

Reducing Unnecessary Accumulation of Incomplete Grades: A Quality Improvement Project

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Abstract

It has been noted that there is an increasing percentage of students accumulating incomplete (INC) grades. This paper aims to identify the factors that contribute to the accumulation of incomplete grades of students and, utilizing the best practices of various universities worldwide, it intends to recommend solutions in limiting the number of students with incomplete grades.

Keywords: Quality improvement, incomplete grades, college

1. Background

The quality of students a school produce mirrors the quality of education an institution has provided. The foundational responsibility of the school is to train students enrolled in its various programs and incorporated to this training is the development of the trait of finishing tasks. However, when many students are not accomplishing their requirements on time, it reflects a negative attitude needing correction. For one, the objective of the school is the character formation of students. This character formation is embedded in the vision of the Northern Luzon Adventist College (NLAC) which is the “The school that prepares for life”.

It has been noted that there is an increasing percentage of students accumulating incomplete (INC) grades. About 21% to 50% of students from different programs received INC grades in one or more subjects, minor and major alike, based from the second semester of SY 2012-2013. Further, incomplete grades of one student could range from one subject up to 18 minor subjects or 14 major subjects.

2. Objectives and Outcome Measurement

Due to the increasing number of students with INC it is the intention of this paper to identify the factors that contribute to the accumulation of incomplete grades of students and subsequently recommend solutions in limiting the number of students with incomplete grades. Moreover, through the application of the recommendations, it aims to decrease the number of students who have incomplete grade at the end of first semester by 40% and 65% by second semester, SY 2013-2014.

3. Current practice and Procedure

The recent practice in NLAC regarding the provision of INC is that teachers customarily give students incomplete grade if they have not completed the requirements for the course (or have not taken the final examination providing that they have successfully completed a substantial portion of the course’s work with a passing grade). Students are given one year to complete the requirements; and if the students fail to complete their deficiencies within the specified time, the teachers compute the grade of the students based on their recorded points. However, when the Registrar’s office (RO) has not receive any final grade after the one-year probation, the students’ INC grade will be changed to “F” grade and the students are required to re-enroll the subject/s. Conversely, when the students are able to complete their deficiencies, they will purchase a Completion Form (P1.00) from the RO (see Figure 1), fill up the form and subsequently request the teacher to write their final grade in the form. Afterwards, the students proceed to the dean/department head for signature and then pass the single copy of the Completion Form back to the RO.

Form for Grade Adjustment					
Name: _____			Course/Year: _____		
Subjects	Semester and Year Taken	Grade	Instructor’s Name	Printed	Instructor’s Signature
_____ Student’s Signature		_____ Dean’s/ Department Head’s Signature		_____ Date complied	

Figure 1. NLAC INC Grade Completion Form

4. Student clearance

Before the end of the semester, every student is required to obtain a Student Clearance Form which is essential for the procurement of the final examination permit. This form is bought (P20.00) at the Director of Student Finance Office (DSF) and signed by various personnel (see Figure 2). Once signed, the students return the Student Clearance Form to the DSF in order to get their final examination permit. Moreover, when students are not able to pay all their fees before the end of the semester, they can appeal to the DSF for certain terms of payments and through the discretion of the DSF, they are given their final examination permit.

FINANCIAL CLEARANCE		
Student:	_____	
Course:	_____	
Balance:	_____	
	Remarks	Signature
Dorm Dean		
Dean/Department Head		
Guidance		
NSTP		
Librarian		
SAO		
Registrar		

Figure 2. Current NLAC Student Clearance Form

5. Methodology

Various methodologies were employed with the intention of providing an actual representation of the condition at hand. Records review was completed so as to determine the number of students with incomplete grades. Moreover, interviews were made to identify the factors that contribute to the accumulation of incomplete grades of students, which are subsequently presented using the fishbone diagram and pareto graph. Finally, a review of policies and procedures of other colleges and universities is presented which will be a basis for the recommendations that will be provided at the concluding section of the paper.

6. Records Review

To determine the prevalence of students with incomplete grades a records review was conducted at the RO during the last week of May, 2013. For the nine (9) departments of the College, the Registrar provided the list of students including the subjects that they have incomplete grades, while the records of the students from the School of Nursing were personally reviewed by the author. This data is presented in Tables 1 to 3. Table 1 shows the percentage of students with incomplete (INC) grades by department. It presents that all ten departments of the College have students with INC grades. Further, the data shows that half of the BSBA and BSOA students which are closely followed by BSIT (49%) have at least one INC grade while the BEEd has the lowest percentage of students with INC.

Table 2 shows the percentage of students with INC grades on the subject categorized as professional (major) or non-professional (minor). Among the 10 departments of the College, the School of Nursing has the highest percentage of students with INC grades (35.9%) in their professional subjects followed by the BSIT and BSBA (both with 30.0%) while the School of Arts and Sciences do not have (0%) any student with incomplete grade in their major subjects. On the non-professional or minor subjects, almost half (47%) of the students of the BSIT department have INC in their non-professional subjects followed by the BS Psychology (42.9%). The BEEd has the least number of students with INC (16.1%).

Table 1. Percent of students with Incomplete Grades By Program

Department	Percentage of students with INC
Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA)	50.0
Bachelor of Science in Office Administration (BSOA)	50.0
Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (BSIT)	49.0
Bachelor of Science in Psychology (BS Psych)	42.9
Bachelor of Arts in Theology (ABTheo)	40.7
Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education (BSEd) with various Major: History, English, Science, Filipino, Music, Math	39.8
Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN)	38.5
Liberal Arts: Bachelor of Arts (AB) with various Major: History, English, Science, Filipino, Mass Communication, Math	32.0
Bachelor of Science in Accountancy (BSA)	28.6
Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education (BEEd)	21.0

Table 2. Percent of Students with Incomplete Grade: Subjects categorized as professional (major) or non-professional (minor)

Department	Professional (Major)Subjects	Non-Professional (Minor) Subjects
BSBA	30.0	40.0
BSOA	16.7	33.3
BSIT	30.0	47.0
BS Psych	9.5	42.9
ABTheo	13.6	40.7
BSEd	15.9	27.3
SON	35.9	26.9
School of arts and Sciences Or Liberal Arts (AB)	0.0	32.0
BSA	12.5	25.0
BEEd	8.1	16.1

Legend: *BSBA* (Bachelor of Science in Business Administration); *BSOA* (Bachelor of Science in Office Administration); *BSIT* (Bachelor of Science in Information Technology); *BS Psych* (Bachelor of Science in Psychology); *ABTh* (Bachelor of Arts in Theology); *BSEd* (Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education with various Major: History, English, Science, Filipino, Music, Math); *SON* (School of Nursing); *AB* (Bachelor of Arts with various Major: History, English, Science, Filipino, Mass Communication, Math); *BSA* ((Bachelor of Science in Accountancy); *BEEd* (Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education).

Table 3. Percent of Students with Incomplete Grade: Specific Minor Subjects

Department	NSTP 1 and 2	Language (Eng/Fil)	Religion	PE 1-4	MG 1 & 2
BSBA	14.0	20.0	24.0	12.0	2.0
BSOA	0.0	16.7	16.7	0.0	0.0
BSIT	31.0	10.0	17.0	13.0	13.0
BS Psych	28.6	14.3	4.8	14.3	23.8
ABTheo	11.9	6.8	0.0	6.8	15.3
BSEd	9.1	5.7	0.0	4.5	9.1
BSN	7.7	5.1	9.0	2.6	0
Liberal Arts	8.0	4.0	16.0	0.0	4.0
BSA	14.3	8.9	1.8	7.1	0.0
BEEd	3.2	4.8	3.2	4.8	0.0
TOTAL Average	14.13	8.44	8.26	7.16	6.79

Legend: *BSBA* (Bachelor of Science in Business Administration); *BSOA* (Bachelor of Science in Office Administration); *BSIT* (Bachelor of Science in Information Technology); *BS Psych* (Bachelor of Science in Psychology); *ABTh* (Bachelor of Arts in Theology); *BSEd* (Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education with various Major: History, English, Science, Filipino, Music, Math); *BSN* (Bachelor of Science in Nursing); *AB* (Bachelor of Arts with various Major: History, English, Science, Filipino, Mass Communication, Math); *BSA*

((Bachelor of Science in Accountancy); *BEEEd* (Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education).

Finally, when the specific minor subjects with INC grades are presented, NSTP 1 and NSTP 2 garnered the highest percentage (14.13%) followed by language courses, such as Filipino and English subjects, (8.44%) and then the Religion subjects (8.26%).

7. Factors contributing to accumulation of INC grade

To identify the factors contributing to the phenomenon, a semi-structured interview was conducted through online and personal interview among current students, former students, faculty members, and department heads/school deans. Based from these consultations and the personal experience of the researcher, three factors are considered to be contributory to the accumulating INC grades of students. These are student factors, teacher factors, and the administrative factors (Figure 3 and 4).

Student factors contribute as the highest factor for the accumulation of incomplete grades. This factor includes the attitude of students toward their schoolwork, such as lack of motivation and interest in making the requirements, laziness, and procrastination. Moreover, lack of time management skills is attributed as another factor. Students are observed to spend more time on socialization (hang-out with friends, sweetheart), and playing internet/computer-based gaming, and extracurricular activities (e.g., singing groups, small groups, sports). Further, lack of resources and financial constraint are seen as other reasons. As a consequence, students cannot take their examinations on scheduled time due to lack of financial permit. Additionally, majority of the students do not have their own PC and printer and cannot afford to pay for the printing of their project that made them unable to pass their requirements on due dates. Lastly, a number of students cannot complete their requirements due to personal problems or sickness.

The other reason for incomplete grades is categorized as teacher factors. Instructors are deemed to require too many or too expensive requirements, others communicate the requirements late in the semester, while some projects are considered vague and unclear. A number of students state that their instructors are merciful for the reason that they agree to extend the due dates of submission even after the ending of the semester. Another concern regarding the instructors is their inaccessibility. Students are having difficulty in submitting their requirements to instructors who have resigned or on-leave. Finally, there are some faculty members who have not checked the students' requirements even when the students have passed the requirements on time and these instructors are considered as negligent teachers by students.

Administrative factors include the dean or department heads' lack of monitoring of faculty and their syllabus and their inability to limit maximum unit load capacity of student. There are students who were noted to have enrolled 29 to 32 units despite their history of accumulating of INCs. Moreover, it was noted that junior and senior students have INC from their freshmen and sophomore subjects. This indicates that there is lax in implementing the policy of re-enrollment of subjects for the past few years. Lastly, it is noted that Completion Forms that are passed to the RO are probably misplaced because a number of faculty members have complaints about students who repeatedly approach them for their INC despite the fact that the teacher has already given the grade to the RO.

8. Benchmarking

Policies regarding the INC grading has been reviewed amongst ten (10) different universities which were used as basis for the presentation in this section. Among these higher education institutions, a grade of incomplete is granted based on various conditions. Many schools require that students should specifically request or petition for an INC grade to the teacher before the last class meeting, complete the Petition to Receive Incomplete Grade form and state the reason for the request (Loma Linda University [LLU], 2013; University of Minnesota [UM], 2103; University of California [UC] San Diego, 2013; Saint Louis University [SLU], 2013; Stanford University [SU], 2013). Students are eligible for a petition for INC based on two conditions: first, the reasons for not completing the requirements include extraordinary circumstances, such as serious illness, personal injury, death in the immediate member of the family, or other situations that are beyond the student's control preventing the student from completing the class (Adventist University of the Philippines [AUP], 2010; Brigham Young University [BYU], 2013). Secondly, the students have completed a substantial part of the coursework and have a class performance which is considered satisfactory enough to merit a final passing grade (BYU, 2013; UC Sand Diego, 2013). Further, the final decision on the approval is either upon the discretion of the teacher (UM, 2013) or with the Program Chair determining whether the circumstance merit the issuance of INC (SLU, 2013). Additionally, students are not eligible with petition for INC as remedy for course overload, failure of taking the final examination, or changing the low grade a higher grade with the condition of having extra works (LLU, 2013). Once the Petition to Receive Incomplete Grade form has been completed, a contract or written agreement between the teacher and students is filled up (LLU, 2013; UM, 2103; UC San Diego, 2013; SLU, 2013). This contract specifies that the student and the teacher agree in writing to the conditions for clearing an incomplete (UM, 2103; SLU, 2013).

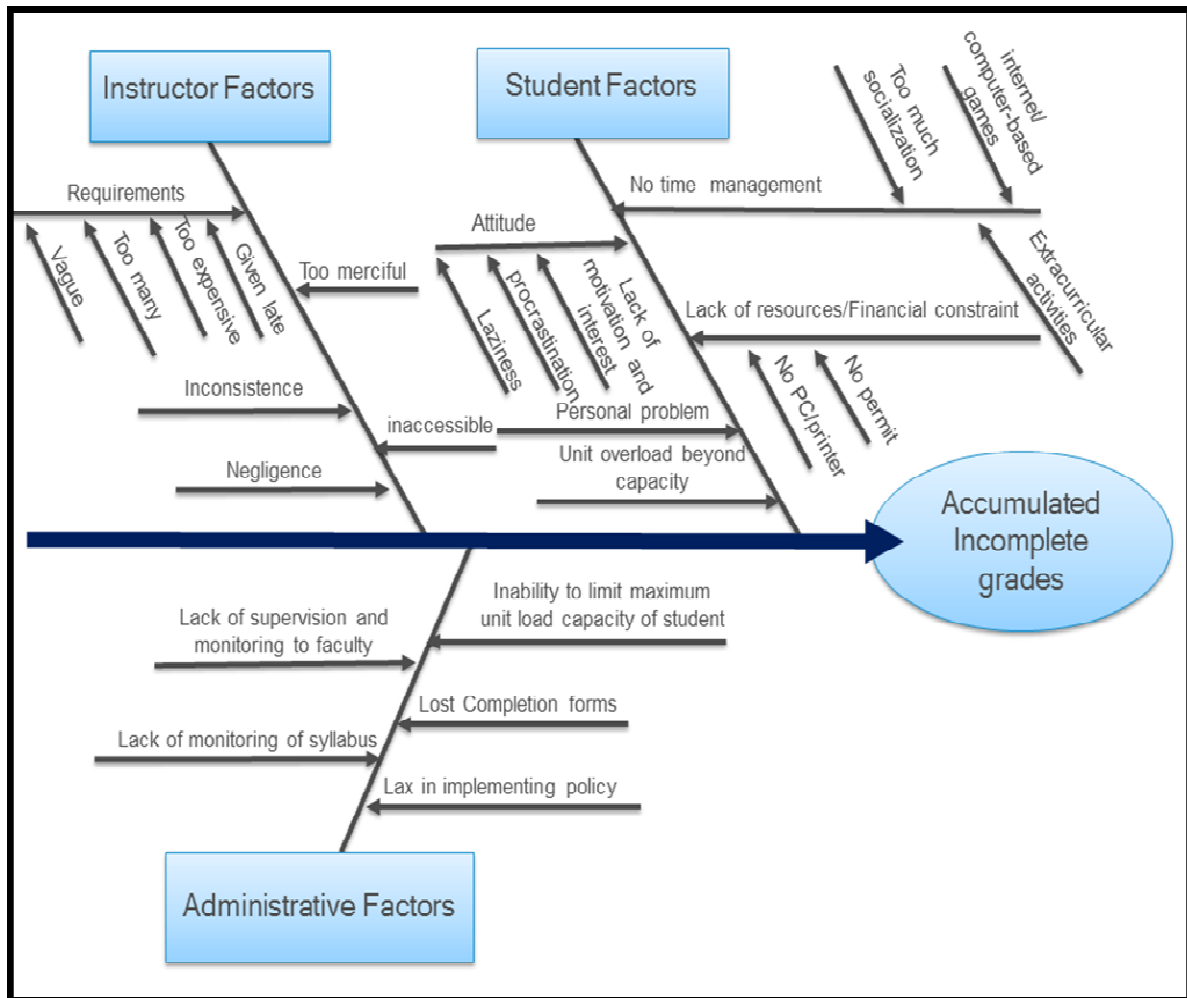


Figure 3. Fishbone Diagram: Factors contributing to accumulation of INC grade

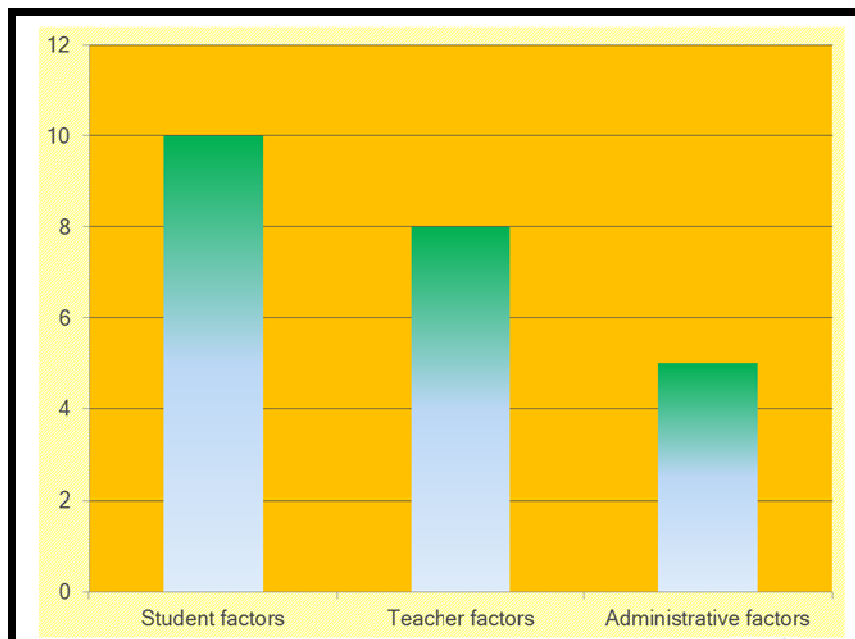


Figure 4. Pareto Graph: Factors contributing to accumulation of INC grade

The length of time for the completion date varies among the universities. One school gives 50 days to the students from the last day of final examination after the course was taught (Lacania, personal communication, May 19, 2013), while other schools may authorize an extension up to 18 months (BYU, 2013; Indian University, 2013). But a common rule, in most of institutions is that an INC grade should be removed within one year. In AUP (2008), if this period lapses and the grade is still not removed, the teacher concerned should explain in writing to the dean why the completion grade is not reported on time and will recommend to record the final grade of the student as indicated in the INC Grade Request Form. The dean will endorse the teacher's recommendation to the RO for implementation.

Once the students complete the deficiencies within the specified time, the teacher is expected to turn in personally to the RO a new grade within four weeks of the date the work was submitted by the students (UM, 2013) or make use of electronic grade change (IU, 2013). However, if not completed within the agreed time the INC will automatically be converted to an F (Failed) with or without the permission of the instructor. Nevertheless, when the incomplete was given in a prerequisite course, it must be cleared by the end of the first week of the class in which the prerequisite is necessary (SLU, 2013). Finally, notification to both the teacher and the student will be provided regarding the change of the student's grade.

9. Quality Improvement Program

Based from the findings of this study, there are two specific programs that are recommended to prevent and control the occurrence of having INC grade. These are the revision of policy and procedure for incomplete and completion of grades and the improvement of student clearance.

10. Revision of Policy and Procedure

It is strongly recommended that the policy on the request for INC and the subsequent completion protocol be revised. Moreover, there should also be a strict implementation of the said policy. The following is the recommended step-by step procedure in the application for INC grade.

1. Only eligible students could apply for INC grade. This is based on the following conditions:
 - a. The reasons for not completing the requirements include unexpected circumstances (e.g. serious illness, personal injury, death in the immediate member of the family, or other situations that are beyond the students' control) which prevented the students from completing the class.
 - b. The students have completed a considerable part of the coursework and have a class performance which is considered satisfactory enough to merit a final passing grade.
 - c. Reasons such as remedy for course overload, failure on taking final examination, low grade to be raised with extra works, or any similar causes are not to be considered for INC petition eligibility.
 - d. Students experiencing financial difficulty and cannot settle their accounts should be encouraged to make arrangement with the DSF and subsequently be provided with a temporary permit. This temporary permit will allow students to take the final examination but they should be informed that their grades will be withheld until the official financial permit has been presented.
2. Incomplete Grade Contract
 - a. If the students are eligible for petition to receive incomplete grade, students request for an INC grade to the teacher before the last class meeting and wait for the instructor's approval.
 - b. Faculty member has the discretion to accept or reject the petition for INC grade but all approval and rejection should be noted by the school dean/department head.
 - c. Once approved by the teacher and noted by the school dean/department head, students get the Incomplete Grade Contract (see Figure 5) from the RO after paying a fee to the cashier. The Incomplete Grade Contract should be in quadruplicate (white copy is for the RO; red copy is the instructor's copy; yellow is for the school dean/department head; pink is for the student)

Personal Information Name: (Last) _____ (First) _____ (Middle) _____ School ID _____ Course/Year: _____ Address: _____					
TO BE COMPLETED BY STUDENT 1. Complete all information requested in the student's data, course information, and reason for incomplete request section of this form. 2. Obtain the teacher, school dean/department head's signature and file the form with the teacher to the Registrar's Office. Policy 1. Incomplete Grade Contract is given only for emergency purpose. Reasons should include unexpected circumstances, such serious illness, personal injury, death in the immediate member of the family, or other situations that are beyond the student's control which prevented the student from completing the class. 2. The student has completed a considerable part of the coursework and has a class performance which is considered satisfactory enough to merit a final passing grade. 3. Reasons such as remedy for course overload, failure on final examination, low grade to be raised with extra works, or any similar causes are not to be considered for INC petition eligibility. 4. Student is given a maximum of one semester to complete the deficiencies. But if the incomplete was given in a prerequisite course, it must be cleared by the end of the first week of the class for which the prerequisite is necessary.					
Figure 5. Proposed form: Incomplete Grade Contract					
Course Information <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%; padding: 2px;">Course code</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Course Title</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="height: 20px;"> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </table> Reason for incomplete requests: (if due to health, attach note from physician) _____ _____		Course code	Course Title		
Course code	Course Title				
TO BE COMPLETED BY TEACHER Instructions 1. If approved, report the INC grade on the Gradesheet 2. Submit this form, along with the accompanying class' Gradesheet, to the Registrar's Office 3. Upon evaluation of the required additional work which is due on the date agreed upon, turn in the final grade on the Completion Grade Form to the Registrar's office within two (2) weeks after the requirements have been submitted. Additional work required to clear the incomplete: _____ _____ If additional required work is not turned in by (Date): month/date/year _____ The grade for the course will be: _____					
I acknowledge receipt of an incomplete grade for the above course and understand what the requirement/s for course completion. Student's signature: _____ (Date): month/date/year _____ REQUIRED SIGNATURES Teacher: _____ (Date): _____ month/date/year _____ School Dean /Department Head: _____ (Date): month/date/year _____ Received by: _____ (Registrar's office personnel) <i>Note: to be filled up in quadruplicate. White copy is for the RO; red copy is the instructor's copy; yellow is for the school dean/department head; pink is for the student. (Some features are adapted from Loma Linda University)</i>					

Cont. Figure 5. Proposed form: Incomplete Grade Contract

- d. The teacher and students sign the form that includes the work that will be completed and the completion date.
 - e. Students are given a maximum of one semester to complete the deficiencies. But when the incomplete is given in a prerequisite course, it must be cleared by the end of the first week of the class for which the prerequisite is necessary.
3. Completion of the INC
- a. Once the students complete the deficiencies within the specified time, they accomplish the Application for Completion of INC Marks (See Figure 6) which is available at the RO, after paying a certain amount to the RO.

Name: (Last) _____ (First Name) _____ (Middle Name) _____					
School ID _____ Course/Year: _____					
Address: _____					
Course No. _____	Course Title _____ Unit _____				
	Faculty				
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td>Term INC/FE mark was obtained:</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> 1st sem 20____ - 20____</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> 2nd sem 20____ - 20____</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Summer 20____</td> </tr> </table>	Term INC/FE mark was obtained:	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 st sem 20____ - 20____	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 nd sem 20____ - 20____	<input type="checkbox"/> Summer 20____	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 150px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> Student's signature _____ Course & Year _____ Date Submitted _____
Term INC/FE mark was obtained:					
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 st sem 20____ - 20____					
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 nd sem 20____ - 20____					
<input type="checkbox"/> Summer 20____					
Supporting Papers:					
<input type="checkbox"/> Examination permit					
<input type="checkbox"/> Others					
Action taken - - - - -					
Dear _____					
Name of Teacher					
Please allow the above-named student to complete his/her INC/NFE marks. Kindly submit the accomplished COMPLETION GRADE SHEET to the College Dean's /Department Head's Office not later than two (2) weeks from the date of completion by the student.					
_____ Dean/ Department Head	_____ Date				
Received application for Completion: _____					
Teacher's Signature over printed name					

(Adapted from SLU, 1995)

Figure 6. Proposed form: Application for Completion of INC Marks

- b. The students accomplish this application in four (4) copies: white copy is for the RO; red copy is the instructor's copy; yellow is for the school dean/department head; pink for the students.
- c. The students submit the application to the school dean/department head for approval, after which they request the faculty to receive and sign all four copies, give a copy to the faculty, return the school dean/department head's copy and retain their own copy.
- d. Upon completion by the students, the faculty submits to the school dean/department head's office the Completion Grade Sheet together with the completed requirements.
- e. The school dean/department head's office submits the said Completion Grade Sheet (See Figure 7) together with the supporting papers (*i.e.*, Incomplete Grade Contract and the completed requirements) to the RO.
- f. Upon receipt of the Completion Grade Sheet and the supporting papers, the RO retains its copy and returns to the school dean/department head's office their copy and the faculty's copy.
- g. The teacher is expected to turn in a new grade within two weeks of the date the work was submitted. Failure of the teacher to pass the grade after two weeks of completion would mean a receipt of memo from the school dean/department head.
- h. The completion grade sheet should be in quadruplicate (white copy is for the RO; red copy is the instructor's copy; yellow is for the school dean/department head; pink for the

- students).
- i. No student should be allowed to give their own grading sheet to the RO.
4. **Failure of completion of the INC.** If the students were not able to complete their deficiencies within the agreed time or the maximum of one semester
- a. The RO will give a notice to the teacher and the students.
 - b. On the part of the instructor, he /she computes the grades of the students based on the students' performance and subsequently pass the grade personally to the RO using the Completion Form (See Figure 7).

Name: (Last) _____ (First Name) _____ (Middle Name) _____		
School ID _____		Course/Year: _____
Address: _____		
Subject	Semester and Year Taken	Final Grade
_____ Instructor's Signature over Printed Name: _____ (Date): _____		
_____ Dean's/ Department Head's Signature over Printed Name _____ (Date): _____		
Received by: _____ (Registrar's office personnel)		
<i>Note: to be filled up in quadruplicate. White copy - RO; Red copy instructor; Yellow - Dean/Department Head; Pink - student</i>		

Figure 7. Proposed form: Completion Grade Sheet or Completion Form

- c. For the students, during enrollment, they will be considered as unofficially enrolled by the RO until they receive their final grade. However, for those who did not enroll after a year, their INC will automatically be converted to F (Failed) with or without the permission of the teacher.
- d. The RO will provide a notification to both the teacher and the students regarding the change of the students' grade.

11. Improvement of Student Clearance

Table 4 shows that almost 36% of students from the School of Nursing have INC grade in their major subjects. It is important to note this because the School of Nursing has a unique set-up. This includes affiliating in the clinical/community areas with different clinical instructors and attending several teachers in their major subjects (*i.e.*, team teaching). Moreover, majority of the major courses have prerequisite courses, which means that students need to finish and pass the previous course before they are allowed to take the next subject. It is vital, then, that all of these instructors should be included in the clearance form so as to monitor the student's progress and prevention of occurrence of having incomplete grade at the end of the semester. Hence, the improvement of student clearance for the School of Nursing is suggested. Moreover, it is important that the clearance should be given to the students at the start of the semester which the clinical instructor will sign every end of their rotation. See Figure 8 for the sample of the proposed Clearance form for the nursing students.

BSN STUDENT CLEARANCE FORM			
Student: _____		Year level _____	
	Remarks	Signature	Date
CI #1			
CI #2			
CI #3			
CI #4			
CI #5			
CI #6			
CI #7			
Level Coordinator			
Noted by: _____ Dean, School of Nursing			

Figure 8. Proposed Clearance form

12. Recommendations

The following recommendations are also provided to further enhance the program of the school for the prevention and control of occurrence of INC. For the students, be motivated in their study and acquire time management strategies. For instructors, give option to students that they can pass their works in soft copies instead of only hard copies (print outs) to minimize the expenses of students. Moreover, teachers should consider the quantity, amount, and clarity of projects they are requiring and inform the students about the requirements in class at the start of the semester. For the College Dean/Department Head benchmark with other colleges and universities and/or revise the policy on the grading system regarding INC. Also, evaluate the number of units a student can enroll based from his/her capacity, and for those faculty who are taking a leave or resigning, grades of student should be passed before the faculty clearance is signed. Similarly, the RO should be consistent with the implementation of re-enrollment of incomplete subjects. For the school administrators, they should make a system of paying for students so they can pay on time and avoid the failure to take the final examination. Moreover, curfew and study period for those living in the dormitories should be strictly implemented and certification of boarding houses to promote adherence to school policies in curfews and study period should be made.

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