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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN SENATE
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY
(Final; Action)

EP.21.037   Fall 2020 Academic Policy Modifications

BACKGROUND

This document provides a proposal for academic policy modifications in response to COVID-19, large amounts of online instruction and the associated challenges with student stress. Various modifications were considered; this proposal puts forth extension of the drop deadline and establishment of a "No Record COVID" grade mode. Please refer to the companion document to see the pros and cons associated with the various options considered.

The extension of the drop deadline provides additional flexibility to students who are navigating this unique semester. We will encourage students to consult with academic advisors and the Office of Student Financial Aid when appropriate, as dropping courses can affect aid eligibility through "Satisfactory Academic Progress" and can also affect time to degree.

The adoption of "No Record COVID" (NX) grading is effectively a way to expand usage of grade replacement. A student facing academic challenges in one or more courses will not be penalized in terms of grade point average. But in order to earn credit for the course, it must be retaken.

The proposal is informed by input and feedback from discussions with groups such as the Senate Committee on Educational Policy, the Council of Deans, the Council of Undergraduate Deans, and with student senators Akil Guruparan, Dana Yun, Sofia Sinnokrot and Ben Crane.

The timeliness of this proposal is important. Motivated, in part, by student stress and anxiety associated with the Fall 2020 semester, we believe that this proposal is most beneficial if enacted prior to the Thanksgiving break. We therefore request expedited review by the Academic Senate.

RECOMMENDATION

The Senate Committee on Educational Policy recommends the Senate approve the following academic policy modifications for Fall 2020:

1. Extend the deadline to drop a course without a grade of W to December 18, the last day of finals, at 11:59 p.m. CST.

2. If a student earns a grade of F for a full- or half-semester course (1st or 2nd 8-week), the grade will be automatically converted to a grade of "No Record COVID (= NX)". The student

will not earn credit for the course, but the NX grade will not factor into the student's grade point average.

3. A grade of D+/D/D- in a full- or half-semester course will, by default, be recorded as awarded, and credit will be earned for the course. However, a student earning one of these grades will be given the option to convert these grades to "No Record COVID (= NX)." If the grade is converted to NX, the student will not earn credit for the course, and the grade is not included in the student's grade point average. This 'opt in' process will be carried out through the student's college office to ensure academic advising is incorporated into the decision.

4. For undergraduate students who avail themselves of the Campus Grade Replacement Option to replace NX grades, these attempts will not count toward the maximum of 4 distinct courses/ten hours.

5. We propose that these modifications go into effect immediately for the Fall 2020 semester.

6. If enacted, we plan a communication campaign that both informs of the current modifications and elevates student awareness of existing academic administrative accommodations, such as Incompletes ("I grades"), which may help provide the most effective accommodation to a student's specific situation in conjunction with or separately from the above listed academic policy modifications.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY

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Background information on potential academic policy modifications for Fall '20

This document provides some input on potential academic policy changes for Fall 2020. It does not take a position on any of these potential policies. Appended to this document is the latest update on policies from all Big 10 institutions.

Spring 2020/Summer 2020
The rapid shift to remote instruction at mid-semester in the spring was unanticipated and extremely disruptive. The Provost's Office, in consultation with the Council of Undergraduate Deans, worked with the Academic Senate to implement a number of policy changes that included expanded use of credit/no-credit (CR/NC) and an extended drop deadline. Expanded CR/NC meant that students could select CR/NC for courses that fulfill major and general education requirements, which is normally not allowed. The expansion of CR/NC also relaxed the limitation on the number of courses that could be selected, so students could opt to take their entire load of courses as CR/NC. One-half of all students that elected to switch a course to CR/NC grading rescinded that choice at a later date.

For the Summer session, which was fully online, there were no policy modifications.

Fall 2020
Because the format of the semester – a great deal of online instruction along with some in-person and hybrid instruction – was known in advance, we did not propose any modifications to existing academic policies.

Here, we attempt to outline the "pros and cons" of policy modifications that might be considered at this time.

1. **Credit/no-credit** – an expanded use of CR/NC could be implemented as it was in the Spring 2020 semester. Faculty would assess students as normal and submit grades for all students, which is the standard practice, as conversion to CR/NC happens automatically within Banner. Students who select CR/NC grading would receive CR for a grade of C- or higher and NC for a grade of D+ or lower. Expanded CR/NC would allow students to select this form of grading to satisfy major, minor, and general education courses. If this approach is selected, it would also be necessary to change the deadline by which students can make this selection, as the standard deadline has passed. Unlike Spring 2020, there was not a mass pivot to remote instruction this semester, so an expanded CR/NC would not be in response to course delivery modifications.
   - Pros
     i. Expanded use of CR/NC alleviates student stress associated with graded courses.
     ii. Selective use of CR/NC allows students to achieve a higher grade point average.

- Cons
    - i. Standard policy limits the number of courses taken CR/NC to a maximum of two courses per semester in the fall/spring and one course in the summer and a maximum of 18 hours of CR/NC courses in which CR is earned as applicable towards the degree. Lack of standard grading Expanding CR/NC for the Fall 2020 would mean that some students might accumulate multiple semesters' worth of credit hours of CR/NC coursework. Lack of standard grading is problematic for some graduate/professional programs (e.g., Law, Medical school) and for some professions with licensure requirements that dictate GPA minimums/minimum grades in certain courses.
    - ii. Lack of course grades, especially on a large scale, presents concerns about the level of student preparation for subsequent courses, particularly in course sequences.
    - iii. The drop deadline for Fall 2020 was October 16. A switch to CR/NC now would be unfair to students that elected to drop courses prior to the deadline. They cannot resume those courses, making a change now is therefore inequitable.

The fact that there are more "cons" than "pros" listed is not meant to be an argument against this approach. Student mental health during this pandemic is considerable concern, and alleviation of stress and anxiety associated with more grading flexibility is recognized as a significant pro.

2. **Later drop deadline** – The deadline to drop a course without a grade of W was October 16. (Note that Colleges can override that deadline for students with special circumstances.) We could relax that deadline and allow students to drop courses until a later deadline.
    - Pros
        - i. Gives the students an option to drop courses that aren't going well, will help reduce stress for some students.
        - ii. Is more equitable, does not put students who dropped courses at the deadline at as significant of a disadvantage compared to changes to CR/NC.
        - iii. Is relatively easy to implement administratively.
    - Cons
        - i. More dropped courses limits academic progress, which can negatively impact satisfactory academic progress for financial aid.
        - ii. Unlikely to affect as many students as expanded CR/NC.

3. **Expanded use of grade replacement** – another alternative would be to allow students an expanded use of grade replacement. Currently, grade replacement is limited to 10 hours/4 courses throughout a student's time at Illinois. This could be relaxed in order to encourage students to retake courses that did not go well.

- Pros
    - i. Provides students more opportunities to "make-up" for courses In which they earned a letter grade of C- or lower.
- Cons
    - i. Unlikely to alleviate current levels of student stress.
    - ii. Will slow academic progress if more students retake courses that they have passed.
    - iii. Grade replacement has been known to incentivize students intentionally earning low grades in order to be eligible.

4. **Modification of low/failing grades.** Some schools have adopted a modified grading structure (see, for example, University of Michigan below.) Grades of C- or higher are graded as normal. Grades of D+ or lower instead receive a grade of NRC = "no record COVID" which does not award credit but does not count against student grade point average. In many ways, this is a variation on the "expanded grade replacement" concept.
    - Pros
        - i. Students are not penalized for poor grades during the pandemic.
        - ii. Would provide some help on student stress and mental health.
        - iii. Helps to better ensure that students are prepared to move forward in course sequences.
    - Cons
        - i. Will slow academic progress if more students retake courses that they have passed, which can
negatively impact satisfactory academic progress for financial aid.
        - ii. Like grade replacement, NRC is likely to incentivize some students to intentionally earn a D+ or lower in a course.

        - iii. As noted under CR/NC, lack of standard grading is problematic for some graduate/professional programs (e.g., Law, Medical school) and for some professions with licensure requirements that dictate GPA minimums/minimum grades in certain courses.
        - iv. Also previously noted, the drop deadline for Fall 2020 was October 16. A modification of failing grades might be considered to be unfair to students that dropped courses before the deadline.

BTAA Institutions Pass/No Pass and Grading Policy Changes, Fall 2020

Illinois	Does not plan to change current policies
Indiana	Extended automatic withdrawal deadline to last day of classes in each session for the length of the pandemic. Changing deadline to elect P/F grading referred back to the Educational Policies Committee by the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, unclear as to if/when will appear for Senate action.
Iowa	Does not plan to change current policies
Maryland	Does not plan to change current policies
Michigan	For fall and winter semesters, undergraduate enrollments will use a modified version of traditional grading in which the regular letter grading system is maintained. Faculty will record letter grades, but students who receive D+, D, D-, or E grades will receive a "No Record Covid" (NRC) grade. Students who are interested will be able to request that an NRC grade be converted to the earned letter grade. Passing grades will not convert to a P grade, so there will be fewer opportunities to convert grades as only the NRC grade can be converted.
Michigan State	NR-C (No Record - COVID19). MSU will implement a substitute grade of NR-C for all undergraduate student grades of 1.5, 1.0, or 0.0 earned during Fall Semester 2020. Grades of 0.0 will automatically be replaced with NR-C; grades or 1.0 or 1.5 will be replaced with NR-C if the student so chooses. By default, graduate students will have the option of substituting a grade of NR-C for grades of 2.5 or below earned during Fall Semester 2020. Per request of the college, the option can be removed for specific programs, in particular those whose accreditation or other constraints make the NR-C option problematic.
Minnesota	Deadline extended to November 30th for students to decide. Faculty can change grading options to allow an S/N option until Nov 13th. They do not have to. All F's will convert to N's. Students may petition to get their F grade back (students sometimes need an actual grade, even and F, for financial aid). • S/N grades will still not be allowed for major requirements • Students can petition to have a D converted to N • This policy extends through spring 2021.
Northwestern	Northwestern introduced a new temporary grading option for undergraduates - establishing Credit/No Credit grading which will fulfill any academic requirement. After the end of Spring Quarter (after students have seen grades), they may elect to change up to one third of the grades they earned this academic year to Credit/No Credit. Graduating seniors will also have the option to change one Fall Quarter grade in early January.
Ohio State	Ohio State is using PA/NP for autumn and probably also for spring. The undergrad student gov't pushed hard for it.
Penn State	Senate Policy 49-70 may be temporarily enabled by the University Faculty Senate to supplement Senate Policy 49-60 "Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory– Baccalaureate and Associate Degree Candidates" under a situation of special Senate concern. When enacted, there is no limit to the number of courses

	that may be taken for credit by any baccalaureate or associate degree candidates under the satisfactory grade/passing grade/no grade (SAT/V/Z) optional and temporary grading system, subject to regulations of the college and the limits of the degree program in which the candidate is enrolled; the SAT/V/Z grading system option also applies to General Education courses; the SAT/V/Z grading system option is available only for the designated semester to candidates after conventional grades have been submitted by instructors. Courses may not be offered under the SAT/V/Z grading system.
Purdue	Purdue Senate extended the last day to withdraw from class and the last day to switch to P/NP to the last Friday BEFORE finals week. All pre-COVID rules for how a P can be used to meet degree requirements stand. So we have the usual grading policies only extended deadlines to make change to their registrations.
Rutgers	Does not plan to change current policies
Wisconsin	Does not plan to change current policies