

Academic Policies Committee

Meeting: Tuesday, November 28, 2023 at 4 pm

Attendees: Michel Pleimling, Keith Goynes, Susan Sumner, Dan Thorp, Keith Thompson, Jen Pike (minutes)

Absent: Kim Smith

Continued discussion on revision of policy 6305 section 2.1- charge from CUSP

What are the broad categories of departmental Progress to Degree statements?

1. One or more lists of courses that need to be completed (sometimes with a specified minimum grade) at predetermined numbers of attempted hours, often with two or fewer attempts. Transfer credit, AP credits, course withdrawals etc. often count toward the number of attempted hours.
2. Overall GPA requirement (ranges from 2.0 to 3.0) and/or specified in-major GPA requirement (ranges from 2.0 to 3.0) at a specified number of attempted hours. Sometimes these GPA requirements must be maintained during the whole course of study or after a specified number of hours.
3. Specified number of semester credits of departmental requirements.
4. Restriction on the number of core/major courses that can be repeated.
5. "Upon attempting xx credits, students must have successfully completed yy credit of in-major courses."

The committee discussed categories #3 and #5 in this meeting.

Regarding #3 and #5:

The committee considered if we should let departments use #3 the way they feel best, or do we need some constraints and constrictions?

Statements of type #3 can provide some guidance to students and may be useful to gauge where they are.

However, programs should not use these guidelines ruthlessly to root out students.

Statements of type #5 might be the most useful for students to gauge their progress.

Great for guidelines but is it a reason to throw a student out of a program?

As opposed to a checkpoint, i.e. *"it's recommended that students complete xx and yy"*.

Change language to a recommendation, but not something that could be acted upon by the department to remove a student.

Moving forward, only specific types of statements should be allowed on checksheets, whereas currently departments have put whatever they want on their checksheets. Some standardization of checksheets has already happened and this would continue along the same lines.

Sections 2.2 and 2.3: academic warnings, probations, and suspension

Should we come up with a different way for an academic warning or probation?

What can be done to better serve our students in academic appeals?

Keith Goynes shared a system to chart a student's standing that is based on cumulative as well as on term GPA. The goal would be to prevent a long, slow slide happening without intervention.

Table 1. Determining Good Standing, Probation and 1st Suspension for undergraduate students.

Status at Beginning of Semester	Cumulative GPA at End of Semester	Term GPA	Status at End of Semester
Good Standing	2.00 or greater	2.00 or greater	Good Standing
Good Standing	2.00 or greater	Less than 2.00 but 1.00 or greater	Probation
Good Standing	2.00 or greater	Less than 1.0	1 st Suspension
Good Standing	Less than 2.00	Less than 2.00 but 1.00 or greater	Probation
Good Standing	Less than 2.00	Less than 1.00	1 st Suspension
Probation	2.00 or greater	2.00 or greater	Good Standing
Probation	Less than 2.00	2.00 or greater	Continued Probation (2 semesters to raise Cumulative GPA to 2.00 or greater)
Probation	Less than 2.00	Less than 2.00	1 st Suspension

Table 2. Determining Good Standing, Probation and 2nd Suspension for undergraduate students upon return from 1st Suspension. (Note: All students returning from 1st suspension with a cumulative GPA < 2.0 are automatically placed on probation.)

Status at Beginning of Semester	Cumulative GPA at End of Semester	Term GPA	Status at End of Semester
Probation	2.00 or greater	2.00 or greater	Good Standing
Probation	Less than 2.00	2.00 or greater	Continued Probation (2 semesters to raise Cumulative GPA to 2.00 or greater)
Probation	Less than 2.00	Less than 2.00	2 nd Suspension

This chart parallels a lot of what we already have, but it brings in the term GPA and uses it for an early indicator to the student that there is a problem that needs to be resolved.

It was observed that students don't take academic warnings very seriously.

Too many students start sliding downward and after many semesters they hit probation and suspension, and it can be too late for them to correct their trajectory.

Adopting the principles of the chart shown above, there might be more students taking advantage of academic appeals or academic relief. It might create more work for the employees working on academic relief/appeals. Hopefully, it would signal to those students that they need help. Currently students are allowed to prolong challenges and then they are so far in a hole that it is too difficult to dig themselves out. This committee has been asked to look at policies with fairness and helping students in mind. For most students, this would be an improvement from a slow lingering slide to suspension.

The committee then discussed how to provide CUSP members with the context to understand the issue of a slow slide to suspension without intervention. It was concluded that case studies should be presented to provide this context.

After discussing some other aspects of Policy 6305, see below, the committee came back to this issue as they realized that an alternative could build on academic warnings. From section 2.2.1: "An academic warning shall be imposed when a student earns less than a 2.0 term GPA, but with a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher." The Committee concluded that by utilizing the current verbiage and incorporating the current policy 6305 the goal of an early intervention can be achieved in a different way. Indeed, students whose term GPA is below 2.0 for two successive semesters could be placed on academic suspension even if their cumulative GPA hasn't dropped below 2.0.

The Committee is in favor of adding this to the policy. This change would only entail a small change of the language currently in the proposal but would yield a mechanism that allows early interventions in situations where we currently fail the students.

2.2 Associate and Undergraduate Academic Eligibility

Section 2.2 could be renamed as "**Academic Warnings and Academic Probations.**"

From the policy:

"2.2.1 Students Enrolled Beginning Fall 2000 Students who maintain the required minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.00 are considered to be in good academic standing with the university and are eligible for continued enrollment at Virginia Tech absent any violations of policies outlined in the Student Code of Conduct.

An academic warning shall be imposed when a student earns less than a 2.0 term GPA, but with a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher. No notation will appear of the academic transcript. Students on academic warning will be required to sign an academic contract acknowledging that their performance is not meeting University standards and stating what actions they are committed to taking to improve performance. Students who fail to successfully complete an academic action plan may be prohibited from future enrollment by the appropriate Undergraduate Academic Dean.

Academic probation shall be imposed when cumulative GPA is less than 2.00.

A student on probation:

- May take no more than 16 credits per semester;
- May be required (at the discretion of individual Colleges) to
 1. consult with an advisor before beginning a probationary semester, and
 2. to sign an academic contract acknowledging that their performance is not meeting University standards and stating what actions they are committed to taking to improve performance.

Academic probation will be lifted when cumulative GPA is at least 2.00."

Discussion: Allowing a struggling student to take 16 credits seems too high. To have a successful next semester, it is often best to take less than 16 credit hours. 16 credit hours may not be the pathway for success for a struggling student.

If it were capped lower, then the students would need to meet with an advisor and receive more contact. They'd be driven to the college mechanisms such as advisors. Perhaps recommend 12 credits, but students could appeal to the academic dean for 15? With permission, 15 could be a possibility or an exception.

The committee agreed that they like to revise the cap for students on probation that is currently 16, to be changed that students can take 12 credit hours while on probation, but with permission could take up to 15 credit hours.

2.3. Suspension Under Academic Eligibility Policy (Section 2.2.1)

From policy 6305:

"2.3.1 Suspension Under Academic Eligibility Policy (Section 2.2.1)

First suspension will be imposed when a student has two consecutive semesters (Fall and Spring) with a cumulative GPA below 2.00.

First Suspension: A student who is placed on first academic suspension at the end of a fall or spring semester will be suspended from continued enrollment through the end of the subsequent fall or spring semester. A student must earn a minimum 2.00 semester GPA the first semester back and raise their cumulative GPA to at least 2.00 by the end of the second semester back or earn a minimum 2.50 semester GPA for every subsequent semester following the suspension until cumulative GPA is 2.00 or greater.

Second Suspension: A student who is placed on second academic suspension at the end of a fall or spring semester will be suspended from continued enrollment for two consecutive academic semesters (spring, fall). Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Satisfactory Academic Progress - No. 6305 - Page 3

Note: Students are not eligible for enrollment in the summer or winter term immediately following a suspension going into effect.

Final Suspension: A student will be permanently dismissed for failure to meet returning performance requirements after a second academic suspension."

Discussion:

The information about a student coming back, currently only included for First Suspension, should also be included for Second Suspension.

The note about students not being eligible for certain terms could be moved to another place where it fits better.

2.3.2 Credits from Other Institutions

"2.3.2 Credits from Other Institutions

A student may not receive credit for course work taken at another college or university during any period in which the student specifically has been suspended by Virginia Tech for academic or disciplinary reasons."

Why do we do this? Other schools allow students on academic suspension to take courses elsewhere and transfer the credits. Being disallowed to take courses during suspension does not help the student. If a student on academic suspension is allowed to take courses elsewhere and transfer the credit, then they are provided with a chance to demonstrate to themselves that they can do the work. This will also allow them to continue making progress toward their degree.

If we make a change in this policy regarding transferring course, will there be a need to change other policies?

2.3.3 Readmission

"2.3.3 Readmission

A student whose GPA is below 2.0 must obtain his dean's approval before returning to school."

This part of the policy is not what we do right now.

2.3 Appeals

This section should be "2.4 Appeals" as there is already a section 2.3.