MEMORANDUM

TO: Linda Garrelts Maclean, Associate Dean

FROM: Bryan K. Slinker, Dean

DATE: October 2, 2012

SUBJECT: Pass-Fail Grading in Pharmacy

The College of Veterinary Medicine has been grading our professional DVM students on a modified Pass/Fail system since 2003. We adopted this for a three-year trial basis across all DVM courses after running individual experiments in selected courses accompanied by surveys of both student and faculty attitudes and experiences with the experiments compared to the course with traditional A-F letter grading.

In 2006, we adopted this as the ongoing “permanent” grading scheme for our DVM students. Our experience is that pass-fail grading has been highly satisfactory for our purposes. It allows our faculty and curriculum to focus more on mastery at an acceptable threshold level and this system reduces the competition among students as we work with them to instill cooperative, team-based behavior as part of their professional development. It does not fully eliminate competitive drive – which is perhaps a good thing – but the reduction matters to our class dynamics and goals for professional development. Our experience is thus similar to the evidence noted in Pharmacy’s documentation for their request. We have never regretted adopting this grading system in our DVM education program, and we support the College of Pharmacy’s request; the rationale they have presented regarding the benefits is sound.

Note also that we have never felt that our students were disadvantaged in their competition for advanced training opportunities because of our grading system, and thus our view is that there should not be significant concerns about disadvantaging graduates when they apply to residencies, fellowships, or other graduate programs – the college has addressed these concerns in their plan. (Note that we track class ranking (based on normalized, cumulative examination scores) in the background in order to help our graduates compete for internships and residencies, for which class rank is often an important evaluative criterion.)