

Proposal to the Senate Educational Policy Committee

Proposal: Remove ABS grade option and Revise *Student Code* Sections § 3-102, § 3-103, § 3-104, § 3-106, § 3-201, § 3-203, § 3-204.

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Background/History

The earliest appearance of the ABS grade (at the time it was AB) in the reviewed University archives is 1915 where it was established to be “absent from final examination, without good reasons so far as you know (counts as failure).” Additional publications in 1923 where AB grades were still entered as an F (or E) grade even if an AB was given. There is further mention in a 1961 student handbook cautioning students against excessive unexcused absences. Students who missed an excessive amount of class or work, including exams, would receive an Absent grade. In some situations, students could get this grade removed with the aid of their advisor or professor, who could assign them makeup work and potentially treat this grade as an Incomplete. Over time, the grade evolved back into the F-equivalent that it is today. When the University underwent the Banner conversion the AB notation was changed to a three-letter notation of ABS as it is today.

Currently, an ABS grade is the equivalent of an F (zero grade point) in a student’s GPA and only serves to indicate a student failed due to absence from a final exam. Unlike the historical uses, recipients are not expected to make up the missed work or the final exam. In Spring 2024, there were 286 ABS grades given to undergraduate students. On average since Fall 2020, 342 ABS grades were given per term. Over the last two academic years, the average was 315, Fall granting slightly more than Spring semesters on average.

Conversations with advising professionals and instructors indicate that the ABS grade is not well understood. This has led to inconsistent use on campus and misconceptions that create significant administrative hurdles. Generally, instructors do not understand the difference between an incomplete grade (I) and an absent from final (ABS) grade. This has led to difficulties serving students who are seeking accommodations regarding final examinations. The ABS grade is a final/official grade that carries the grade point average weight of a failing (F) grade; the ABS is not a temporary/placeholder grade. Faculty are required when assigning an F grade to indicate a last date of instruction, whereas with an ABS they are not required to do so. This incentivizes faculty to select the ABS grade rather than the F grade despite the ABS not accurately representing the student’s effort. Unlike all other grading symbols in use on campus, the ABS grade requires the approval of the student’s college of enrollment when grade corrections are necessary. This additional layer of approval has complicated the adoption of electronic methods to submit and process grade changes.

The Student Success @ Illinois Policy and Issues Group (PIG) convened on this topic in Fall 2024 due to the ambiguity around appropriate usage and because the symbol’s impact on a student’s GPA is the same as an F. This group has representation from all undergraduate serving academic units and the Office of the Registrar. The Policy and Issues Group provided their recommendations to the Council of Undergraduate Deans (CoUD) at the end of Fall 2024. CoUD was supportive of this groups work and

recommendations. Based on the history of ABS, complicated administrative processing, and the need to assist students in navigating their academic grading the PIG has put together their recommendations below.

Recommendations

The Policy and Issues Group reviewing ABS grading recommends the following changes to the *Student Code* to remove the ABS grading option:

§ 3-102 Grading System – Grades Authorized for All Colleges

Excellent (A+, A, A-); Good (B+, B, B-); Fair (C+, C, C-); Poor (D+, D, D-) (lowest passing grade); Failure (F) (not acceptable for degree credit), including courses dropped for academic integrity violations (see § 1-402); ~~Absent from the final examination without an acceptable excuse ABS (counts as a failure, not acceptable for degree credit). If a student is absent from a final examination, and it is clear that taking that examination could not have resulted in a passing grade for the course, a grade of F may be given instead of ABS.~~ The A+ grade standing alone does not designate Honors Credit (see § 3-703). To recognize superior academic performance in courses designated as an honors course/section by the offering department or when the student has an Honors Credit Learning Agreement, the appropriate grade is A+H.

§ 3-103 Computation of Scholastic Averages

b. F = Failure (including courses dropped for academic integrity violations) = 0.00

~~ABS = Absent from final; counts as failure.~~

§ 3-104 Other Grade Symbols in Use

(within the chart)

NC No credit earned. To be used only in courses taken under the credit-no credit grading option. Instructors report the usual letter grades. As of Fall 2022, a letter grade of F ~~or a grade of ABS~~ will automatically be converted to NC (**Between Fall 2022 and Fall 2024, ABS grades will also convert to NC**). Prior to Fall 2022, a grade of D+ or lower was converted to NC.

§ 3-106 Grade Corrections

When a student's grade has been incorrectly reported, the instructor may correct the grade with the approval of the executive officer for the unit in which the course is offered. ~~(Exception: an ABS grade may be changed to a letter grade only with the additional approval of the dean of the college in which the student was registered at the time the original grade was assigned.)~~ The regular supplemental grade form is used to report the corrected grade; all copies of the form must be submitted to the student's college office.

§ 3-201 Final Examinations

b. Undergraduate Students

2. For satisfactory reasons, students may be "excused" by the dean of their college and examined later by their instructor. Absence from a final examination for any other cause is reported as a final grade of ~~"absent" (ABS)~~ **"failure" (F)** in the course ~~and counts as a failure.~~ (See § 3-103.)

§ 3-203 Proficiency Examinations

4. Departmental proficiency examinations may NOT be taken in the following circumstances:

To earn credit for a course that has been failed, meaning the student earned a grade of F, FR or **ABS (prior to Fall, 2025)**. (See § 3-204 on special examinations.)

§ 3-204 Special Examinations

b. A special examination may be given only in the following circumstances:

1. the student earned a failing grade of F, FR, or **ABS (prior to Fall, 2025)** in the University of Illinois course.

Justification

The history of ABS dates back to World War I and at one time was similar to our current Incomplete processing. Over time this grade has evolved to be the equivalent of an F without any significant rationale for the difference.

There are no other Big 10 institutions that have an equivalent grade to ABS nor do UIC or UIS. With no peer institutions having similar grading the use of ABS can also cause confusion on transcripts and to others navigating post-bachelors or even transfer opportunities at other campuses.

ABS is confusing to not only faculty, but students and removing it will provide better understanding of university grading and GPA. In conversations with students about their understanding of ABS, many reported not even knowing this was a possible grade and did not understand that it was reflected in GPA's the same as an F (zero GPA points). The ABS grade offers no benefit to faculty, staff, or students. The Policy and Issues Group was unable to detect a situation in which an ABS grade as opposed to a failing grade on a student's transcript would result in a better outcome for the student or better efficiency for the campus.