

CU Boulder Grade Replacement Policy

Fall 2018

Background

From 2002-2009, CU Boulder had a pilot “course forgiveness” policy in effect that allowed undergraduate students to repeat up to two courses in which a poor grade (D+ or lower) received in a class could be replaced by a new grade earned in a subsequent instance of that same class. Graduate students could invoke this policy too for one class in which they received a C+ or lower. The original grade of the prior instance of the class would remain on the transcript but would no longer be included in credit totals or in calculations for cumulative GPA, major GPA, and academic good standing.

The pilot was ended in 2009 due to concerns that the policy was not fair to high achieving students (who would like, e.g., to replace a B in one class with an A in a repeated attempt) as well as fears that students seeking to repeat a course were placing significant demand on enrollments and thus reducing access to a class to students new to CU. Neither concern was proven to have been significant enough to end the policy but a “vocal minority” ruled the day and the pilot program was ended.

The concern about high achieving students is addressed by the intent of these policies which is to give students who fail to demonstrate adequate understanding of the concepts covered by a course a second chance to learn from their initial struggles and ultimately gain mastery of the material. The goal is to allow students a chance to gain the knowledge and skills they need to persist and ultimately graduate from CU.

The concern about enrollment pressures is addressed by the fact that data from Institutional Research showed that the demand generated by repeaters back when the pilot policy was in effect was not statistically significant. Indeed, four years into the pilot, data showed that only one percent of students had even invoked the policy. In general, the courses most likely to see increased demand by repeaters are those that 1) have a high DFW rate and 2) function as gateways or prerequisites to downstream classes. Such classes are highly likely to have high enrollments and therefore are already making use of strategies to deal with demand: large classrooms, multiple sections, multiple AY course offerings, etc.

In Fall 2017, the College of Engineering and Applied Science drafted a new course forgiveness policy that it wanted to pilot in Spring 2018 for CEAS majors. The focus of that policy was on helping new students who struggle in the transition to CU be able to repeat courses they took during their first year in CU Engineering. When that policy was advanced to campus for review,

it was learned that Regent policy (APS 1025) dictates that course forgiveness policies must be adopted campus wide; it is simply too problematic to have just one unit provide course forgiveness to its students given all the ways that students interact with departments across campus.

As a result, the CEAS course forgiveness policy was set aside and an ad hoc committee of the Boulder Faculty Assembly was created to look at these issues and assess whether it was time, once again, to implement a policy like this at CU Boulder. After an initial set of conversations with various units on campus, it was determined that interest in such a policy was high and this led to the drafting of this document which proposes a new policy.¹

One difference from the past is that we now refer to this policy as a *grade replacement* policy rather than a course forgiveness or course repetition policy. Some members of our academic community take issue with the use of the word “forgiveness” since the intent is to allow students to demonstrate mastery of a given subject. Furthermore, the campus already has course repetition policies which govern, for example, how GPAs are calculated when a student repeats a course currently (grades from all instances are simply averaged together) or which limit how many times a student can take a given class (e.g., CEAS majors cannot take a given class more than three times). As such, this new policy is a grade replacement policy that is distinct from—and must work hand-in-hand with—existing course repetition policies.

As presented below, the draft grade replacement policy allows undergraduate students to repeat up to 10 credits worth of courses during their undergraduate career and allows graduate students to repeat up to 6 credits worth of courses during their graduate career. Different grade ranges are applied for undergraduate and graduate students and not all courses are eligible for grade replacement. The policy is designed to be straightforward to implement and allows for some customization of the workflows around grade replacement to ensure, e.g., that students who are struggling are informed of all the campus and unit resources they have available to help them succeed. The core principle driving the design of this policy is the desire to help students who have struggled academically at CU and are at risk of leaving the university without a degree. Grade replacement allows such students to recover from poor performance, to learn from failure, and ultimately to demonstrate that they have the resilience to persevere and learn the concepts, techniques, and skills required to graduate with a degree in their chosen discipline.

¹ The BFA committee spent time researching other universities in the PAC 12 and discovered that all PAC 12 institutions have policies, similar to the one proposed here, in effect now. These policies therefore appear to be a standard student success practice at other institutions of higher education.

Proposed Text of Policy

The University of Colorado Boulder allows degree-seeking **undergraduate and graduate students** to *repeat* most courses for credit, subject to limits imposed by individual schools and colleges. When an undergraduate or graduate student repeats a course, grades from all attempts appear on the student's transcript and all grades are used in computing total credits, cumulative and major grade point averages, and academic standing.

This policy adds the option of grade replacement in addition to the ability to repeat courses for a limited number of attempts.² When grade replacement is invoked, the grade from the **last attempt** of a course replaces the grade from the **most recent prior attempt of the same course**. The replaced grade is excluded from GPA and credit calculations allowing instead the grade from the last attempt to be included in cumulative grade point average and credit totals in the official academic record. Grades from all attempts of a course remain on a student's transcript with those attempts that have been replaced appropriately indicated.

Under this policy, an undergraduate student may petition to replace a grade from a prior instance of taking a class if they received a **C-, D+, D, D-, or F** in the petitioned class; a graduate student may petition to replace a grade from a prior instance of taking a class if they received a **C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, or F** in the petitioned class. Under this policy, only the latest attempt of a repeated course is used to determine a student's academic standing beginning with the term in which the course was repeated and to confirm completion of graduation requirements.

Eligibility:

- This policy can only be invoked by currently-enrolled, degree-seeking CU Boulder **undergraduate or graduate** students. **Students who have graduated are not eligible for grade replacement for courses taken prior to earning their degree.**
- This policy only applies to **undergraduate or graduate courses taken and repeated at CU Boulder. Classes ineligible for grade replacement are special topics courses and those courses that are designated in the catalog as repeatable for credit** (i.e., independent studies, field experience, thesis hours, etc.).
- Undergraduate students may invoke grade replacement on up to **10 credit hours of coursework** and graduate students may invoke grade replacement on up to **six credit hours of coursework**.
- The student must have received an eligible grade in a prior attempt of a course to invoke this policy. Grades of **C-, D+, D, D-, or F** are eligible for undergraduate students and

² Colorado Law students are **exempt** from this policy and are subject to the academic and grading policies of the Law School.

grades of **C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, or F** are eligible for graduate students. Note: If a student receives a low grade in a class due to academic dishonesty, that grade is not eligible for replacement via this policy.

- Courses repeated for grade replacement must be taken for a letter grade (not audit, pass/fail, no credit).
- Petitions for grade replacement (see below) **must be completed no later than a date specified by the Registrar's Office in the semester in which the course is to be retaken** (prorated for variable length and summer sessions).³ **The grade from the most recent prior attempt is replaced.**
- Once the grade replacement policy is invoked that decision is irrevocable. The grade earned by a student **in the most recent attempt becomes the final grade that calculates in a student's credit totals and GPA, even if the grade earned in the repeated course is lower than the original.**
- If a student invokes the policy but drops or withdraws before the end of the term, the original grade from the prior attempt stands. This attempt does not count against the number of credits a student is allowed to repeat.
- No retroactive adjustments or transactions for prior terms will be performed as a result of repeating a course, including changes to academic standing or eligibility for honors, athletics, financial aid, etc.
- Some academic units on campus may limit the number of times a student can enroll in a given course. Such limits must be observed when invoking this policy.

Petition Process

The Office of the Registrar will provide a process for students to invoke this policy. The request to invoke the policy will be approved as long as the exact same course (same course prefix, same course number) is selected and the student has enough grade repetition credits left to cover the course.⁴

³ An initial suggestion for this date is by the “add deadline” of a given term. This deadline causes complications for students who get added to a course but then placed on a waitlist. To address this issue, a second suggestion for this date is the term's census date which will avoid the waitlist issue. A third suggestion is that students must invoke the policy by the late drop deadline which is the end of the 10th week of the Fall and Spring semester (this date would be prorated for other sessions).

⁴ An issue was raised during the comment period of this policy that in some cases a cross-listed course may serve as a viable replacement for a prior attempt. An example was given of a course in A&S that might have two sections, one for Classics and one for History. It's the same course but it is cross listed with a Classics prefix and a History prefix. Advisors indicated it would be useful for a student to be able to take, e.g., the History section first and then repeat the class in the Classics section, and have this second attempt replace the grade of the first section. We plan to investigate this issue in depth during implementation to see what can be offered to address this issue.

Students that invoke the policy will have an indicator associated with their records such that units can pull a report that allows them to identify such students each term and perform outreach to them.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. *A student has a certain number of credits allocated for grade replacement (10 credits for undergraduate students and 6 credits for graduate students). When do these credits get spent?* A student's grade replacement credits get "spent" when they have invoked the policy on a course and earned a new grade in the repeated attempt. If a student has ten credits and invokes the policy on a 3-credit course, then three credits would be deducted when the student has received a grade (note: not a W or an I) for that course. At that point, the student would have seven credits to spend on other courses.
2. *If a student comes to CU Boulder as an undergraduate and invokes the policy on ten credits of courses and then graduates and becomes a graduate student at CU Boulder, do they also get six credits of grade replacement to spend on courses taken as a graduate student?* Yes.
3. *May a student non-degree student taking a course via Continuing Education invoke this policy?* No. The policy is only available to degree-seeking students.
4. *May a suspended student taking a course via Continuing Education invoke this policy?* Yes. Suspended students are still degree-seeking students.
5. *If a student takes a class P/F and earns a P grade (which corresponds to receiving a grade that is a D- or higher), may a student invoke the policy on a subsequent attempt of that class, take the class for a grade, and have the grade replace the P?* No. A 'P' grade is not one of the eligible grades needed to invoke the policy.
6. *What are the resource implications of the policy?* There are resource implications on the Office of the Registrar with respect to implementing the policy within Campus Solutions, including providing a workflow that allows students to invoke the policy and petition for exceptions to the default grade replacement algorithm (replace most recent prior attempt). Some units may see an uptick in advising workloads due to a need to discuss the policy with students and guide them in their attempts to invoke the policy. This uptick should be minimal however *since students already repeat courses* to meet prereq requirements and to boost major and cumulative GPAs to allow them to graduate or regain academic good standing. Currently, they repeat these courses without the potential academic boost of grade replacement, however. When the prior pilot policy was in effect, data showed that only one percent of students ever invoked the policy across a four-year period.
7. *Would the policy take seats away from students taking the course for the first time?* Maybe. It depends on how the course is set-up with respect to enrollment windows, reserve capacity, enrollment restrictions, etc. Departments have a wide range of tools to

address this concern, including reserving seats in a class for new students before providing space to repeaters.

8. *What about equity (some students may not be able to afford to repeat a course)?* This concern is definitely well-placed for elective classes that do not serve as pre-reqs for downstream classes. A low SES student may not be able to justify the tuition required to repeat such a class, especially if it is not on the critical path to meeting graduation requirements. For those classes that do serve as pre-reqs or do fall on the critical path to graduation, these students would be required to repeat these courses regardless if they want to graduate. In that situation, a grade replacement policy can help such a student ensure that the investment is worth it: not only do they demonstrate that they now understand the material of the class in question but their GPA is no longer lowered by the poor grade of the previous attempt and they now have an increased chance of meeting graduation requirements as a result.
9. *What lies behind setting the undergrad threshold at C-?* The undergraduate threshold of a C- was selected because some degree programs require a minimum grade of C to allow a student to use a class as a pre-req for a downstream class.
10. *Will drop dates and drop policies remain as they are now?* Yes.
11. *Might this affect international students in adverse ways?* TBD. A common concern for international students is maintaining a minimum number of credits per semester; since prior attempts of a class remain on a student's academic record, this concern is mitigated. As with the prior pilot policy, the proposed policy can always be amended if problems related to its implementation are discovered or if it is found to have an adverse impact on a particular student population.
12. *What if a student earns a low grade due to academic dishonesty? Will they be allowed to replace that grade with a new attempt?* No. The Registrar's Office will work with the BFA and the Honor Code to flag courses which involved an academic dishonesty case where the student was found responsible. Such courses are not eligible for grade replacement under this policy.
13. *If a student invokes the policy, repeats a course, and gets an incomplete, and never completes the requirements for the course, what happens when the I turns to an F after two semesters?* At that point, the student has received an F in the course and the student's grade replacement credits will get deducted.
14. *Building on the previous question, what happens if the student has already spent all of their grade replacement credits in the two semesters since receiving an I in the original course?* In that case, the F received in the subsequent course is treated like any other course that is repeated under CU's course repetition policy: all grades from all instances are used in GPA calculations and academic standing reviews.
15. *If a student invokes the policy, repeats a course, and earns a lower grade in the subsequent attempt, does it still replace the (better) grade from the prior attempt?* Yes.

16. *May a student invoke the policy on a set of classes whose combined credits would exceed the number of credits remaining in their grade replacement total?* No. That is, if a student had seven credits of grade replacement left, they would not be allowed, e.g., to invoke the policy on three 3-credit courses at the start of a given semester.
17. *How does a student invoke the policy?* TBD. It is currently hoped that students will be able to invoke the policy while registering for classes. Another option is that an online form will be available on the website of the Registrar's Office that allows students to invoke the policy on a course after they have been enrolled in it, up to and including the Add Deadline for that term.
18. *Under this policy, would an undergraduate student be allowed to repeat an instance of a graduate-level course for grade replacement?* Yes. Grade replacement applies to a student's **career** (undergrad vs. grad), not to the **level of an individual course**. Thus, an undergraduate student might take a graduate course (perhaps as part of a combined BS/MS degree) and do poorly in the first attempt. They could then repeat the course again as an undergraduate, invoke this policy, and do better the second time. The grade from the second instance would then replace the grade from the first instance. An undergraduate student could only do this if they still had enough credits out of the ten credits provided by the policy for grade replacement.
19. *Under this policy, would the following scenario be allowed? An undergraduate student enrolls in a graduate course and earns a poor grade. The student graduates and becomes a graduate student at CU Boulder and takes the same graduate course again and earns a better grade. Would the student be allowed to invoke the policy and have the new grade earned as a graduate student replace the grade earned in that class as an undergraduate?* No. Recall that grade replacement applies to a student's career. Once a student graduates, they can no longer replace a grade earned during that career. In this particular scenario, the course taken as a graduate student will count towards the GPA they earn as a graduate student but the academic record from when they were an undergraduate student can no longer be altered.
20. *Referring to the scenario in the previous question, what if the student was in a concurrent BS/MS (or similar) program? These students receive both degrees at once after they have completed requirements for both degrees. In this case, the student technically does not graduate from their undergraduate career until the very end of the process. Would the student be able to use the grade replacement credits for being a graduate student to replace a grade from a class they took as an undergraduate?* No. For students in concurrent Bachelor's/Master's programs, the grade replacement policy will treat the term in which students have attained graduate standing as the term in which they have graduated from their undergraduate degree for the purposes of this policy only. This aspect of the implementation of the policy is a short-term concern: concurrent Bachelor's/Master's program are being phased out and will be replaced with Bachelor's

Accelerated Master's (BAM) programs which ensure that students will graduate with a Bachelor's degree as soon as they have met the degree requirements before moving on to earn their Master's degree.

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