

Freshmen at NUS get poorer grades crossed out

90% take to new scheme to ease grade pressure on first-year students

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NINE in 10 National University of Singapore (NUS) freshmen have taken advantage of a new scheme that allows them to wipe less-than-stellar grades off their records.

Since last year, students have been able to omit grades for chosen modules, so they do not count towards overall scores.

Students who get at least a C

can do this for up to five modules in the first semester; those with lower grades must retake the module or take another.

The scheme applies to nearly all NUS faculties and schools: arts and social sciences, business, computing, design and environment, engineering, music, nursing and science.

Altogether, 88 per cent took up the option for at least one module. A small number – 6 per cent – did so for five modules they had

taken in the first semester.

Provost Tan Eng Chye said NUS wanted to ease the pressure of grades for freshmen, as well as to encourage students to explore subjects outside their specialisation – even those they might not be confident of.

The move was also aimed at easing freshmen into university life, and getting students to focus on learning over grades.

“We want our students to pursue their interests and their passion – to take up courses outside their core disciplines and not worry about grades,” said Professor Tan.

NUS is pleased with the high take-up rate for the scheme, he said, and is looking closely at why undergraduates are using it.

“We are surveying academics to see if students were as engaged in learning,” he said.

NUS hopes to put in place a full grade-free first year eventually but is taking a “measured approach” to gauge the response, he added.

Freshman Ritchie Ng Zhenghao, 21, used the scheme for a subject in which he received a B+.

Said the business student: “I thought by asking for some of my grades not to be counted, I could spend some time pursuing other things, such as community service, which I am keen on.”

He helped to organise a community service project at Ren Ci Hospital, and did a short internship at an investment bank.

First-year engineering student Joshua Lim Yuan Hui, 21, who asked for four of his grades not to be counted, said it was only because of the scheme that he decided to take courses in economics and political science.

“I wanted to try them out as they interest me, but I wouldn’t have if I had thought it would affect my overall grade point average,” he said.

The NUS law and medical faculties already have a grade-free system for first-year students.

At the Singapore University of Technology and Design, first-year students get only a “pass” or “no record” in the first term.

Overseas institutions, such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Brown University in the United States, have gradeless policies as well.

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