

To: University Athletics Board
From: Bob Jacobsen, Faculty Athletic Representative
Subject: Change to Physical Education Grading
Date: May 28, 2013

Summary:

Grades for intercollegiate-athletics PE classes will shift from letter grades to P/NP in Fall 2013. This is an academic decision made by the PE department for academic reasons. This solves grading problems and aligns us with Pac-12 and national practice. Team GPAs will drop .15 to .25 because of this, about 50 students will be at risk of academic probation, and 15-25 probably will go on academic probation. The GPA drop will be across athletics, but the students in academic difficulty will be mostly males from basketball and football, with African American males making up a large part. Adaptation & recovery will take some time, perhaps through Fall 2014.

More information:

Berkeley intercollegiate athletes can currently take up to 2 units of PE 11 or PE 12 for a letter grade each semester. This counts in their GPA¹ and toward having 13 units for full time status. This is administered by the PE department, who is the final assigner of grades, based on grade sheets from the coaches. Several efforts over the last decade have created rubrics for the grading based on effort, skill and competition time. Kathryn Scott is the director of the PE department, which is in the L&S Division of Biological Sciences. She is the instructor of record who is responsible for the final grades to the registrar.

There are other PE classes for various sports and activities that are graded either with letter grades or P/NP. Those grades are assigned by PE instructors based on various rubrics. A fraction, roughly a third, are for letter grades and the grade distribution in these courses is quite typical of campus grade distributions, pretty evenly A/B/C with a few D and F grades.

The vast majority of PE 11 and 12 grades for IA students are submitted by the coaches as an A. In the most recent semester, it was over 96%². Director Scott tries to adjust these after-the-fact based on news reports of playing time, discussions with coaches and in some cases student athletes, and other information. She gets a lot of push-back from coaches and students when this happens.

¹ At most 4 units of that can count toward the 120 needed for graduation, but due to NCAA eligibility requirements the 120 unit requirement is never an issue.

² The student athletes generally agree that, unless you're hurt and not playing, a coach that gives a B or C is trying to tell you to leave the team.

No other Pac-12 school gives letter grades for intercollegiate athletics. (ASU did, but stopped) Because of the playing seasons, the kinds of activities, not to mention issues with differences of criteria between PE and coaches, grades for these courses are quite different from other PE grades and very different from other grades on campus. They do not properly reflect academic results. (This was her view, and after multiple discussions I came to understand and share it)

Director Scott has tried to solve this problem a number of times. Last fall, after consultation with me as FAR, IA (Foti Mellis) and through us Derek Van Rheen of the Athletic Study Center, Associate Dean Rhodes of L&S Advising, and Chris Stivers of IA Compliance, Director Scott decided that the proper solution was to change the intercollegiate athletics courses to P/NP grades only.

P/NP-only grading will put about 35-60 students at academic risk next semester. These are the ones that would be above 2.0 were they to get the 2 units of A from PE, and would be below without it. Half or more are going to be able to step up their academics, get a C instead of a C- in a course or two, and be OK. Probably 20 or so (in addition to our usual 15-20) will fall below the line. Many of those will be from from the football team, with perhaps one or two from the basketball team.

This is likely to make a 0.15 to 0.25 decrease in the overall student-athlete GPA in the first (Fall 2013) semester. It's already lower than the general student GPA, and this will make that difference larger and more visible. Of course, it will take away the argument that student athletes have their GPAs arbitrarily bumped up by PE grade points.

We (Derek, Chris Stivers, me, IA compliance, L&S Advising, OFAR, etc) are going to work this through to the best of our ability. It'll be a little rocky, but I think students will be able to adapt and academic performance will recover in a year or so.