

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION – ACADEMIC AFFAIRS
POLICY NUMBER – ACAF 7.22
POLICY TITLE – DFW POLICY
SCOPE OF POLICY – USC UPSTATE
DATE OF REVISION – DECEMBER 1, 2025
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER - PROVOST
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE – OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

PURPOSE

A student’s ability to pass a class is shaped by a combination of factors—those outside the instructor’s control, such as the student’s academic preparation, personal motivation, health, financial stability, and external responsibilities, and those within the instructor’s control, including course design, instructional methods, communication, assessment practices, classroom environment, and availability of support.

Extensive research exists on the instructional practices within an instructor’s control. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that our classes are grounded in evidence-based best practices that promote learning and success. The policy is not intended to impact the rigor of any course, nor to eliminate the DFW rate entirely, but rather to ensure that any DFW outcomes are a result of factors not under the instructor’s control.

This policy defines a high DFW rate, establishes expectations for addressing high rates, and affirms the institution’s responsibility to provide resources to support these efforts

DEFINITIONS

Unproductive credit refers to students taking credit-bearing courses without completing the course with a passing grade.

DFW rate refers to the percentage of students in a course or program who receive a grade of D or F or who withdraw (W) from the course. DFW rates can be calculated for individual sections of a course, and across all sections of a multi-section course.

Pattern of high DFW rates refers to 2 or more semesters of DFW rates over 40% in the last 5 semesters

POLICY STATEMENT

USC Upstate’s Values emphasize continuous improvement and striving for excellence in all operations, including instruction. Courses with high DFW rates present significant barriers to students’ college completion and success and can be a source of stress and challenge for faculty. Faculty teaching a course with a pattern of DFW rates at or above 40% will participate in a

collaborative review, in order to design and implement an action plan. The institution has responsibility to support and provide resources for these continuous improvement efforts to ensure the success of our students, the quality of our educational programs, and the professional growth of our faculty.

PROCEDURES

1. Unproductive Credit Reports

The Institutional Research and Planning (IR&P) Office will provide the Provost Council with reports each semester on unproductive credit rates, highlighting courses and sections with patterns of high DFW rates.

2. Initiation of Review

Deans will review the data provided by the IR&P and determine which courses will undergo the collaborative review process. Based on context or other relevant considerations, they may exercise discretion to exclude certain courses from review. The Dean will meet with the Department Chair and the faculty teaching those courses to initiate the review process. The review process may be completed individually or collectively in the case of multi-section courses. The review will identify opportunities for increasing the use of evidence-based teaching and learning practices. Choosing not to participate in the review process will be noted in Annual Reviews and may impact eligibility for appointments such as summer teaching, overloads, stipends, TAPS, and similar opportunities.

3. Collaborative Course Review Process

a. Review. The collaborative review process will begin with a holistic evaluation of all elements contributing to high DFW rates using the CAIFS Best Teaching Practices Rubric. This comprehensive review will examine both the factors not in the instructor's control and those that fall within it—such as course design and structure, instructional methods, communication and engagement strategies, assessment practices, the classroom and Blackboard environment, and the encouragement of use of support resources like tutoring and supplemental instruction. Data about variables not under the instructor's control will be included in the form of quantitative data from IR&P and qualitative insights gathered from student focus groups.

b. The faculty members teaching the course and a CAIFS approved reviewer will do independent evaluations using the CAIFS Rubric and then meet to review the evaluations and design an Action Plan aimed at enhancing student learning. If the reviewer and faculty member agree that the Action Plan necessitates a major course redesign, the faculty member may be able to apply for a course redesign stipend.

c. Action Plan Implementation. Once the reviewer and the Dean approve the Action Plan and implementation timeline, faculty members will implement the Action Plan with support from the reviewer to ensure that faculty have the necessary resources and support.

d. Post-semester Reflection. After teaching the revised course, faculty members will meet with the reviewer at the end of the semester to reflect on the successes and opportunities for further improvement.

TIMELINE

Complete self-evaluation – 2 weeks

Collaborative review and creation of Action Plan – Up to 4 weeks

Implement Action Plan – 6 weeks to 8 months

Post-Semester Reflection – End of semester meeting with reviewer following the teaching of the redesigned course.

HISTORY OF REVISIONS

- December 1, 2025 – New policy