students are aware? No. This is not a new grade type. The student will not see FW, and FW will not be listed as an official grade for UNO. FW will only be seen on the grade roster, and if selected will allow the instructor to 1) select attendance status (stopped attending, never attended), and 2) select last date of attendance.

Does the grading scale for syllabi in CCMS need to be changed to reflect FW? No, this is not a new grade type.

If the transcript only reflects the grade of F regardless of if an F or FW is given, how is the student informed? FW information submitted on the grade roster will only be used by Financial Support and Scholarships. Financial Support and Scholarships will evaluate all FW grades submitted and will only contact students whose aid will be adjusted.

Does the instructor have the responsibility to communicate the F and FW distinction? No, Financial Support and Scholarships will contact students if they are affected.

What about students who withdraw from the course and no longer appear on Canvas in the roster or gradebook? Students who officially withdraw from a course after the drop/add period are issued a W on the transcript. Instructors do not need to enter final course grades for these students as the Registrar already has the W on file. The F/FW distinction only pertains to students who appear on the final grade roster (and therefore did not officially withdraw from the course) and who are receiving a failing grade because they did not earn enough points to warrant a passing grade (either because of poor performance on course requirements or the failure to complete/submit course requirements).