

**A Study of Incomplete Grades
for
Fall 2007 and Spring 2008**

Mountain Empire Community College

Institutional Research Office

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Study of Incomplete Grades for Fall 2007 and Spring 2008

Summary

In Fall Semester 2007, 250 students (8.3% of all students) received 331 incomplete grades (3.8% of all grades); for Spring 2008, 172 students (6.4% of all students) received 214 incomplete grades (2.8% of all grades).

For Fall, 43 of 64 (67%) subject areas had at least one "I" grade; for Spring, similarly, it was 43 of 68 (63%) subject areas.

Small enrollment subject areas had a higher percentage of "I" grades. Very small enrollment subject areas had the highest percentage of "I" grades (8.7% in Fall 2007 and 7.8% in Spring 2008).

Subject areas with the highest number of "I" grades in Fall 2007 were AST (43), BIO (23), and SDV (23). GIS (40%), SCT (36%), ENV(29%), REL (29%), and GOL (27%) had the highest percentage of "I" grades.

In Spring 2008, HIS (18) had the highest number of "I" grades, though this number was much less than those in the fall semester. GIS (50%), NAS (31%), SCT (25%), ENV (24%), and HCT (23%) had the highest percentage of "I" grades.

For Fall 2007, 123 "I" grades (37.2%) were changed, with two-thirds of those grades changed in the first three months of the spring semester. The balance of the grades (63%) resulted in an "F" or "U" grade.

For Spring 2008, 101 "I" grades (47.2%) were changed, with two-thirds of those grades changed in the first three and a half months after the spring semester. Except for two extended "I" grades, the balance of the grades (52%) resulted in an "F" or "U" grade.

For Fall 2007, 31 of the 43 subject areas (72%) giving "I" grades had 50% or fewer of their grades changed, with 13 areas having no grades changed.

For Spring 2008, 26 of the 43 subject areas (60%) giving "I" grades had 50% or fewer of their grades changed, with 16 areas having no grades changed.

For Fall 2007, students who completed their coursework in the first month had the highest average grade; this did not hold for Spring students.

Students who completed all of their "I" coursework had the highest GPA in their other coursework.

Introduction

Incomplete grades are a way for faculty members to allow students extra time to complete assignments. From the MECC Student Handbook:

"I - Incomplete No credit; used for verifiable unavoidable reasons. Since the "incomplete" extends enrollment in the course, requirements for satisfactory completion will be established through student/faculty consultation. Final papers in courses for which the grade of "I" (incomplete) has been awarded must be submitted to the instructor three weeks prior to the last day of the subsequent semester or another grade (A, B, C, D, F, P, R, S, U or W) must be awarded by the instructor based upon course work which has been completed. In the case of "I" grades earned at the end of spring semester, students will have until three weeks prior to the last day of the subsequent fall semester to complete the requirements. In exceptional cases, extensions of time needed to complete course work for "I" grades may be granted beyond the subsequent semester with the written approval of the Vice-President of Academic and Student Services. A "W" grade should be awarded for the "I" grade only under mitigating circumstances which must be approved by the Vice-President of Academic and Student Services and documented. A copy of this documentation must be placed in the student's academic file."

In an Enrollment Team meeting during the fall of 2007, which included the Vice-President of Academic and Student Services and the Division Deans, the Institutional Research Analyst made a comment that completing term-generated databases had to be delayed due to incomplete grades. After a short discussion, an agreement was made to study the incomplete grades for the 2007 Fall Semester.

The questions answered in this study include:

- How many "I" grades were given, and how does that relate to the college as a whole;
- How many students were given "I" grades, and how does that relate to the college as a whole;
- What subject areas are more or less likely to give "I" grades;
- How many I grades get changed, and does completing the class work earlier indicate a higher grade; and
- Do students who complete assignments (and when they get completed) indicate the students' academic overall performances?

Data Results

How many "I" grades were given, and how does that relate to the college as a whole? How many students were given "I" grades, and how does that relate to the college as a whole?

Term	Assigned grades	"I" Grades	Total Students	"I" Students
Fall 2007	8,721	331 (3.8%)	3,017	250 (8.3%)
Spring 2008	7,621	214 (2.8%)	2,679	172 (6.4%)

In Fall 2007, 8,721 grades were assigned, including 331 "I" grades (3.8%). The number of students with "I" grades was 250 (8.3%) of the 3,017 students in Fall 2007. Of the 250 students, 190 had one "I" grade; 46 had two "I" grades, 7 had three "I" grades, and 7 had four "I" grades.

In Spring 2008, 7,621 grades were assigned, including 214 "I" grades (2.8%). The number of students with "I" grades was 172 (6.4) of the 2,679 students in Spring 2008. Of the

172 students, 140 had one “I” grade; 25 had two “I” grades, 4 had three “I” grades, and 3 had four “I” grades.

What subject areas are more or less likely to give “I” grades?

Fall 2007	Spring 2008	Fall 2007	Spring 2008
# of “I” grades	# of “I” grades	% of grades being “I”	% of grades being “I”
AST 43	HIS 18	GIS 40% of 15	GIS 50% of 16
BIO 23	AST 16	SCT 36% of 14	NAS 31% of 45
SDV 23	HCT 14	ENV 29% of 56	SCT 25% of 8
ENG 17	LGL 14	REL 29% of 35	ENV 24% of 37
BUS 16	NAS 14	GOL 27% of 11	HCT 23% of 61
ENV 16	MTH 13	CIV 23% of 13	CIV 22% of 18
ITE 16	BIO 10	CSC 22% of 64	LGL 18% of 77
CHD 14	ENV 9	LGL 16% of 83	AGR 17% of 6
CSC 14	HIT 9	MDL 13% of 30	CSC 14% of 51
HLT 14	GIS 8	NAS 13% of 30	HRT 10% of 10

Fall 2007

There were 64 subject areas offering classes in Fall 2007. Using arbitrary figures, the subject areas were separated into four areas based on assigned grades, very small (6 – 40 grades), small (49 – 98 grades), medium (106 – 193 grades), and large (253 – 1028 grades). By percentage, the very small subject areas have the largest number of “I” grades at 8.7%. As the size of the subject areas increase, the percent of “I” grades typically falls (5.6% to 2.8% to 3.2%). There is also a tendency for more subject areas to give “I” grades as they increase in size (57%, 67%, 62%, and 100% - subject areas giving “I” grades).

Given their relative size, the very small subject areas are either very likely or very unlikely to give “I” grades, ranging from 0% to 40%. Nine of the 23 areas had double-digit “I” percentages, with five having at least 20%, while another ten did not give any “I” grades. For the subject areas giving “I” grades, the “I” grades accounted for 14.1% of the overall grades given.

Among the 18 small subject areas, 12 gave at least one “I” grade. However, only three had double-digit “I” percentages. Continuing into the 13 medium subject areas, eight allowed “I” grades, though two areas only gave one. Two areas in particular were more willing to give “I” grades. All ten of the large subject areas gave at least one “I” grade, including one area with a double-digit “I” percentage. Two areas were under one percent.

Spring 2008

There were 68 subject areas offering classes in the Spring 2008. Using arbitrary figures, the subject areas were separated into four areas based on assigned grades, very small (4 – 40 grades), small (41 – 100 grades), medium (101 – 200 grades), and large (201 – 756 grades). By percentage, the very small subject areas have the largest percentage of “I” grades at 7.8%. As the size of the subject areas increase, the percent of “I” grades typically falls (5.1% to 1.4% to 2.1%). There is also a tendency for more subject areas to give “I” grades as they increase in size (44%, 57%, 73%, and 100% - subject areas giving “I” grades).

Given their relative size, the very small subject areas are either very likely or very unlikely to give “I” grades, ranging from 0% to 50%. Six of the 25 areas had double-digit “I”

percentages, with four having at least 20%, while another fourteen did not give any “I” grades. For the subject areas giving “I” grades, the “I” grades accounted for 15.2% of the overall grades given.

Among the 21 small subject areas, 12 gave at least one “I” grade. However, only four had double-digit “I” percentages. Continuing into the 11 medium subject areas, eight allowed “I” grades, though the average was two per subject. All eleven of the large subject areas gave at least one “I” grade, though the highest percentages were 5.4% and 5.0%. Three areas were under one percent.

How many grades get changed?

Fall 2007

After the College’s automated process was run near the end of the spring semester, changing unaltered “I” grades to “F” or “U” grades, only 123 of the 331 (37.2%) “I” grades had been changed. Thereby, 62% of the “I” grades automatically became “F” or “U” grades. This did not include eight ENV classes (all eventually changed to an “F” and thirteen CSC classes (all but two that were eventually changed to “U”) that had extended “I” grades.

Of the 123 changed grades, 36 (29.3%) were changed in the first month of the spring semester. Another 24 (19.5%) and 21 (17.1%) grades were changed by the second and third months of the spring semester, respectively. Collectively, two-thirds of the changed “I” grades were done by March 24.

Students whose grades were changed in the first month showed the highest average grade, among those whose grades were changed, with a 3.25 average. Oddly, the students completing their course work in the second month had the second lowest average grade at 2.29. The third month average was 2.71, while the lowest average grade was among those that completed their work in the last month and a half with a 2.20 average grade.

Only twelve of the 43 subject areas with “I” grades had over 50% of those grades changed before the end of the spring semester. WEL (8), HUM (4), MKT (2), PNE (2), NUR (1), and PED (1) had all of their “I” changed. MTH had 77% of its “I” grades changed. On the flip side, 13 subject areas had no “I” grades changed, averaging 2.6 original “I” grades, led by HIT (6), ART (5), HCT (5), MDL (4), and ITN (3). The other subject area with a very low percentage of changed “I” grades was SDV, with only 1 of 23 “I” grades changed.

Spring 2008

After the College’s automated process was run near the end of the fall semester, changing unaltered “I” grades to “F” or “U” grades, 101 of the 214 (47.2%) “I” grades had been changed. Thereby, 52% of the “I” grades automatically became “F” or “U” grades, with two grades in which the “I” grade was extended. Of the 101 changed grades, 29 (28.7%) were changed in the first month of the summer semester. Another 23 (22.8%) and 16 (15.8%) grades were changed by the second month of the summer semester and within the first month of the fall semester. Collectively, two-thirds of the changed “I” grades were done by September 4.

A difference between the fall and spring semesters concerning the change of “I” grades is that while students in the fall who completed their work in the first month had a very high grade average, students who had completed their work at five checkpoints in the summer-to-fall semesters had very similar average grades, ranging from an average of 2.81 (checkpoint #3) to 3.67 (checkpoint #4). There was also no specific trend among this data.

Only 17 of the 43 subject areas with “I” grades had at least 50% of those grades changed before the end of the spring semester, five more areas than the total for the fall semester. BUS (3), EMS (1), FOR (1), HLT (1), PHT (1) had all of their “I” changed. CSC had 86% of its “I” grades changed while 70% of BIO grades were changed. On the flip side, 16 subject areas had no “I” grades changed, averaging 2.4 original “I” grades, led by DRF (7), ITE (6), CIV (4), ITD (3), and ITP (3). The other subject areas with a very low percentage of changed “I” grades were LGL, with only 2 of 12 “I” grades changed, and AST (3 of 16).

Do students who complete their assignments have better outcomes in other classes?

The students were separated into three categories – those who completed all “I” coursework, those who completed at least one, but not all, and those who did not complete any “I” coursework. Because CSC 195 classes are not counted toward graduation, these students were discounted from calculation.

	Fall 2007		Spring 2008	
	GPA*	Other Credits*	GPA*	Other Credits*
All “I” work completed	2.94	81%	2.55	70%
Some “I” work completed	1.81	55%	2.09	60%
No “I” work completed	1.43	34%	1.80	41%

*GPA and credits earned consist of all other courses a student took in which an “I” grade was not given.

Fall 2007

The composite GPA and credit hour pass rates of these groups, only including classes that previously had grades, were: completed all classes, 2.94 and 81%; completed some classes, 1.81 and 55%; and did not complete any classes, 1.43 and 34%. Students with one “I” grade had a composite GPA of 2.28, with a 56% pass rate. Students with more than one “I” grade had a composite GPA of 1.09, with a pass rate of 30%. Also, students who completed their work earlier in the semester had other outcomes of 2.99 composite GPA and a 79% pass rate. This compares to a composite GPA of 2.50 and 1.43, along with a pass rate of 76% and 34%, for students who completed their work later in the semester or did not complete any work.

Spring 2008

The composite GPA and credit hour pass rates of these groups, only including classes that previously had grades, were: completed all classes, 2.55 and 70%; completed some classes, 2.09 and 60%; and did not complete any classes, 1.80 and 41%, which is a similar trend as the fall semester, though the differences were not as dramatic. Students with one “I” grade had a composite GPA of 2.13, with a 54% pass rate. Students with more than one “I” grade had a composite GPA of 2.65, with a pass rate of 61%. These figures are reversed compared to the fall semester. Also, students who completed their work earlier in the semester had other outcomes of 2.51 composite GPA and a 74% pass rate. This compares to a composite GPA of 2.53 and 1.80, along with a pass rate of 63% and 41%, for students who completed their work later in the semester or did not complete any work. In the fall semester, those who completed all their work had better outcomes than those who had completed some of their work.

Conclusion

As it is stated in the MECC Student Handbook, incomplete grades are given due to “verifiable unavoidable reasons.” Extended incomplete grades are given in “exceptional cases.” Only one subject area (ENV) in Fall 2007 had extended “I” grades, meaning that “exceptional cases” did not exist for the 244 students taking something other than a CSC class. With this in mind, only 37.2% of the “I” grades were changed before the automated process was run, most of which were changed in the first three months of the spring semester.

Other studies indicate that spring semester students have better performance outcomes than fall semester students. This study helps to vindicate that observation. Still, only 36% of the “I” grades were changed before the automated process was run, though an additional 11.2% (totaling 47.2%) had grades changed at the very latest possible time. This percentage is ten points higher than the percentage of the fall semester (37.2%). However, over 50% of incomplete grades ended up as an “F” or “U.”

Again, a majority of the grades that were changed were done within several months of the end of the spring semester. There was not much overlapping of the two semesters in terms of the subject areas giving incomplete grades, which may have been a result of the report of incomplete grades in the fall semester. The end result, however, is very similar, in that students who complete their coursework will do so at about the same rate and in a similar time frame.

No previous MECC incomplete grade study is available to make comparisons to know whether the data in this study is inordinate. Assuming these data are accurate representations of a typical semester, the data suggests that limiting either the number of incomplete grades given (which would lessen paperwork and manual labor) or the amount of time allowed for coursework to be completed is preferable. However, the extended timeframe for completion of “I” grades is a VCCS policy. Understanding and perhaps lessening the practice of giving “I” grades at MECC would make for a stricter interpretation of “verifiable unavoidable reasons.”