

# Report of the Office of First-Year Programs

Matt Kretchmar, Dean of First-Year Students

First-Year students can now view their final grades from the fall semester which are accessible via the "Web4Student" feature on the myDenison portal. Now that the busy first semester is behind us, this is a good opportunity to reflect on the hard work that went in to earning these grades and to plan for the spring semester. I've found it helpful to provide this guide for students and their families to put these grades in context; this is certainly a very different academic environment and experience for most of our first-year students, and it is often beneficial to know how your own grades fall within the spectrum of other Denison students.

## Fall Grades

As a whole, the Class of 2014 earned a respectable 3.05 GPA. This is just slightly above a B average (a B is 3.0). This is similar to the academic performance of previous cohorts which typically range from 2.95 to 3.10. Generally, students improve their grades as they progress through Denison which is reflected in the table below:

All Students	3.12
First-Years	3.05
Sophomores	3.09
Juniors	3.15
Seniors	3.22

The first-year women performed slightly better than the first-year men earning a GPA of 3.18 compared to the 2.89 of the men. Our data tells us that women devote more hours to their studies which largely explains the statistical difference. The table below shows the percentage of first-year students in different categories.

<b>GPA Range</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Total</b>
3.50 - 4.00	17.8%	34.7%	27.3%
3.00 - 3.49	27.8%	34.7%	31.7%
2.50 - 2.99	28.5%	17.3%	22.2%
2.00 - 2.49	17.0%	9.0%	12.5%
below 2.00	8.9%	4.3%	6.3%

Denison uses a 4.0 scale to compute Grade Point Averages. An A is 4.0, B is 3.0, C is 2.0, D is 1.0 and F is 0.0. Pluses and minuses add third points, for example a B+ is 3.33 and a C- is 1.67, though an A+ is still 4.0.

## **Academic Standing**

Denison asks all students to maintain "good academic standing" by earning a cumulative GPA of at least 2.0 (a C average). If a student falls below a 2.0, generally they are placed on "academic probation" for a semester when they are expected to return to good academic standing by raising their cumulative GPA back above a 2.0. If a student fails to do so, they may be academically suspended for a semester to take the time away needed to address the particular challenges they are facing. If a student earns a semester GPA below 1.0, they are also typically suspended (regardless of the cumulative GPA).

There were a handful of students in the Class of 2014 whose semester GPA places them in academic difficulty. Those students on academic probation will be required to attend a "Back On Track" workshop during the first week of the spring semester. Afterwards, each student will meet weekly with me or a dean in the Academic Support and Enrichment Center. We will use these meeting times to discuss productive strategies involving time management, exam preparation, paper writing, working with professors, etc. Typically about 2/3 of the students who attend this program return to good academic standing the next semester.

## **Activities Tied to GPA**

The privilege of participating in many of Denison's activities is dependent upon good academic standing. It is important that students who are not in good standing take the time away from certain activities to focus more wholly on their academic performance before returning to these activities.

Generally varsity athletes are strong academic performers; some teams even take pride in maintaining significantly higher GPAs than the campus average. Varsity athletes must generally maintain a 2.0 GPA to participate in intercollegiate competition. These guidelines are stipulated by the NCAA but students may also want to consult with their coach for any other policies per a particular team. Some club sports also require a 2.0 GPA for student participants.

The Greek community seeks, as a cornerstone of its mission, to foster a strong academic community. As such, most fraternities and sororities have a minimum GPA requirement for recruitment and participation: men need a 2.3 GPA and women a 2.5 GPA. These standards are set by the national governing bodies and are not Denison University policies. Some chapters may have additional requirements so be sure to inquire specifically with a particular Greek organization.

## **Resources for Improvement**

The first semester on campus is often a significant learning experience. With a semester of experience, students are more familiar with the academic life at Denison and have learned some strategies for succeeding. However, the university offers a

wide array of support options for helping students improve their academic performance. I would urge students to take advantage of these many resources. I list several of them below.

I will conclude this letter by thanking the students of the Class of 2014. This cohort is off to a strong start and promises many great achievements in the semesters ahead. The Office of First-Year Programs is always happy to chat with students and their families.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Matt Kretchmar  
Dean of First-Year Students

### **Suggestions for Improvement:**

- Schedule an appointment with your academic advisor. Talk about what you learned this fall and what you'd like to focus on in the spring.
- Schedule a session with me (First-Year Dean, x6224) or a dean in Academic Support (x6666). We offer individualized "academic coaching" that often greatly helps students improve their performance.
- Purchase a planner at the DU bookstore and use that to keep track of your deadlines and appointments. Schedule study time and free time in your planner to better manage your time.
- Set specific grade goals for each course at the end of the first week of classes. Visit the professor's office hours to share your goals and talk with the professor about strategies to achieve those objectives.
- Visit the writing center on a consistent basis.
- Become a frequent flyer in professors' office hours. Think about how you might prepare for these meetings to take advantage of them.
- Take advantage of the counseling center.
- Make a New Year's Resolution to attend at least five evening events this year -- we bring dozens of the world's best scholars and performers to campus each term.
- Seek a leadership role in a campus organization that is important to you.
- Form a "writing group" or study group with 2-3 of your colleagues.
- Make a commitment to work ahead in your papers and assignments.