Proposed Policy on Grade Restriction of Programs
For Faculty Council Vote
1 March 2010

Motion:
THAT the proposed policy on grade restriction of programs be approved effective 1 September 2010, and that the statement of "best practices" on managing grade-restricted POSt offerings be endorsed.

Background:
The Curriculum Review and Renewal Committee identified a problem in the Faculty that many programs – and almost all majors and specialist programs in the social sciences – are grade restricted, leading to a situation in which: many students are shut out of a whole sector of study; college advising staff must work with students to find alternative programs; and some programs shoulder a disproportionate load of students with lower GPAs.

In April 2008, Faculty Council passed a new policy to address this problem, by requiring all units (departments and EDU-As) to participate in offering at least one non-grade-restricted program. Over the ensuing year, it became clear that this solution is not practical: enrolment controls of some kind would still be required in most cases to manage the demand for such programs, and a lottery approach – the available non-grade control device – was deemed inappropriate after much further consultation.

Over the last 6 months, the Curriculum Renewal Steering Committee, in consultation with undergraduate coordinators and department and college advising staff, has been discussing alternative responses to the underlying problem: i.e., how do we manage access to areas of study in a fair and academically justified way? One problem has become clear: we have no policy on limiting enrolment in programs by grades – i.e., there are no guidelines on when, how, and why a program can restrict access through course grades or GPA thresholds. The suggestion is that a fair grade-restriction policy that addresses these questions could best ensure that those students most qualified to study in a subject area will be able to do so.

In particular, the proposal is that a POSt can only be grade-restricted due to enrolment pressures, and that only grades in courses relevant to the program can be used as a measure of qualification. The first part of the proposal addresses fairness by not preventing students' access to a program when there is capacity to teach them. The second part addresses fairness by avoiding a situation where a student who does reasonably well in relevant courses, but less well overall, is shut out of the programs in the discipline because of a lower GPA. Moreover, by requiring grade restrictions that are directly relevant to performance in the area of study, we avoid closing off whole areas of study to those students who show capability in the area. This approach also ensures some degree of fairness for program sponsors across the Faculty, by ensuring that students are only shut out of a program – and thus required to find an alternative – when their capabilities demonstrably do not lie in an area in which demand exceeds teaching capacity.

A. **Proposed policy on grade restriction of programs:**

1.   **A POSt (Specialist, Major, or Minor) can be grade-restricted only for reasons of enrolment pressure. Program sponsors proposing to limit a POSt must make a case based on past experience, and must make separate cases for each type of POSt (Specialist, Major, Minor) rather than automatically extending a restriction from one type to all.**

2. **In designating the entrance requirements for a grade-restricted POSt, program sponsors must provide academic rationale for a course or set of courses that constitute an appropriate opportunity for a student to demonstrate competence in the subject content of the POSt. The entrance threshold for admittance to the program cannot be based on the student's GPA nor on some arbitrary set of courses.**

3. **The grade cutoffs for entrance to a POSt will be established by analysis of recent patterns of course and program enrolments, leading to a grade restriction for achieving the overall target enrolment that can be accommodated by the unit. Grade cutoffs will be reviewed on a regular basis for their effectiveness in achieving the target enrolment numbers in a POSt.**

Implementation process and timelines:
Beginning Fall 2010, program sponsors aiming to introduce grade restrictions on new programs, or on programs that were previously unrestricted, will be asked to adhere to the above policy. For programs that currently have grade restrictions that do not follow the above policy, the Dean's office will meet with the Undergraduate Coordinator/Associate Chair from the sponsoring unit to develop an implementation plan for phasing in an appropriate grade restriction. Such programs will need to be brought into compliance no later than during the Fall 2011 curriculum cycle (i.e., for program applications in Spring 2012). Because the necessary consultations may require some time, any program sponsors planning to institute new or revised grade restrictions will need to begin these discussions no later than March of the calendar year in which they propose to bring forward the program for (re)approval in the Fall.

(Please see the Appendix for some additional details regarding application of the policy.)

Further practices to enable more access to grade-restricted programs:
We have also discussed a number of "best practices" that would help to address the original problem of access vs. demand, by encouraging units to: (1) consider a second-year access point to give students another chance to demonstrate qualification for a program; (2) focus on limiting the resources taken up by students in Minor programs in order to allow more students into those Minors; (3) be open to students satisfying program requirements by substituting relevant courses from other less-pressured units; and (4) consider carefully coordinating the course-mark threshold for access to scarce upper-year course places with the grade threshold for admission into the relevant program. These suggestions are designed to reduce some of the extraneous pressure on courses that contributed to program restrictions, thus allowing more students into the programs and access to those places. More detail on these best practices are spelled out below in items B1-4, respectively.

B. **Statement of "best practices" on managing grade-restricted POSt offerings:**

1. **Units with restricted POSts should consider having a second, different entrance requirement (following the policy on grade restriction of programs) for those beyond first year, so that students overcoming a bad beginning can qualify later by demonstrating ability without having to repeat introductory courses as Extras. The second, later requirement may impose a higher grade cut-off than the first year one.**

2. **To the extent possible, Minor POSts should be left unrestricted. In order to achieve this, units may impose a limit on the number or range of courses to which those enrolled in the Minor may have access. By restricting the number or kind of courses each student in a**

Minor can take, this should make room for more students to be able to pursue a Minor in the unit. For example, units may limit students in Minors to no more than 4 FCEs of the unit's courses. Also, all minors must contain at least 1 FCE at the 300+ level, but units need not allow students in Minors unlimited access to all their 300+ level courses, e.g., they may designate a limited subset of the unit's courses that those in the Minor may use to satisfy this requirement, or they may limit access to a particular number of FCEs at the 300-level. They may also, if pedagogically appropriate, create specific 300-level courses for students in Minor POSts.

3. Units asking to restrict POSts because of course enrolment pressures will be asked to consider allowing students to satisfy some portion of their program requirements with relevant courses from less-pressured units.   If this were done more widely, some of the course-enrolment pressure in the program-sponsoring unit might be relieved, allowing more students access to the grade-restricted programs. Note that we are not suggesting that program sponsors "export" their students to unwilling units; rather we are recognizing that students often have access to relevant courses in other units that could contribute to a coherent program in the pressured unit, but currently may not be allowed to count them.

4. Units with pressured upper-year courses should coordinate the grade requirement for entrance to their POSts with the grade required to take courses at the 300- and 400-level. This avoids having scarce upper-year course spaces occupied by those who have not qualified to be enrolled in a restricted POSt. However, the course mark restriction on taking further courses should not be so restrictive as to frustrate the "second qualifying opportunity" recommended in B.1 above.

<u>Appendix</u>

This appendix clarifies what is expected in the implementation of this policy by giving some details about the process to be followed, as well as an example.

The process for bringing forward a (new or revised) grade restriction on a program will involve consultation and discussion between the program sponoring unit and the Dean's office, research into the unit's past enrolment experience, and subsequent development of a proposal for grade-restricting the POSt. For new programs that include a grade restriction, or for existing programs that have a non-compliant grade restriction, the unit's Undergraduate Coordinator/Associate Chair should meet with the Vice Dean, Teaching & Learning, to discuss the enrolment pressures on the unit and determine an appropriate target enrolment. Although the selection of relevant courses for the grade restriction will follow from academic principles, the precise statement of the grade cutoffs will be based on analysis of how to achieve the agreed-on target enrolment. The Office of the Faculty Registrar will be consulted to advise on appropriate grade cutoffs in the relevant courses to be used for the grade restriction.

In identifying a target enrolment number for grade-restricted programs, the sponsoring unit need not consider only the maximum enrolment capacity of their courses – units may balance access to their courses and programs across different student populations. For example, a program sponsor may decide to have a particular POSt with a grade restriction to keep numbers in that option lower so that other students have access to the unit's courses; those other students may come from another of the unit's programs or from another unit's programs (any of which may be non-grade-restricted programs). The discussions with the Dean's office will address the overall enrolment pressure on the unit and how the unit wants to balance access to its courses.

In identifying an academically-justified entrance requirement for admission to the program, the program sponsor will specify two components: the course or set of courses that are deemed relevant for grade restriction purposes, and the grade calculation that will apply to some subset of those courses. The set of relevant courses may be larger than the subset used in the grade calculation, in order to allow some flexibility in choice of courses for students demonstrating their competence. The subset used in the grade calculation can be no more than 3 FCEs, since programs can require no more than 3 FCEs of study in first year. The program sponsor can specify the grade restriction as a minimum grade in each identified course, a minimum grade in any one of the identified courses, or an average across the identified courses (or a subset of them). Normally, the calculation should refer to fewer than 3 FCEs, to avoid the average over 3 FCEs becoming "almost a CGPA" for first year students. For this reason, program sponsors will be expected to provide strong academic justification for the use of more than 1 FCE in the grade calculation.

For example, consider that the Department of Cultural and Regional Studies (CRS) wants to introduce a grade-restricted program. The department may specify that CRS100Y is the single relevant course for admission to the program, and state the grade restriction as "at least 65% on CRS100Y". Alternatively, the department may consider any 100-level course in the department as relevant, and state the restriction as "at least 65% in one CRS 100-series course". Given a multidisciplinary program, the department may decide that there is a group of courses, both CRS and non-CRS, which provides adequate preparation for the program, and the grade restriction may be "an average of at least 63% on 2 FCEs in courses drawn from the following list." (Note that, if there is more than one way to calculate a student's relevant average based on the program's stated requirement, then the method that gives the student the best outcome must be used. For example, if a student has taken 3 FCEs from the designated group of

relevant courses, and the restriction requires the average of 2 FCEs, the average must be calculated on the best two.) The department may also follow best practice by allowing for a second, later entry-point for the program, with an appropriate requirement. This later requirement may be a higher grade cut-off than the one required after first year; e.g., if the first entry point is "at least 65% in CRS100Y", the second may be "an average of at least 70% on two CRS2**Y courses."

In all cases, units will be urged to make their requirements as simple as possible within the needs of an academically-relevant requirement. It should also be noted that, as they do with all program requirements, program sponsors have the authority to make individual exceptions in unusual circumstances regarding satisfaction of a grade requirement for entering a restricted program.