

Student Academic Services, Academic Affairs
401 Golden Shore, 6th Floor
Long Beach, CA 90802-4210
www.calstate.edu

Eric G. Forbes
Assistant Vice Chancellor
(562) 951-4744
eforbes@calstate.edu

MEMORANDUM

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To: CSU Presidents
CSU Provosts
CSU Vice Presidents for Student Affairs
CSU Associate Vice Presidents
Directors of Admissions and Records
State University Registrars

From: Eric G. Forbes 
Assistant Vice Chancellor

Subject: Basic Subject Courses and the Grade of C-

Executive Order 1100 established a system-wide minimum grade for specific courses used to fulfill graduation requirements in the four basic subjects. By calling out these courses directly, the language excluded various forms of the grade of D or “barely passing” from meeting these fundamental course requirements and eliminated the use of an average grade of those units completed as a satisfying standard. At the same time, the Executive Order attempted to bring these graduation requirements for all students in line with our ordinary admission requirements for transfer students, particularly students transferring from one CSU campus to another one.

In forming a system-wide policy, however, an issue immediately surfaced regarding the optional use of “+/-“ grading at CSU campuses and the intersection with this Executive Order. Several CSU campuses employ “+/-“ grading and several do not. How does this work out? Students performing at the low-end of the scale at any CSU or external campuses that do not award C- might likely receive C grades. The more precise “+/-“ grading scheme, in other words, now has the unintended consequence of denying access to transfer or delaying graduation in a way different than at campuses with traditional grading schemes. The consequence is that the literal intention of section 2.2.2 of Executive Order 1100 cannot be evenly enforced.

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Executive Order 1100

2.2.2 Minimum Grades

A grade of C or better is required of each CSU or transfer student completing courses in written communication in the English language, oral communication in the English language, critical thinking, and mathematics or quantitative reasoning.

Title 5 Section 40104

A campus may use “plus” and “minus” designations in combination with letter grades and may compute grade point averages taking plus and minus values into account.

To resolve the equity dilemma, we reviewed this matter with General Counsel for which there are two solutions: 1) return to the practice of permitting campuses to use any grade to meet these basic subject requirements or 2) consider the grade of C requirement in a general sense and permit various forms of the grade (C-,C,C+) to meet graduation and transfer admission standards. After careful consideration, we have adopted option 2 as the best approach.

1. *Can students meet admission and graduation requirements with the grade of credit or CR?*

Yes, as long as the grade of credit or CR means a grade of C- or greater at the institution of instruction.

2. *Can we differentiate graduation from admission requirements?*

No longer. If we admit students with the grade of C- in basic subjects, we must also permit them to graduate with these grades. If we graduate transfer students with the grade of C- in basic subjects, then we must permit entering FTF to fulfill these requirements with grades of C- too.

3. *Can we set a higher admission standard for basic subjects if our campus is under any form of impaction?*

No, the question of equity is more pervasive than the issue of impaction. Students who complete these courses with grades of C- meet these particular requirements for admission as well as graduation. However, there are most likely other impaction requirements in making an admission determination, such as a higher overall grade point average than the CSU minimum, or the completion of certain major-specific preparatory courses unique to each campus. The basic subject requirements, however, are system-wide and invoke common rules.

4. *Can we set a higher standard than C- for these courses if they are utilized for prerequisites?*

Yes, as prerequisites are not about admission or graduation but about the preparation to undertake a subsequent course, prerequisites can be set for higher performance to ensure the likelihood of student success.

5. *Does this minimum requirement for admission and graduation also apply to the acceptance of transfer credit grades for other courses?*

No, the minimum grades for both transfer admission and graduation are only set for the completion of the four basic subjects. Executive Order 1100 leaves the determination of grades that meet other general education requirements at the discretion of the campus. However, with respect to courses successfully completed by students between CSU campuses under our legislated CSU Fully Online program (AB 386), at least elective credit in residence must be allowed at the home campus.

6. *When is this interpretation scheduled for implementation?*

Campuses will be expected to comply with the uniform policy regarding the use of the grade of C- in basic subjects for admission to the fall 2017 term, and for graduation purposes with the 16-17 catalog year. We anticipate including information about these changes in the mandatory catalog copy and will propose changes to executive order 1100 to correspond to this interpretation.