Statement by Prof. Don Chance, Sponsor of Resolution 11–20, on the Establishment of a Plus-Minus Grading System

As the faculty member who initiated the plus/minus system grading system proposal, I provide this statement of support and explanation. There has been a great deal of controversy and even some fear about this matter, especially among students. I want everyone to make an informed decision. Please base your thoughts on facts, not fear and innuendo.

WHY CHANGE THINGS? I made this proposal for two primary reasons, (1) it gives faculty members greater flexibility, and (2) an overwhelming majority of our peer research universities use the system, with some using it for decades. We need to catch up, not lag behind.

WILL IT AFFECT GRADES? The fear that many in the LSU community have expressed is that it will hurt grades. Virtually nothing has been said about its ability to reward those who deserve better grades than those who under the current system happen to fall in the same 10-point range. The task force’s report, which I urge you to read, examined a number of studies published in refereed journals, and there is no evidence of a significant change in grade point averages.

WHAT IF I JUST DON’T WANT TO USE IT? Many faculty members have stated that they will not use the plus/minus system if it is implemented. There is no problem with that. An A is still four points, a B is still three, etc. The current system nests within the plus/minus system.

WILL I START DROWNING IN APPEALS? Some of you are afraid that you will be swamped with appeals, given the increased number of cutoffs. Nine years ago I went from teaching under the plus/minus system to the current system and my appeals did not go down. Keep in mind that at most 0.4 quality points are at stake, whereas under the current system, one whole point is at stake. You can easily justify being more rigid in appeals. If it becomes an unmanageable problem, and I predict it will not, you can of course use the current system at any time.

WHAT ABOUT THE COST AND IMPLEMENTATION? In the next 2-3 years, LSU is planning to implement a new student information system. If the plus/minus system is adopted, its implementation will be much easier and less costly if it is done in conjunction with the new student information system. Thus, now is the optimal time to move forward with the plus/minus system.

IF I DO NOT LIKE THE PLUS/MINUS SYSTEM, WHY SHOULD I SUPPORT THIS PROPOSAL? I ask you to support the plus/minus proposal, even if you do not personally plan to use it. It will give many of us flexibility and move LSU in the direction of America’s best universities, a small step but an important one. Senators, I hope you will give us this opportunity to catch up with our peers. For the rest of the faculty, please contact your Senators and tell them you support this.

And by all means, please contact me (dchance@lsu.edu) if you have questions or concerns.