memorandum

to: College of Law Faculty and Students

from: Roy M. Sobelson, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs; Kelly C. Timmons, Associate Dean for Student Affairs

RE: New grading system and standards, effective Fall 2009

date: October 30, 2009 original (moot court eligibility information modified may 5, 2010)

 Last year, the College of Law faculty adopted a new grading system and grading standards, effective in the Fall of 2009. Below you will find a summary of the most important aspects of the new system.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The new grading scale

 Beginning this semester (Fall 2009), we will use letter grades instead of number grades. The available grades, and their grade point value equivalents used for calculating cumulative grade point averages (gpa’s) and ranks, are:

A+ 4.3

A 4.0

A- 3.7

B+ 3.3

B 3.0

B- 2.7

C+ 2.3

C 2.0

C- 1.7

D 1.0

F 0.0

 While there is no inherently correct 55 -100 point scale value that must be attached to each letter grade, the fact that we’ve graded on the 55 -100 point scale for so many years suggests that many faculty members will equate a traditional number scale with our new letter scale. Below you’ll find a traditional scale that may help faculty and students adjust to the transition from the old system to the new. **Keep in mind that this is informational only and unofficial; students will be given letter grades and the “small number equivalents” only (i.e., 0.0 to 4.3). None of the 55-100 scale numbers will be issued to students or appear on transcripts**.

 97-100 A+ 4.3

94-96 A 4.0

90-93 A- 3.7

87-89 B+ 3.3

84-86 B 3.0

80-83 B- 2.7

77-79 C+ 2.3

74-76 C 2.0

70-73 C- 1.7

60-69 D 1.0

Below 60 F 0.0

The new standards

 The new grading standards, effective with the issuance of Fall 2009 grades, are:

 (a) All required courses, except Litigation, must have a mean (i.e., average) between 2.9 and 3.1.[[2]](#footnote-2) Grades of non-J.D. students shall be disregarded in computing the course mean;

 (b) For non-seminar elective courses with 20 or more students, the faculty strongly recommends that the class mean fall between 3.0 and 3.2.[[3]](#footnote-3) Grades of non-J.D. students shall be disregarded in computing the course mean;

 (c) For non-seminar elective courses with fewer than 20 students, the faculty strongly recommends a maximum class mean of 3.5.[[4]](#footnote-4) Grades of non-J.D. students shall be disregarded in computing the course mean; and

 (d) Seminars (i.e., courses specifically adopted and listed in the Bulletin as seminars) are exempt from the policies stated above.

 There are no mandatory or recommended medians (the grade in the middle of the class) or distributions (the number of A’s, B’s, etc.).

Standards related to grading

 The new standards for several matters related to grades are:

 (a) A cumulative grade point average of 2.20 is necessary to be “in good academic standing.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

 (b) A cumulative grade point average below 2.00 will result in automatic exclusion from the College of Law, with no right of appeal;[[6]](#footnote-6)

 (c) A cumulative grade point average of at least 2.00 but less than 2.20 will result in the student’s placement on academic probation.[[7]](#footnote-7) A student on probation is permitted a maximum of two semesters in which to raise the cumulative grade point average to the required 2.20. A student who does not raise the cumulative grade point average to the required 2.20 by the end of two semesters shall be excluded from the College of Law. If the student raises the cumulative grade point average to a 2.20 but in a later semester the cumulative grade point average again falls below 2.20, if the student has previously been on probation for two semesters, the student will be excluded from the College of Law. Probationary semesters do not include the summer term;

 (d) The minimum cumulative grade point averages for participating in various co-curricular activities are:

 (i) Clinics -- 2.30

 (ii) Externships -- 2.30

 (iii) Moot Court -- 2.70[[8]](#footnote-8)

 (iv) Mock Trial -- 2.30[[9]](#footnote-9)

 (e) The minimum grade necessary to meet the writing requirement for a course is a 2.30;[[10]](#footnote-10)

 (f) The minimum cumulative grade point average needed to graduate from the College of Law is 2.20;[[11]](#footnote-11) and

 (g) For graduation honors, the cumulative grade point average standards are:

 (i) *Cum laude* -- 3.40 – 3.59

 (ii) *Magna cum laude* -- 3.60 – 3.79

 (iii) *Summa cum laude* -- 3.80 and above.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Two semester course grading

 Beginning with the Fall of 2009, all courses which continue for two semesters (Contracts I and II, Property I and II, Civil Procedure I and II, Torts I and II, and RWA I and II) will be graded independently each semester. Thus, each student will receive a final grade in the Fall of each such course, and a separate final grade in the Spring of each such course. All students must pass each semester of each such course in order to graduate.

Educating others about the new system

 Many students are interested in explaining the change in our grading system to others, particularly potential employers. To that end, we have prepared two letters explaining grade conversion to employers. Each letter explains the purposes and timing of grade conversion and contains the number to letter conversion chart. The College of Law has already sent letters to all employers with whom the Career Services Office has a relationship.

 Students may determine that including a copy of one of these letters in individual communications with employers will help the employers better assess students’ transcripts and grade point averages. Students are free to use copies of the letters for this purpose. For those students graduating in the Fall of 2009, the following letter is most appropriate: <http://law.gsu.edu/u/w4w8x>. For those graduating in the Spring of 2010, this letter is most appropriate: <http://law.gsu.edu/u/uj2xv>.

Inclusion of cumulative grade point averages on resumes

 Some students have asked us whether it is appropriate to convert their pre-Fall 2009 grades, and include their converted cumulative grade point averages (gpa’s) on their resumes between now and January of 2010, when the Fall 2009 grades are recorded and the conversion is complete and “official.” Until January of 2010, students’ gpa’s are the same, on a 55 to 100 scale, as they were at the end of Spring 2009 or Summer 2009. Consequently, that is the gpa students should put on their resumes, if they choose to include one at all. The employer letter(s) mentioned in the paragraph above will give employers a sense of what current grades will look like after conversion occurs.

 Nonetheless, students are permitted to include unofficial post-conversion gpa’s on their resumes, so long as they indicate clearly that the converted gpa is "unofficial until grade conversion." Obviously, any student who chooses to include this gpa must ensure that his or her calculations are accurate. To avoid confusing employers about the meaning of an "unofficial until grade conversion" gpa, students may want to include an employer letter linked above.

1. This memo does not include the specifics of our plan to “convert” number grades earned prior to the Fall of 2009 so that they can be combined with grades earned in the Fall of 2009 and later in calculating students’ grade point averages and rankings. For a full discussion of the conversion plan, see the memo at:

<http://law.gsu.edu/rsobelson/GradeConversion0809/Grade_Conversion_Memo_for_Students.pdf>. Note that the honors standards originally adopted and included in the linked memo have since been slightly modified.

 This memo also does include information about the alternative honors calculation formula that may be used by students who started in the College of Law before the Fall of 2009. The formula itself may be found at <http://law.gsu.edu/u/k32r9>. As of the writing of this memo, we are still developing an explanatory memo and a website program which will perform the alternative honors calculation automatically. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Under the old system, the mandatory mean for all first year required courses (Contracts, Property, Torts, Civil Procedure, Criminal Law and RWA) was 77.5 to 79.0. The mandatory mean for the second year required courses other than Litigation (Constitutional Law I, Evidence and Professional Responsibility) was 78.5 to 80.0. Even under the new system, Litigation will continue to be graded on an S/U/A basis. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Under the old system, there were no required or recommended means for elective courses. The new standard is intended to address students’ concerns about unfairness and grade-shopping caused by disparate grading standards in similarly situated courses. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. While the concerns identified in n. 3 make it appropriate to adopt standards for these classes, their small size makes strict means inappropriate. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Under the old system, the standard for good standing was 73.00. These calculations are only made at the end of the Spring semester, unless a student graduates in a semester other than the Spring, in which case the calculation is also made in that semester. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Under the old system, students with a cumulative grade point average under 70.00 were automatically excluded, without right of appeal. These calculations are only made at the end of the Spring semester. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Under the old system, students with a cumulative grade point average of at least 70.00 but less than 73.00 were placed on academic probation. The conditions of probation remain the same as before. These calculations are only made at the end of the Spring semester. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. After adoption of the new plan by the faculty, Moot Court changed its bylaws, making the minimum 2.70, instead of the original faculty-approved 2.30. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Under the old system, the minimum grade point averages required for (i)-(iv) were 73.00. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Under the old system, the minimum grade necessary to meet the writing requirement for a course was 73.00. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Under the old system, the minimum grade point average necessary to graduate was 73.00. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Under the old system, the honors standards were: (i) 84.0 for *cum laude*; (ii) 87.0 *for magna cum laude*; and (iii) 90.0 for *summa cum laude*. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)