Evaluations and Grades: Proposal

Passed by EPC, 30 October 2015

We propose that students who do not complete evaluations will not be able to see their grades right away.

Specifically, a student who has completed all available evaluations for a given semester will be able to see that semester’s grades as they are posted to SIS, exactly as all students can now. A student who has \textit{not} completed all available evaluations will not see the semester’s grades until the next business day after the deadline for faculty to submit grades.

Rationale: Withholding access to grades is a “best practice” that seems to encourage students to submit evaluations; other schools have found that this works. Of course we can’t withhold access forever: sooner or later students do need to see their grades. In particular, they need to see them by the time the school’s Committee on Academic Standing meets to determine which students will be placed on academic alert (or probation, or worse). These committees meet roughly a week after the faculty grade submission deadline.

For example, this semester, the evaluation period will end on 14 December, and final exams start the 15th. We will presumably begin to post grades during the finals period, as we finish up calculating them. All grades will be due on 5 January. The Academic Standing Committee of the School of Engineering will be meeting on the 13th, and the Committee on Academic Standing and Honors of the School of Arts and Sciences will meet on the 14th. Under this proposal, students who don’t do all their evaluations will not see any of their grades until 6 January. (Thanks to Carmen for the specific dates.)

Details: Not every course gets evaluated; a class with too few students (fewer than 4) does not get an official evaluation. We will only pay attention to the evaluations students are actually asked to write. Conceivably, a student doing an honors thesis, a research project, and two very small upper-level courses might not have any evaluations to write in a given semester. If so, that student would be able to see the semester’s grades right away — since the student has (vacuously) completed all available evaluations.

It will be necessary to determine, from Trunk, which students have finished with evaluations and which haven’t. This is already being done, because students who haven’t done all their evaluations get automatically-generated email reminders. Then it will be necessary to mark students in SIS so that grades can be displayed or not, depending on whether evaluations are complete: a student with a “green flag” for the term can see the semester’s grades, but a student with a “red flag” cannot; all flags turn green on the day we release grades, the day after faculty grades are due. This requires both communication from Trunk to SIS, and a new facility within SIS.

Of course there is no way to prevent faculty members from telling students their grades, whether by writing the semester grade on the final exam or final paper before we hand it back, by posting them in Trunk, or by answering a question from a student. And that’s OK; eventually, students who are so eager to find out their grades will learn that it’s worth their while to fill in evaluations.

We expect that giving students access to the results of evaluations will also help encourage them to submit evaluations, but other schools have found that delaying grade reports helps even more. We’ll eventually do both.