

DISCONTINUATION WITHOUT FAILURE DATE

RESOLVED AB01/100 APPROVED AT ACADEMIC BOARD MEETING 6 NOVEMBER 2001

That the Academic Board approves:

- (i) That the discontinuation without failure date for students withdrawing from courses be half the session plus one week, effective Session 1, 2002, as detailed in the document presented;
- (ii) That the discontinuation without failure date for whole year courses remain in the session 2 census date; and
- (iii) That students be informed they will be financially liable for all courses in which they are enrolled as at the census date (31 March, 31 August, two weeks after the beginning of teaching in a non-standard session). (File: 011341)

DISCONTINUATION WITHOUT FAILURE DATE

In 2000 a meeting of Presiding Members discussed a suggestion that the date for discontinuation without failure be moved to later in the session to allow students to receive feedback on their performance before they had to decide whether to withdraw from a course. This paper sets out the background to the discussion, lists some advantages and disadvantages and identifies the changes to present procedures which would follow if the proposal were to be approved.

BACKGROUND

Until the introduction of HECS the discontinuation without failure (DOF) dates were

- For one session courses, the end of the seventh week of that session;
- For whole year courses, the end of the second week of session 2.

In the early 1990s the DOF dates for single session courses were changed to coincide with the HECS census dates (31 March and 31 August) to avoid the confusion between when students became financially liable for a course and when they were subject to an academic penalty. In the late 1990s the DOF date for whole year courses was moved to coincide with the session 2 census date.

With the introduction of tuition fees, the HECS census date was adopted as the date by which students became liable for payment of fees.

Students who believe they have a case to discontinue a course after the DOF date without penalty may submit an Application for Special Permission to Withdraw where they give reasons for their request and explain why it was not submitted by the DOF date. The course authority and the

program authority make recommendations and the Student Information and Systems Office finalises decisions, taking into account consistency across the University. Applications are generally granted in the case of illness or where the circumstances of the student have changed to such an extent that s/he is no longer able to complete the intended enrolment program.

Students may also discontinue a course after the DOF date with academic penalty. This results in the grade of DF – Discontinuation with Failure.

At a meeting of Presiding Members of Faculties in 2000 Geoff Whale presented a paper on various academic policy issues including the suggestion that the last date to withdraw without academic penalty be extended to week 10. He pointed out that this was not yet a concrete proposal but asked for Faculties' views. His proposal read in part

If the last date to withdraw without *academic* penalty were extended to, say, week 10, then students would have ample opportunity (including at least one assessment task) to decide whether to proceed to final assessment. ***There would be no refund of fees or HECS*** after the census date. If this were adopted, the need for DF would be greatly reduced and could even be abolished (students would get a mark regardless). Genuine late withdrawals on strong evidence could still be approved. AF could be retained, but must be applied according to UNSW policy (the student submitted no work for assessment at all).

This suggestion was supported by the Presiding Members at the meeting, the only change being to move the DOF date to the end of Week 8 rather than Week 10. The Presiding Members also concluded that if the change were to achieve the desired academic outcome, there would have to be a commitment to administer and return a significant piece of assessment before the end of Week 8.

DISCUSSION

Points in favour

- Students would have a real opportunity to decide whether they wanted to complete the course.
- Students would receive feedback on their performance before they incurred an academic penalty.
- Applications for special permission to withdraw would be reduced.
- Students who withdrew without special permission after the end of Week 8 would receive whatever marks they had accumulated together with the appropriate grade according to University rules.
- It would remove ambiguity in the calculation of the WAM. The value of DF would no longer be a factor.
- Courses discontinued without special permission after the DOF date would clearly count for the purpose of calculating student academic standing.

Points against

- Potential confusion on the part of students between academic penalty and financial liability.

- Class lists would remain fluid for a longer period.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the discontinuation without failure date for single session courses be changed from the census date to the end of the eighth week of session.
2. That the discontinuation without failure date for whole year courses remain the session 2 census date.
3. That the discontinuation without failure date for summer and winter session courses be adjusted to allow for effective feedback to be provided to student, taking into account the outcome of discussions occurring elsewhere.
4. That students be informed they will be financially liable for all courses in which they are enrolled as at the census date (31 March, 31 August, two weeks after the beginning of teaching in a non-standard session).
5. ~~That students be provided with effective feedback on their performance before the end of week 8 of a standard session.~~ (Referred to COE for consideration under Assessment Policy Review).
6. That the grade of DF be abolished and that students who discontinue without special permission after the discontinuation date receive the marks achieved up to the time of the discontinuation. (Referred to PAC, see Geoff Whale's paper on DF which clarifies this clause, which was approved at December 2001 Board).

Judith Tonkin
Deputy Registrar
17 September 2001