

DRAFT

EPC Report on Faculty Approved Continuance Standards

April 6, 1999 Faculty Meeting

At its special meeting on April 14, 1998, the faculty approved new Continuance Standards (to take effect in the Fall semester of 1999) and a mid-semester reporting system. The new Continuance Standards trigger several new student support services, collectively called Academic Intervention. These services, and the use of the new Continuance Standards to trigger them, became effective in the fall semester of 1998. The new Continuance Standards will take effect in the fall semester of 1999. The mid-semester reporting system notifies students who are performing marginal or unsatisfactory work near the time of the spring or fall break, when they still have time to improve their performance. It was fully operational during the fall semester of 1998, although the participation rate of the faculty appears dangerously low. This report reviews the new Continuance Standards, the performance of the support services and the success of the mid-semester reporting system. This report also recommends to the faculty a clarification of the counseling procedure for students placed on probation.

The New Continuance Standards

The new Continuance Standards provide student performance minima for cumulative quality point average (QPA) and total credits earned at William and Mary for each semester of attendance.

Semester	QPA	Credits		Semester	QPA	Credits	Students whose work falls below the minimum QPA and earned credit standards will be placed on probation. While on probation, they must earn at least a C average with at least a 12-credit load. They will have two regular semesters to
1	1.7	9		2	1.7	24	
3	1.85	36		4	2.0	48	
5	2.0	60		6	2.0	72	
7	2.0	84		8	2.0	96	
9	2.0	108		10	2.0	120	

bring their work up to or beyond the minimum standards for QPA and credit earned requirements. Failing this, they will be required to withdraw from the College for at least one semester.

Before returning from such a suspension, students must normally supply:

- a. a personal statement,
- b. evidence of a solid work record, paid or unpaid, and

- c. transcripts from another higher education institution showing that they have received B's or better in two courses. This credit is not transferable to William and Mary. With very rare exceptions, students are not reinstated if their academic performance has required them to withdraw twice.

Normally, the suspension period will last one semester, although the duration of suspension is at the discretion of the Committee on Academic Status.

Students are not removed from probation due to credit earned at William and Mary Summer School, although students must maintain at least a C average in their William and Mary Summer School work if they are on probation.

Only credit earned in William and Mary courses counts toward determining whether students are meeting Continuance Standards. Hence no transfer, Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) credit will count to determine continuance standing, although such credit will count (a) toward the 120 credits required for graduation, (b) toward general education requirements, and (b) toward concentration requirements. From a Continuance perspective, students enter William and Mary with a "clean slate".

Students on probation must meet with the Dean of Students Office for academic counseling by the end of the first week of the semester in which they are placed on probation, and with their Academic Advisor before registering for the subsequent semester. These students will not be allowed to register for classes for the subsequent semester until these two advising meetings have occurred. After the Add/Drop period, an Administrative Hold will be placed on their records by their Advisors and the Dean of Students which will be removed as soon as they have had the required meetings.

The EPC moves that the previous paragraph be replaced with the following clarification:

Students on probation must participate in the Academic Intervention program of the Dean of Students' Office during the semester in which they are placed on probation. Students on probation must also meet with their Academic Advisor before registering for the subsequent semester. These students will not be allowed to pre-register until they have both participated in the Academic Intervention program and met with their Academic Advisors. After the Add/Drop period, Administrative Holds will be placed on their records by the offices of Academic Advising and the Dean of Students. These holds will be removed as soon as they have fulfilled these requirements.

The change requires participation in the Academic Intervention program without specifying that program. The current program, as described below, includes filling out a questionnaire, attending a workshop and meeting with a counselor. The Academic Intervention program should be flexible so that it can be continuously improved, and so that it can be modified for those students who are participating for a second semester.

Students granted underloads are expected to keep up with Continuance Standards and to abide by the ten-semester rule.

The Committee on Academic Status will hear individual cases for exceptions to the Standards.

Differences from the Current Continuance Standards

Both the new Continuance Standards and the current Continuance Standards require that a student eventually have a cumulative QPA of 2.0 and 120 credits to graduate. The primary difference is that the new standards require students to achieve a QPA of 2.0 by the fourth semester at William and Mary, whereas the current standards did not require a cumulative QPA of 2.0 until the ninth semester. It is very difficult for students to improve their QPA during their final semesters. A student with a QPA near 2.0 will only improve his/her cumulative QPA by 0.03 with a B in a 3-credit course if he/she already has 100 credits. If he/she only has 24 credits, the improvement will be almost four times as large. It is possible under the current standards for a student to satisfy the continuance standards until the ninth semester, and then find it not possible to graduate. Each year, a few students prove this point.

The new standards also initiate Academic Intervention at a higher level of performance at the early semesters. Under the current standards only first semester freshmen with QPA values of less than 1.1 were placed on probation. The new standards begin Academic Intervention for all first semester freshmen with QPA values less than 1.7. Under the current standards the severe sanctions then occurred more quickly, since separation could be mandated after one semester on probation. The new standards do not mandate separation unless a student has not met the minimum standards after two semesters on probation. Under the new standards, a student will be released from probation after one semester, if he/she has met the cumulative QPA and cumulative credit standards.

Finally, the new standards use cumulative standards exclusively to determine a student's academic status, while the current standards confusingly alternated between using just the prior semester's QPA, and a combination of the prior semester's QPA and the cumulative QPA and credit hours for this determination.

The 1998/99 Academic Intervention Program

Beginning in the fall semester of 1998, the Office of the Dean of Students selected students to include in its Academic Intervention program if their performance was below either the new continuance standards or the current continuance standards. During the fall semester of 1998, this included a total of 183 students. Of these, 88 students would have been included using *only the new standards* while the remaining 95 included only those with cumulative QPA values above the new standard's guidelines, but who were placed under probation using the current continuance standards. Under the new Continuance Standards, these 95 students would not be required to participate in the Academic Intervention program, nor would they be placed on probation because the new

Continuance Standards are based solely on cumulative QPA values and credits.. However, the Dean of Students intends to continue sending warning letters to any student whose semester QPA falls below 2.0, inviting the student to participate in the Academic Intervention program. The 88 students who were included using only the new standards were not all placed on probation. Since the new standards will not be implemented until Fall 1999, and since these standards have significantly higher trigger QPA values during the first nine semesters, many of these 88 students would not have been placed on probation under the current standards.

During the spring of 1999, the total number of students in the Academic Intervention program increased by approximately 50% to a total of 292. This increase is primarily due to first semester freshmen. A similar increase would also result from applying only the current continuance standards. Even with this larger number of students, the Office of the Dean of Students has sufficient staff to maintain a fully operational Academic Intervention program. In this regard, it is clear that the support services mandated by the faculty in their April 14, 1998 resolution are in place and are fully operational.

Each student in the Academic Intervention was asked to complete a questionnaire, to meet with a representative of the Dean of Students, and to attend a workshop. Approximately 44 students did not complete the program. Associate Dean Mirick provided us with these insights regarding those students who did participate:

1. These students often did not have a realistic view of their own performance, but overestimated it considerably.
2. Completing the questionnaire often brought the student a greater awareness of the situation immediately, and certainly improved the interview process by focusing it more quickly.
3. The mid-semester reports of marginal or unsatisfactory work were helpful during counseling sessions when they were available.

The students who participated in the Academic Intervention program improved their performance considerably. The QPA of the participating students increased by an average of approximately 0.8 from the spring semester of 1998 to the fall semester of 1998, while the QPA of those students who did not participate decreased over that period by an average of 0.2. While the EPC did not find it possible to isolate the various causes for these changes, we believe that this is indicative of a productive Academic Intervention program.

A full report of the 1998 Academic Intervention program, provided by the Office of the Dean of Students is attached as Appendix B.

The Mid-Semester Reporting System

A system of mid-semester reporting has been in operation since the fall semester of 1998. Each faculty member is requested to post mid-semester grades shortly before Fall Break or Spring Break. Currently, a student may monitor his/her marginal or unsatisfactory

grades over the web, and whenever a faculty member posts a marginal or unsatisfactory report, the Office of Academic Advising contacts that student by phone, mail or e-mail. Beginning next year, the notification system will be automated and conducted entirely by e-mail. Academic Advisors may also view the mid-semester reports for their advisees.

The mid-semester reports are posted shortly before the advising period for pre-registration. A student is required to meet with his/her advisor during this period if this is his/her first year at William and Mary. Hence Academic Advisors can counsel first year students doing unsatisfactory work before the work solidifies into poor grades. For other students, the Advising Office notifies Advisors only if it receives two or more reports of marginal or unsatisfactory work. Advisors of these students are encouraged to meet with their students doing unsatisfactory work, but they are not required to do so. For students on probation, a meeting is mandatory, regardless of the mid-semester reports, since the students cannot register for the subsequent semester until they have met with their Advisors.

During the fall semester of 1998, faculty posted a total of 659 marginal or unsatisfactory grades. However, only 216 of these possible grades eventually became a grade of D or F. An additional 135 of the 659 marginal or unsatisfactory grades became withdrawals (W/WM), incomplete grades (I) or passing grades (P). Some 76 of these grades became A's or B's. Although the EPC has no direct evidence, it is likely that the posting of a marginal or unsatisfactory mid-semester grade is useful for a student, especially in view of the tendency of marginal students to overestimate their performance. The Office of the Dean of Students reports that these mid-semester reports were helpful during counseling sessions with the students in the Academic Intervention program.

However, a major concern is the apparent lack of participation by the faculty. In the spring of 1998, the faculty gave almost 2000 grades of C- or lower, yet they only posted 659 marginal or unsatisfactory mid-semester reports. Certainly, some of these cases result from poor performance only in the second half of the semester, but the EPC believes that faculty non-participation is also a large component. So far in this spring semester of 1999, the faculty have increased their participation, and have posted 1414 marginal or unsatisfactory mid-semester reports, yet this represents grades from only 408 course sections of the 2300 course sections offered this spring.

The EPC believes that it is very important that faculty participate in the mid-semester reporting system. We recommend that faculty revise their schedules if necessary so that some measure of performance is available for students by the semester break. Except in a few unusual courses, it should be possible to provide such a measure. It is not fair to students to withhold such measures until after the withdrawal date. The EPC strongly recommends that those faculty teaching first and second year classes should participate. Even when a faculty member has no marginal or unsatisfactory grades to report, it will be very helpful to record this fact in the mid-semester reporting system, so that we will know the participation rate.

EPC Analysis of Faculty Concerns

The primary rationale for the new Continuance Standards was that the University should help our students achieve as much as possible before they graduate. Our entrance requirements are sufficiently high that virtually all of our students have the ability to earn a QPA of at least 2.0. There are a variety of reasons why some of our students do not consistently achieve grades of 2.0 or better, but innate ability is almost never among them. When the University identifies students who are underachieving, and then guides and motivates them to do better, it is truly educating.

The new Continuance Standards are designed with the intention of identifying struggling students early and then providing them with the guidance they need to insure a successful academic career. A primary concern of a few faculty was that the new Continuance Standards might reduce the rate of graduation for some students by mandating separation before those students had sufficient time to adjust to the demands of a William and Mary education. To examine this issue, we attempted to collect data characterizing who does not succeed under our current standards.

The Office of Institutional Research has performed a study of the graduation rate based on the cumulative QPA after two, four, and six semesters for students who entered William and Mary during the fall of 1990-93. These classes are the most recent for which ten full semesters have passed since matriculation. Of course, these students did not have the support services of the new Academic Intervention program available. This study is attached to this report as Appendix B. Approximately 150 students from each of those entering classes did not graduate during the attendance limit of ten semesters. The EPC was not able to separate these students according to their various reasons for not graduating. Discussions with the Office of the Dean of Students suggest that perhaps one-third of these students may leave for medical reasons or to transfer to another institution with special offerings in their planned concentration. However, it is clear from this data that few students with QPA values less than 1.3 after the first two semesters (which is still above the current Continuance Standards) graduated during the ten semester limit. It is also clear that almost two thirds of the students with QPA values well below the new standards (1.3-1.5 after 2 semesters, 1.7-1.8 after four semesters, 1.8-1.9 after six semesters) do eventually raise their QPA to 2.0 and graduate. Under the new Continuance Standards those students would be required to raise their QPA values to 2.0 by the end of the sixth semester (allowing for two full semesters of probation after the fourth semester, when a QPA of 2.0 is first required).

The EPC believes a crucial question is: If the Academic Intervention program and the new Continuance Standards had been in effect in 1990-1998, would those students who had low QPA values and still graduated have sufficiently improved their QPA values to graduate under the new Continuance Standards? If so, then the new standards and the Academic Intervention program would clearly be a success as it helped raise the academic performance of those students. If not, then the new Continuance Standards would mean that we would lose students who would otherwise have graduated. We cannot answer that question, and so we cannot guarantee that all students who would have graduated under the current standards will also graduate under the new standards. If those students had been guided by the new Continuance Standards with its accompanying

Academic Intervention program, and had achieved the 0.8 semester QPA increase obtained by the students participating in the 1998/99 Academic Intervention program, then many of them would have graduated.

What the EPC will do is to ask for continuing reports by the Offices of Institutional Research, Academic Advising, and the Dean of Students to monitor these graduation rates, and the academic trajectories of students based on their QPA values following their first two semesters. Any serious decreases from the 1990-1993 benchmarks will initiate a re-examination of the issue by the EPC. Any major increases from the 1990-1993 benchmarks for students who have participated in the Academic Intervention program will be considered strong evidence of the program's success. Five years after the implementation of the new Continuance Standards, when the first cohort of entering students will have completed their ten semester limit, the EPC will report to the faculty on the performance of the students who have marginal QPA values during their first year. We will then compare the graduation rates and the QPA improvements of these students to similar groups from the 1990-1993 benchmark groups. We also hope to have, as a result of exit interviews, a better understanding of which students leave because of poor academic performance.

As a second major concern, the EPC also considered the possibility of a student's performance falling precipitously during the sixth or seventh semester. Under the new guidelines, which are based exclusively on cumulative QPA values and cumulative credits, such a student could perform poorly for an extended period before the Continuance Standards applied. The Office of the Dean of Students, as mentioned above, will continue to monitor any students who have a semester QPA of less than 2.0, and will include in its report to the EPC whether or not those students are being successfully encouraged to participate in the Academic Intervention program.

Conclusions

The EPC has concluded that the 1998 Academic Intervention program operated as planned, and appears to be instrumental in raising the QPA values for students who are academically at risk. The EPC believes that the implementation of the new Continuance Standards will likely result in better performance by our students who are currently performing marginally.

The mid-semester reporting system is operational, and will be continuously improved by the Office of Academic Advising. The Academic Intervention program and several Academic Advisors have found that the early reports are useful for counseling students. However, for the program to work at its best, faculty participation must be brought to significantly higher levels. Without high faculty participation, the program could be counter-productive by giving students a false sense of security about their academic performance.

The EPC believes it is crucial to establish some measures of these programs' performance. To this end, the EPC will receive reports each year from the Offices of

Academic Advising, of the Dean of Students, and of Institutional Research that will monitor:

1. Graduation rates based on the QPA values of students 2 semesters after enrollment at William and Mary.
2. Performance of students, as measured by their semester and cumulative QPA values, who perform at a marginal level during the first two semesters. This will be compared to the performance of similar students in the entering 1990-1993 classes, which will be used as a control.
3. Performance of students who have semester QPA values of less than 2.0, but cumulative QPA values above the Continuance Standards.
4. Reasons for failure to graduate, as best determined from QPA performance and from exit interviews.

The EPC will compile these annual reports into a study to be presented to the faculty five years after the new Continuance Standards take effect.