CAMPUS SENATE AY2008/2009
RESOLUTION 38-24

Mid-term Grade Policy

WHEREAS, UIS should employ every reasonable means to improve the retention of its student and to understand the patterns of student success and persistence; and

WHEREAS, mid-term grades insure that students enrolled in 09x-, 100-, and 200-level courses receive feedback about their academic progress to help them stay at UIS; and

WHEREAS, best practice now suggests that early warning systems and mid-term grades should be used in tandem as part of an overall retention strategy for first-year students; and

WHEREAS, mid-term grades can help assess the impact of the Early Warning System; and

WHEREAS, mid-term grades can help advisors intervene to improve the academic success of transfer students;

THEREFORE, at its meeting on February 20, 2009, the Undergraduate Council unanimously endorsed the use of mid-term grades at UIS, according to the following policy:

- Mid-term grades should be required for 09x-, 100- and 200-level courses
- Mid-term grades should be optional for 300- and 400-level courses

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Campus Senate at the University of Illinois at Springfield hereby approve the Mid-term Grade Policy.

Rationale and further information:

MEMO

To: Pat Langley, Chair
Campus Senate

Harry Berman, Provost
Over the last two years, the Undergraduate Council (UGC) has had several conversations about the value of using mid-term grades as a retention tool. In the initial phase of development of the UIS General Education Curriculum and the expansion of the freshman class, the Undergraduate Council favored using an Early Warning System (EWS) instead, and such a system was created and has been used since Fall 2006. At that time, there were concerns that mid-term grades were issued too late to really help students make changes in their academic progress. There were also concerns about faculty compliance and the time it would take faculty to calculate and submit mid-term grades. The Undergraduate Council members at that time agreed to revisit the issue at a later time.

In the time between initial discussions about mid-term grades and the latest set of discussions during this academic year, the Undergraduate Council has become aware of a number of factors that make mid-term grades a desirable component of a retention plan for undergraduates:

- UGC has concerns about retention rates among first-year students: fall-to-fall persistence rates for first-year students are 71% for the 2006-07 entering class and 66% for the 2007-08 entering class. Every reasonable strategy for helping first-year students succeed should be employed, and mid-term grades are one such strategy.
- The Early Warning System is not currently required of faculty, although the Office of Undergraduate Education makes multiple attempts to remind faculty teaching 09x-, 100-, and 200-level courses to submit the names of students manifesting attendance-related, academic, social/emotional, or financial problems to the Undergraduate Academic Advising Center (UAAC). Only a minority of faculty respond to Early Warning System notices: approximately 20-30% of the total number of faculty teaching 09x-, 100- and 200-level courses in any given fall or spring since the system began operation. Required midterm grades in 09x-, 100- and 200-level courses would insure that there is at least one opportunity (albeit later than desirable) for intervention in the academic careers of first-semester freshmen.
- Mid-term grades could potentially be used for courses beyond the 09x-, 100- and 200-level, which would provide a safety net for transfer students who come into UIS. Each semester, faculty request that the EWS be expanded to serve students in other courses on campus. The Office of Undergraduate Education receives those requests from faculty in 300- and 400-level ECCE, elective, and major courses, as well as from faculty in graduate programs. Currently, there are not sufficient staff members in the UAAC to be able to process EWS notices from all levels of
coursework at UIS, so mid-term grades in key courses throughout the curriculum could provide advisors with a way of identifying the students most at risk.

- The combination of early warning and midterm grades are involved in the growing practice known as “intrusive advising,” a pro-active approach to reaching students who would not normally seek help for academic issues. As Jennifer Varney notes (http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/AAT/NW30_3.htm#10), “Intrusive Advising is not ‘hand-holding’ or parenting, but rather active concern for students’ academic preparation; it is a willingness to assist students in exploring services and programs to improve skills and increase academic motivation” (Upcraft & Kramer, 1995). A series of articles on this approach may be found at the website of the National Academic Advising Association (http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/clearinghouse/advisingissues/Intrusive_advising.htm).

- Midterm grades also function as an indirect means of assessing the impact of the Early Warning System. If students are reported through EWS, advisors, peer advisors, housing staff, and staff in other units on campus have the opportunity to intervene to improve students’ chances for success. Having mid-term grades posted 4 weeks later will provide some indication of whether students who were reported through EWS continue to have problems. While an EWS notification does not in any way guarantee that a student will succeed in the course in which the student was reported, it provides a means of intervention. If a student who received an EWS notification for a given course does well on his or her mid-term grade in that course, then something has occurred in the intervening weeks to improve the student’s chance of success (and EWS may be one of the factors).

- The UAAC, the Center for First-Year Students, the Diversity Center, and the Office of Undergraduate Education have all recommended the use of midterm grades in conjunction with both the Early Warning System and MAP-Works (Making Achievement Possible, an Educational Benchmarking product), a student survey that provides information about how students think they are doing early in each semester of the first year. Mid-term grades can be entered into MAP-Works so that staff involved in academic and student support services can have a very clear picture of how a student’s self-assessment relates to actual academic performance.

- Best practice now suggests that early warning systems and midterm grades should be used in tandem as part of an overall retention strategy for first-year students. Part of the goal of any successful retention initiative is not letting any student fall through the cracks. Using mid-term grades in addition to EWS provides another opportunity for faculty to report academic problems that may not have been apparent in the 4th or 5th week of the semester.

- Mid-term grades help the institution understand the patterns of student success and persistence through the first year of college. Staff involved in the retention of first-year students should have multiple sources of information, from faculty and students, regarding student performance, to
understand the factors that drive persistence. The Office of Undergraduate Education and the Institutional Research Office will correlate those data to find patterns among students who persist and students who do not. Midterm grades serve as an important data point in that process of research that can help the campus develop better strategies to insure the academic success of our students.

The Undergraduate Council recognizes the problems of mid-term grades for faculty and offers the following responses to common concerns about mid-term grades:

- Mid-term grades involve faculty time.
  - Response:
    - Figuring grades at mid-term will involve faculty time, but the benefits to the students are worth the time involved.
    - Posting grades takes little time through Web for Faculty.
    - A majority of public and private higher education institutions in the U.S. use mid-term grades.
    - Faculty play an important role in the persistence and academic success of students. Mid-term grades help provide services and assistance to students who might otherwise fall through the cracks.

- Mid-term grades change pedagogical strategies by making it necessary for faculty to provide graded assignments early in the semester.
  - Response:
    - Multiple early assignments providing graded feedback to students about their performance are considered a best practice in higher education. The Second National Survey of First-Year Academic Practices, conducted by the Policy Center on the First Year of College (http://www.firstyear.org/survey/survey2002/findings.html), finds that “Early feedback on academic performance is important during the first semester. Students are often unaware of their own levels of academic readiness and need the motivation that early grades can provide.”

At its meeting on February 20, 2009, the Undergraduate Council unanimously endorsed the use of mid-term grades at UIS, according to the following policy:

- Mid-term grades should be required for 09x-, 100- and 200-level courses
- Mid-term grades should be optional for 300- and 400-level courses.

While some institutions limit mid-term grades to particular populations of students (e.g., first-year students, first-time first-year freshmen, students who are making below a C- in a given course), the Undergraduate Council opted to make the mid-term grade policy consistent with the use of the Early Warning System. The Council members believe that making mid-term grades optional for 300- and 400-level courses will make intervention more possible for transfer students at risk and will provide to those students a service that has thus far been missing at
this campus. Programs can make the decision whether or not to use mid-term grades at the 300- and 400-level and in which classes and how many classes they will use them.

The Undergraduate Council is forwarding its recommendations to the Graduate Council for discussion about the optional use of mid-term grades in graduate classes.