

**Implementation of
Semester System in Higher Education Institutions of Pakistan**

**Policy Guidelines
Approved by the Higher Education Commission (HEC)**



Higher Education Commission, Islamabad, Pakistan

Introduction

The National Committee on Examination System constituted by Higher Education Commission, deliberated on the two systems of examination i.e. Annual System and Semester System of Examination were focused, and the NCES gave a set of recommendations for improvement of the Annual System (**Annexure –I**).

The Semester System was not only less familiar in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) of the Country, but also was implemented in diverse forms (bisemester, trisemester and term system etc.). Therefore, the Commission constituted a Sub-Committee headed by Mr. Shahzad Alam, Member of the Commission, to have a threadbare assessment of the Semester System and prepare guidelines for its execution that can largely benefit the stakeholders.

These Policy Guidelines have been developed with the expectation that HEIs across Pakistan and such institutions engaged in medical education, will mould their examination system accordingly; keeping in view their respective need analysis.

STANDARDIZED SCHEME OF STUDIES FOR FOUR- YEAR BACHELOR / MASTERS / MPHIL DEGREE PROGRAMS

1

Undergraduate Structure

Total No. of Credit Hours	124 – 136
Semester Duration	16-18 weeks
Course Duration	8 Semesters (3.5 – 4 years)
Number of Summer Sessions	1 – 2 in one academic year
Course Load per Semester for Regular Full-time Students	15 – 18 Credit Hours*

* See the Maximum and Minimum Course Load Guideline

Masters / MPhil Structure, after completion of 124 -136 Credit Hours by Undergraduate Students

Total No. of Credit Hours	30 (minimum 24 credit hours of Course Work + 6 credit hours* of Research or course work)
Semester Duration	16- 18 weeks
Course Duration	1.5 – 2 years
Number of Regular Semesters	3-4
Number of Summer Sessions	1 – 2 in one academic year
Course Load per Semester	9 – 12 Credit Hours

*See “Requirements for the Award of Degree”

Course Layout for Undergraduate Students (124-136 Credit Hours)

Year	Credits	Compulsory Requirement for Bachelors (HONS) Program	Electives	General Science Requirements	Requirements Towards a Major
Total	124-136	27	12	34	51-63
YEAR 1					
Semester I	16	6	3	7	0
Semester II	16	6	0	10	0
YEAR 2					
Semester III	14	6	0	4	4
Semester IV	17	3	0	10	4
YEAR 3					
Semester V	16	3		3	10
Semester VI					
YEAR 4					
Semester VII	15	0	3	0	12
Semester VIII	14	0	3	0	11
Internship/Project Report	6				

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 124-136 Credit Hours are required of all undergraduate degree programs (124 represents the minimum and 136 represents the maximum credit required) • 51-63 Credits Hours must be taken in courses prescribed for the major. Credit points are earned in courses based upon the amount of time and effort required for those courses. Most courses carry 3 Credit Hours. • 34 Credit Hours must be earned taking courses outside the prescribed course for the major but within the same school as the major; meaning core, basic science. • 30 Credit Hours must be earned taking multi-disciplinary courses outside the school of major. • A course equals 3 Credits and the length of the lectures should be 3hrs per week. This is typically in the form of three 1-hour lectures per week or two 1.5 hour lectures per week. • Internship / Project: Every student should write a project report or will do internship in any organization relating to the discipline chosen for as specialization.
2	<p>CREDIT HOURS FOR (UNDERGRADUATE, MASTERS / MPHIL)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A credit hour means teaching a theory course for 50 minutes each week throughout the semester. • One credit hour in laboratory or practical work / project would require lab contact of two hours per week throughout the semester. • The credit hours are denoted by two digits within brackets with a hyphen in between. The first digit represents the theory part while the second (right side) digit represents the practical. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Thus 3(3-0) means three credit hours of theory, while 4(3-1) means a total of four credit hours, of which three are of theory while one credit hour is for laboratory. ○ The weekly contact hours of a 3(3-0) course will be three, the contact hours of a 4(3-1) course will be six. ○ The contact hours during each week of the Summer Session will be doubled to ensure that the course is completely taught in a semester with half the duration compared with a regular (Fall/Spring) semester.
3	<p>DEGREE PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WHO HAVE DONE 2 YEARS BACHELOR (UNDER ANNUAL SYSTEM)</p> <p>A 2 year Bachelor Degree (BA. BSc. etc. Pass) under the Annual System is equivalent to 50 credit hours under the semester system. The candidate can get benefit of maximum 50 Credit Hours or less on course to course basis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Bachelor (Honors) degree program will consist of 124-136 credit hours. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students after 2 year Bachelor degree (annual system) should be enrolled in Bachelor (Honors) Program to complete remaining 74-86 credit hours (if the courses taken by them during the 2 year Bachelor Program (annual system) are relevant to the Bachelor (Hons.). out of them, 10 Credit Hours will be devoted for Bridge Courses *. ○ Program courses in which the students want to enroll, e.g. a student of arts with 2 year Bachelor degree may not be eligible for Bachelor (Hons.) in Sciences, but a student with 2 year Bachelors degree in science may be eligible for admission in BBA Program. • The Institute must develop its own criteria of admission of students holding a 2 year Bachelor degree. <p><small>* The universities are required to fill the gap presently exists in BA/BSc who are going to the BS stream by designing Bridge Courses of 10 Credit Hours out of the 74-86 Credit Hours in the area of Mathematics, English, IT or whatever universities desire.</small></p>

<p>4</p>	<p>ADMISSION INTO MASTERS AFTER 2 YEARS BACHELOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is for those students who will be joining the institute after completing 2 years Bachelor (annual system). • The students may be enrolled into the Masters program directly by offering 94-106 credit hours, but they have to fulfill the following requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Will earn first 64 – 76 credit hours at undergraduate level, and then ii) Will earn 30 credit hours at Masters / M. Phil level. • The Institute is obliged to issue a Bachelor (Hons.) degree to the student after completing the undergraduate course requirement, i.e. 64-76 credit hours, despite the student has been enrolled directly into Masters Program.
<p>5</p>	<p>FALL / SPRING SEMESTER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will be two regular semesters (Fall and Spring) in an academic year. Each semester will be spread over 16-18 weeks (inclusive of exams). • Universities / institutes are at liberty to enroll students (if they fulfill their criteria) for any semester or for any single course and issue transcript with letter grades at the end of the semester.
<p>6</p>	<p>SUMMER SEMESTER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A university may offer one or two summer sessions with duration of 8 weeks each. • The contact hours during the Summer Session will be doubled to ensure that the course is completely taught in a summer session with half of the duration compared to a regular (Fall / Spring) semester.
<p>7</p>	<p>COURSE LOAD FOR FALL AND SPRING SEMESTERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undergraduate Students <p>A regular student is required to take 12credit hours per regular semester, but however, a student can take a maximum of 18 credit hours, provided the student fulfils the condition mentioned in point no. 8 (See point 8)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master / MPhil Students <p>A regular student is required to take 9 credit hours per regular semester, but however, a student can take a maximum of 12 credit hours, provided the student fulfils the condition mentioned in point no. 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course load for summer semester, undergraduate students <p>Undergraduate students' course load is 6 credit hours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course load for summer semester, Master / MPhil students <p>Graduate students can take up to 6 credit hours during summer system.</p>

8	<p>REQUIREMENT FOR MAXIMUM COURSE LOAD IN A REGULAR SEMESTER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An undergraduate student may be allowed to take up to 18 credit hours and a graduate student up to 12 credit hours (being maximum course load) only if s/ he has a C.GPA of 3.5 or above and that too with the permission of the Head of the Department. • The Head of Department may also allow maximum course load to any student, graduate or undergraduate when the student is graduating in that very semester, e.g. an undergraduate student with C.GPA of 3.2 needs 18 credit hours to graduate or a Masters / MPhil student with a C.GPA of 3.2 needs 15 credit hours to graduate. In this situation the Head of Department can make an exception for any particular student by allowing him / her to take maximum course load as this will be the student's last and graduating semester.
9	<p>ACADEMIC CALENDAR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every university will publish a schedule of complete academic year for its fall, spring and summer semesters for the convenience of students and faculty members mentioning the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Semester starting date 2. Holidays during the semester 3. Semester termination date 4. Final exam week 5. Grade notification date • Students are responsible to meet the requirement and deadline published for each semester in the academic calendar of the university. Students will also be expected to know and adhere to the rules, regulations, course loads, prerequisites, and policies of the university, as well as those of the departments / institutes in which they are enrolled.
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WITHDRAWAL / CHANGE OF COURSE(S) • A student, with the consent of the concerned Dean, may be allowed to (a) change a course within 7 days of the commencement of a semester, and (b) drop a course within 2 weeks of the commencement of semester. • Withdrawal from a course will be allowed latest up to one week before the 2nd in-semester examination (i.e. by the end of 15th week) under approval by the Dean/Head of Department of the Institute. Withdrawn course will appear on transcript with the letter grade W, and will not be treated as F grade. • Universities may have their own criteria for withdrawal keeping in line with the above guidelines.
11	<p>REPEATING COURSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whenever a student fails or gets a 'F' grade, s/he has to repeat the course, whenever offered. • Undergraduate students may be allowed to repeat a course in which s/he has obtained Grade 'D' • The Institution may define maximum number (≤ 6) of courses that student may be allowed to repeat. • In case a student repeats the course which has already been taken, the old grade will be substituted with the new grade, (for CGPA calculation) but in case a student takes a new course in lieu of the course in which s/he failed, both the grades will reflect on his/ her transcript, i.e. old course grade and new course grade.

	<p><u>REPEAT COURSES FOR MASTERS / MPHIL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A graduate student with a C grade can repeat the course if he /she desires to improve. Each Institution may define the maximum number of courses (≤ 3) that a student may repeat at the Graduate level. 																		
12	<p>ATTENDANCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance in classes is normally considered mandatory, especially in a semester system. Each Institution may develop a policy for maximum attendance ($\leq 70\%$) in a course required to obtain a passing grade in the course 																		
13	<p>EXAMINATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In each semester, students may be required to appear in quizzes, mid terms, final examination, give presentation, participate in group discussion, and submit projects/assignments/lab reports. These (to be determined by the teacher concerned) will have different weightage contributing towards the overall assessment in percent marks. This weightage can be determined, based on the following guidelines: <table border="1" data-bbox="444 1045 1338 1329"> <thead> <tr> <th>Nature of Examination</th> <th>Course with Lab</th> <th>Course without Lab</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Quizzes</td> <td>5 – 10%</td> <td>5 – 15 %</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mid Semester Examinations</td> <td>20 – 30%</td> <td>30 – 40%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Assignments</td> <td>5 – 10%</td> <td>5 – 10%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Practical/Project(if applicable)</td> <td>10 – 20%</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Final Examination</td> <td>-</td> <td>40 – 50%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In case a student joins a course after it has started, s/he will be responsible for any missed quizzes, assignments and lectures. The marks in missed quizzes etc will be considered zero while make-up tests, assignments, projects and labs can be arranged in consultation with the teacher/Head of Department. There will be no Supplementary/ Special Examination in a Semester System; if a student fails in a course, he/s is required to repeat it. 	Nature of Examination	Course with Lab	Course without Lab	Quizzes	5 – 10%	5 – 15 %	Mid Semester Examinations	20 – 30%	30 – 40%	Assignments	5 – 10%	5 – 10%	Practical/Project(if applicable)	10 – 20%	-	Final Examination	-	40 – 50%
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14	<p>GRADING POLICY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The following are the major/prevalent grading systems: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Absolute Grading System Relative Grading System Rubric Method A brief on Relative Grading system is as follows: 																		

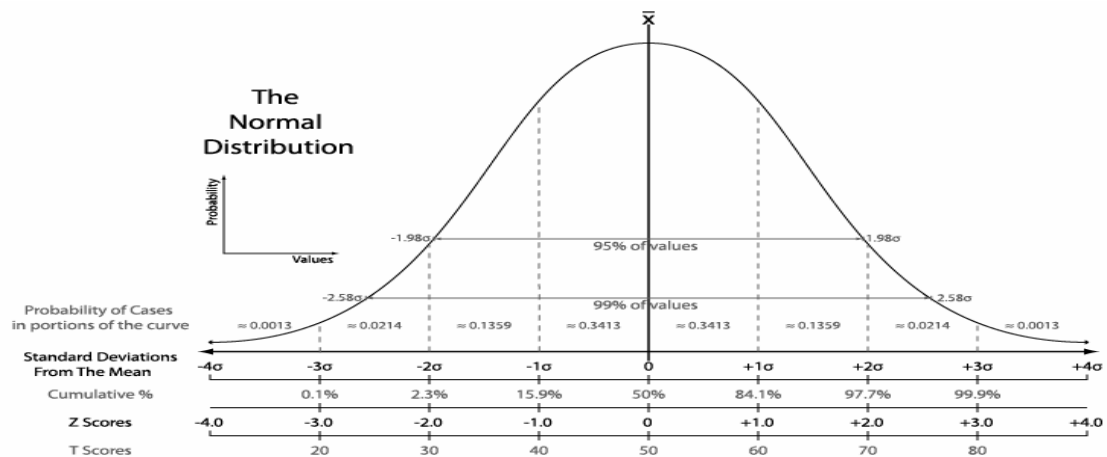
2- RELATIVE GRADING SYSTEM:

- Relative grading allows for screening students according to their performance relative to their peers. In relative grading a histogram of total marks obtained by all students is taken and ranges for assigning various grades are decided for awarding the grades. These “ranges” for assigning grades are based on upper limit of percentage of students in a course that can have a particular grade.
- It also establishes minimum achievement standards linked to the content mastery and then calculate numbers of As, Bs and Cs etc, based on the curve tied to the students' performance relative to their peers.

Three Types of Grading in Relative Grading System:

- i) Normal, Bell-Shaped Curve (recommended for adoption)
- ii) Distribution Gap Method
- iii) Standard Deviation

i) Normal, Bell Shaped Curve: Grading on a bell curve (or simply known as curving) is a method of assigning grades designed to yield a desired distribution of grades among the students in a class. Strictly speaking, grading "on a bell curve" refers to the assigning of grades according to the frequency distribution known as the Normal distribution whose graphical representation is referred to as the Normal curve or the bell curve. Bell curve grading assigns grades to students based on their relative performance in comparison to classmates' performance. In true use of bell curve grading, students' scores are scaled according to the frequency distribution represented by the Normal curve.



Compares the various grading methods in a normal, bell-curve distribution. Includes: Standard deviations, cumulative percentages, percentile equivalents, Z-scores, T-scores, standard nine, percent in stanine.

In short, it is a method in which teacher determines the percentage of students who should be assigned each grade symbol so that the distribution becomes normal in appearance.

15	<p>COMPUTATION OF SEMESTER GRADE POINT AVERAGE (GPA) AND CUMULATIVE GRADE POINT AVERAGE (C.GPA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Semester Grade Point Average (GPA) and Cumulative Grade Point Averages (C. GPAs) will be calculated using the following relationships: <p>GPA = $\frac{\text{Sum over Courses in Semester (Course Credit Hours X Grade Point Earned)}}{\text{Total Semester Credit Hours}}$</p> <p>C.GPA = $\frac{\text{Sum over all taken Courses in all Semesters(Course Credit Hours X Grade Point Earned)}}{\text{Total Credit Hours Taken in all Semesters}}$</p> <p>➤ <u>Universities may follow any other standard procedure for calculating CGPA.</u></p>
16	<p>C.GPA REQUIRED FOR DEGREE COMPLETION (UNDERGRADUATES MASTERS / MPHIL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For graduation, the minimum qualifying CGPAs for Bachelors and Masters Students are 2.00 and 2.50, respectively. Whenever an undergraduate students C.GPA decreases from 2.0, or a graduate students C.GPA decreases from 2.5, s/he will be on 1st probation for the next semester. If the undergraduate student does not come out by increasing his/her C.GPA to 2.0, or a graduate student does not come out by increasing his / her C.GPA to 2.5, then again, s/he will go on "<u>Last Probation</u>". If the student who was earlier on 1st probation, does not come out in the last probation by achieving the minimum desired C.GPA, s/he shall be dropped from the Institute and cannot be re-admitted by the same institute.
17	<p>TRANSFER OF CREDIT HOURS FOR UNDERGRADUATES / MASTERS / MPHIL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every university will develop its own criteria for transferring the credit hours. However, some guidelines are mandatory for all the universities / institutes to follow. No credit hour of a course will be transferred if the grade is less than C for undergraduate and B for graduate. Universities are at liberty to enroll students (if they fulfill their criteria) for any semester or for any single class and issue the students a transcript for the courses done.

18	<p>REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF DEGREES</p> <p>FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A student must have a regular admission in the Undergraduate program of the Institute, and should earn a minimum of 60 credit hours out of a total of 124 – 130 credit hours from the institute from where s/he will be entitled for the degree (this para should be read in conjunction with Para 17). <p>FOR MASTER / MPhil STUDENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A student must have a regular admission in the Masters / MPhil program of the Institute, and should earn a minimum of 30 credit hours from the institute from where he/ she will be entitled for the degree. (24 credit hours of course work and 6 credit hours of research) * 6 credit hours of research is mandatory for Masters / MPhil level, however, exemption may be allowed only in those cases where research is not possible. (This exemption from research can only be for Non-Science subjects / disciplines) • The Head of Department may allow the student to do course work of 6 credit hours in lieu of 6 credit hours of research. This exemption cannot be allowed if the student wants to do Ph.D. • This exemption can only be allowed if the student wants to terminate his / her course at Masters / MPhil Program.
19	<p>STUDENT GRIEVANCES AGAINST ANY COURSE INSTRUCTOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Institutes should have a 3 member Committee headed by a senior faculty member to redress the grievances of the students about any course instructor or grades or for any other issue. • A student must approach the Head of the Institute for a grievance on grade within 5 days of the receipt of the grade. The Head of the Institute / Department shall forward the grade grievance to a 3 member committee and it will be mandatory on the Committee for hearing both sides (student and the instructor), and will give a final decision within 5 days or before the start of registration for the new semester whichever comes early. The decision of the Committee will be final. • A Departmental Committee headed by the Chairman / Senior Faculty Members will be constituted to check randomly a few papers of the final semester examination for uniformity of scoring & covering of the course content.
20	<p>COURSES ON PASS / FAIL BASIS FOR UNDERGRADUATES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courses can be taken on pass / fail basis. These courses can be taken only out of elective courses, and the grade awarded toward these courses will NOT be considered in calculating the GPA or CGPA. If the student fails, s /he has to repeat the course (the repeat course policy will apply). A maximum of 9 credit hours of courses can be taken on pass / fail basis. • No course can be taken on Pass / Fail basis at Masters / MPhil Level

21	<p>CANCELLATION OF ADMISSION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a student fails to attend any lecture during the first four weeks after the commencement of the semester as per announced schedule, his/her admission shall stand cancelled automatically without any notification.
22	<p>COURSE FILE</p> <p>Maintenance of Course File is compulsory for the teacher. It will have a complete record of everything that happened during the semester. The course file will contain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of Course/Course contents • Course Coding • Weekly Teaching Schedule • Dates of Mid-Semester Examination • Grading policy will identify each activity. Such as homework, Quizzes, Mid-Semester Examination, Final Examination, Term Papers • Copy of Each Homework Assignment • Copy of Each Quiz Given • Copy of Mid Semester Examination • Grading Sheets of the Course detailing Statistical data on the grades obtained by students. • Difficulties /Problems faced during classroom / course delivery.
23	<p>FREEZING OF A SEMESTER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a student freezes a semester(s), s/he will retake admission in the same semester. No freezing during the semester is allowed. The maximum duration of the degree program shall remain the same. • However, the university may develop any criteria for freezing a semester.
24	<p>TEACHER EVALUATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In semester system the first step is the scrutiny and approval of the course outline by the Dean. Course Instructor plays a very pivotal role. There is very little control over the instructor when s/he is in the classroom. • It is mandatory on the head of the institutes to have every course instructor evaluated by the students on what they have been taught by their instructor. This evaluation must be preferably done on-line. However if on-line is not possible then it has to be done manually. It must be done in the last week of the semester (Without the presence of the course instructor so as to maintain impartiality). This evaluation should be objective and should be shared with the concerned course instructor for his / her improvement / knowledge. • Evaluation done by the students will be completely anonymous, i.e. the student will not be required to indicate, name, or roll numbers or registration numbers or by any other means whatsoever.

Annexure I

- i. Different types of examination systems i.e. Annual, Semester, and Term are being practiced all over the country. In order to attain the uniformity and harmony, all higher education Institutions should gradually shift towards the semester system.
- ii. Assessment strategies, quality of items and examination processes cannot be improved without intensive professional training of the staff involved in the examinations.

Pertinent Training should be arranged at regular basis for all the staff concerned with examinations: from Controller of Examination to the junior clerk in Examination Department, paper assessors, paper setters and examiners. The aim of the training should be to evolve an effective reliable, valid, secure and transparent examination system.

- iii. Course objectives in terms of students' learning outcomes and Table of Specification should be available to all concerned persons including students.
- iv. Choice of questions in examinations, e.g., 5 out of 8 questions encourages selective study, and should be abolished.
- v. Grace marks in examinations to pass the candidates should not be allowed in any circumstances by the year 2007. A system of moderation/ arbitration, however, must be evolved by then for all institutions with consensus.
- vi. Paper setting for the Final Examination setting should preferably be done by a panel of 2 or more examiners. Wherever applicable, in the annual system of examination, final papers shall be reviewed by a neutral examiner.
- vii. Most of the questions should assess higher level of cognition, i.e., conceptual knowledge and application of learned material in practical field.
- viii. Where applicable, a "Key" (agreed answer/solution) should be prepared by the paper setters before the question paper is used in the examination. The "Key" should also give the weightage and detailed breakdown of the marks for subcomponents (only for objectives; not for descriptive papers). In descriptive questions, where writing of exact solution may not be practical, the paper setter must write answers to the key points of each question that are required from the students. The answer/solution should be displayed or made accessible to students when they review their answer books after marking by the examiner.
- ix. Assessment Tools such as Use of Multiple Choice Question (MCQs) and short essay questions (SEQs) should be encouraged to increase the content validity of question papers. Descriptive questions should preferably be done away with except where writing skills, concepts or ability to dialogue needs to be evaluated in detail e.g. in the case of discipline of Social Sciences etc.
- x. Practical/Project should always be conducted by a panel of examiners including external and internal examiners. It is also recommended that marking of each examiner should be reflected separately.
- xi. A policy of complete transparency be adopted in Semester/Term system where candidates are guaranteed an opportunity to discuss the marks awarded to them with the concerned teacher.
- xii. In case a student fails in an examination, he / she should wait for at least six months before appearing for second chance of examination.
- xiii. All examinations to be held from year 2007 will follow the testing policy of giving "**No Choice**" at under graduate level.