

**Withholding of grades by TSSU members  
Guidelines for chairs, directors and deans  
Revised 14 August 2015**

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This information is not confidential and may be distributed.

## **Introduction**

Following a strike vote the TSSU sometimes instructs its members to continue to mark students' work (exams, assignments etc.) and to record the grades, but to withhold the grade information from the students, the course supervisor or the department chair (or equivalent). This prevents students from knowing how they are doing, and prevents academic units from calculating and submitting final grades.

Chairs, directors and deans are responsible for submitting grades, and are likely to be asked how to proceed when grades are withheld by TSSU members. The response will depend upon a wide variety of circumstances, and this document provides principles and guidelines that cover many of these eventualities. Chairs, directors and deans are expected to use this document and common sense to make decisions, but should always feel free to contact the VP Academic for further advice.

If TSSU members ask their supervisors or department administrators about how to proceed, they should be referred to their union.

Under no circumstances should TSSU members be coerced or intimidated into providing grades.

## **Principles**

The following principles help structure the guidelines and advice in this document. They should also be used by faculty members and administrators when trying to make decisions about particular situations.

1. The University will attempt to minimize inconvenience and hardship to students that might result from labour actions.
2. Normally, in order to maintain the integrity of the course, all planned assignments, tests, exams etc. described in the course outline will continue to be required of students.
3. Students will be informed as early as possible about the format of assignments, tests, exams, etc.
4. The grading weights established in the course outline should be used to assign a final grade.
5. Students in similar circumstances should be treated similarly.
6. Final grades that contribute to a student's cumulative GPA will not be assigned until there is a sufficient basis for evaluating work and assigning a final grade.

## **Scenarios and guidelines when grades are being withheld**

The following scenarios cover what we believe will be common situations concerning grading and assignment of final grades. Each scenario is followed by guidelines on how to proceed. Because we cannot anticipate every circumstance, chairs and deans are encouraged to make decisions based on the above principles and the guidelines below. These scenarios mainly concern events up to the deadline for the submission of final grades. Should new circumstances arise, these guidelines will be modified or further guidelines will be issued.

**A. Students are in a course taught by a faculty member, with no TA or no marking to be done by a TA**

The grading protocol established at the start of the course should be followed. Grading of work and submission of a final grade will proceed as usual.

**B. Students are unable to complete work or attend an exam due to labour action (e.g. a picket line disrupts bus service)**

Faculty members and sessional instructors should try to accommodate students who cannot submit work or attend the exam, just as is done in similar situations (e.g. student illness, snow closure etc.). We will also be providing students with instructions, should this occur. In cases where an instructor has been working with the Centre for Students with Disabilities, the instructor should notify CSD of their revised plans as soon as possible.

**C. When the faculty member and TA completed the time use guidelines at the start of the semester, the TA was assigned marking duties towards the end of the semester and during the exam period**

There are a number of ways to deal with this situation, and faculty members could follow any one of the below, or a combination.

(i) The faculty member may take over responsibility for marking. Faculty members may ask colleagues to help with heavy marking schedules that they have taken over from the TA. Faculty members hired after April 9, 2014 may not do either of the above. The chair (or equivalent) cannot require a faculty member to undertake this work.

(ii) Although the faculty member may not make significant changes to the types of assessment and their weights advertised in the original course outline, the faculty member may change the format, so as to facilitate marking without the assistance of a TA. For example, if the course calls for a final exam worth 25%, the exam must proceed and the weight must be 25%. But if the faculty member had planned a final

exam in which students would provide short answers to be marked by a TA, that format could be replaced by a final exam in which students were assigned multiple choice questions to be machine marked. The chair (or equivalent) cannot require a faculty member to undertake this work.

(iii) Alternatively, the faculty member may still assign marking to the TA; if the TA withholds grades, students will be assigned a final grade of GN. When the labour action ends, the TA will submit grades and the students' final grades will be revised.

### **Process for submitting GN grades.**

The Grade Not Reported notation may be used if circumstances beyond the instructor's or University's control make it impossible for grades to be assigned for the entire class. The notation has no numerical equivalent and does not affect either the term grade point average or cumulative grade point average. The dean of the Faculty responsible advises the Registrar, in writing, that the notation GN is required for a course until grades can be submitted. GN is a temporary grade that will revert to a letter grade or notation.

### ***D. Students are in a class where a sessional instructor (SI) has responsibility for submission of final grades, and the TSSU prohibition on submission of grades is still in place when grades are due***

The department chair (or equivalent) will assign a grade of GN. When the labour action ends and the SI submits the grades, the students' records will be changed.

### ***E. Students are in an online class for which a tutor marker (TM) has responsibility for submission of grades, and the TSSU prohibition on submission of grades is still in place when grades are due.***

The department chair (or equivalent) will assign a grade of GN. When the labour action ends and the TM submits the grades, the students'

records will be revised.

***F. Students are in a class taught by a faculty member, and a component of the work (e.g., the midterm exam) has been graded by a teaching assistant (TA) who has not submitted grades to the faculty member.***

The department chair (or equivalent) will assign a grade of GN. When the labour action ends and the TA submits the grades, the students' records will be revised.

***G. Students are in a class taught by a faculty member. The grading of some material has been split between the faculty member and the TA, such that grades for some students are available, whereas grades for other students are not.***

The department chair (or equivalent) will assign a grade of GN for all students. When the labour action ends and the TA submits the grades, all the students' records will be revised. The faculty member and the chair/director/dean have the option of assigning final grades to some students and GN to students whose grades are withheld, if, in their judgement, this can be done fairly. Normally this will be done when there is a critical need for students to receive their grades (see item M).

***H. A student needs information on a grade that has been withheld by a TA, TM or SI.***

The student should ask the TA/TM/SI for information. Under normal circumstances, a final grade cannot be provided by the University to an individual student until all the grades in a class have been approved by the department chair or equivalent. Refer to items I, J and M for special circumstances.

***I. A student's future career will be affected by final grades being delayed beyond the normal date for submission of final grades. This might include graduation from SFU, admission to graduate school,***

***an employment opportunity, or athlete eligibility***

Starting August 12<sup>th</sup> the student can contact the Registrar's Office at [urecords@sfu.ca](mailto:urecords@sfu.ca) and explain the circumstances. The Registrar's Office will provide the student with a letter addressed to the appropriate organization that explains the circumstances.

***J. A student is taking a course in the current semester as a prerequisite for a course in the subsequent semester, but submission of a final grade is delayed by labour action.***

Students who believe that their performance in a prerequisite course may not have achieved the standard required are advised to discuss their performance with their TA, TM, instructor or faculty member, as appropriate.

- If grades are received prior to the beginning of term then the normal requisite processing will occur and, following departmental review, students who have not satisfied requisite requirements will be dropped from the fall term course.
- If grades are not received by the start of term then any subsequent instructions will depend on the actual date in which grades become available. Further instructions and guidelines will be issued at the appropriate time.
- Note that a GN grade for a prerequisite will allow students to register in the next term

***K. The deadline for submission of final grades has been reached, and grades are available for a substantial portion of the students' work.***

Faculty members and chairs (or equivalent) may submit a final grade if, in their opinion, there is sufficient work completed to assess the performance of all students in the class. As a guideline, if grades are available for 75% of the work, a grade could be assigned. Students should be informed that they may request an adjustment of their grade once all the marks have been submitted for the course.

**L. Labour actions continue into next semester.**

The University will then issue further guidelines. Unless instructed otherwise, academic units should proceed with the hiring of TSSU members for positions in the following semester.

**M. A student appeals to TSSU and the TSSU member is allowed by the union to release the student's grade, but not the grades for other students in the class who have not appealed to TSSU**

In these circumstances we will almost certainly be dealing with students who have a critical need for the grade. For example, Education students require their full transcript in order to be certified as teachers and to start work in the fall; some external scholarship providers require proof of grades as a pre-condition for releasing scholarship funds for the next semester; students may require proof of program completion or completion of a particular course to obtain employment or admission to another institution.

We should follow the principle of minimizing hardship to students, and chairs/directors/deans can therefore do the following:

- If the grade is released through the TSSU appeal process, the letter grade can be submitted and the remaining students can receive a GN. Any further grade changes will follow the normal grade revision policy.