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

EP.21.062   Spring 2021 Academic Policy Modifications

BACKGROUND
This document proposes modifications to the Academic Policy for Spring 2021. Motivated in part by student stress and anxiety associated with the Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 semesters, it is a response to the ongoing COVID-19 environment and the knowledge that our campus will continue to deliver a majority of courses online in Spring 2021.

The Senate Committee on Educational Policy (EP) recognizes that our students face continuing challenges, including heightened stress and anxiety. We also understand the major impact the last two semesters has had on students, staff, and faculty. Numerous stories of understanding and compassion exist in every college, and in the spirit of this compassion, we have even seen signs of instructors awarding higher than usual grades to mitigate the legitimate challenges of remote learning in a pandemic.

EP has been concerned as to how Academic Policy modifications are impacting overall learning during this COVID-19 pandemic. We know modifications to Academic Policy may lead to less motivated students, and we understand how these types of students can affect group-based classroom dynamics in a negative manner. We also know modifications may impact progress towards degree completion and the prospect to apply to graduate or professional schools. EP asked for data to be gathered over Winter break in order to prepare this proposal. We sought reports and feedback from multiple entities on campus that could provide more information about our students' struggles and our campus learning outcomes. This included data centered on the effects COVID-19 had on the Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 semesters, and was collected from the Counseling Center, McKinley Health Center, Office of the Registrar, Office of the Provost, Office of Undergraduate Admissions, Faculty Staff Assistance Services, Student Assistance Center (Emergency Dean), Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES), Faculty Academic Integrity Report (FAIR), and the Council of Undergraduate Deans.

EP examined the effect CR/NC (credit/no credit) has had on Dean's Lists; the types of letter grades students have been replacing with the CR/NC option; the impact on McKinley Health Center, the Counseling Center, Student Assistance Center, and DRES; the increase in FAIR incidents; and student concerns and issues as reported by the Council of Undergraduate Deans, a body which represents the largest group of advisors on campus, advisors who deal with the day-to-day concerns, needs, anxiety, and stress of thousands of undergraduate students.
In examining the data from Spring 2020 (46,438 students) and Fall 2020 (50,110 students),EP noted that nearly every college experienced a rise in the overall grade point averages (GPAs) of

their students when comparing Spring 2019 to Spring 2020, and Fall 2019 to Fall 2020. The exception was the Graduate College, where a .02 decrease in overall GPAs was seen in Spring 2019 to Spring 2020. In Spring 2020, 70.93% of letter grades earned were A grades; 19.52% were B grades; 6.55% were C grades; 1.37% were D grades; 1.42% were F grades; and below 1% were non-letter grades (ABS, NR, I, DFR, etc.). In Fall 2020, 70.2% of letter grades earned were A grades; 19.09% were B grades; 6.31% were C grades; 1.68% were D grades; 1.97% were F grades; and below 1% were non-letter grades (ABS, NR, I, DFR, etc.).

CR/NC grades are not factored into a student's GPA, and D and F grades under the CR/NC option receive no credit. In Spring 2020, students had to choose the CR/NC option before the official grade submission deadline. 25.24% of students elected to use the CR/NC grade option, with 9.91% of their total grades CR/NC, whereas in Fall 2020, 17.70% of students used the CR/NC option, with 6.86% of their total grades CR/NC. In Spring 2020, 10.07% of A grades were changed to CR; 22.51% of B grades were changed to CR; 43.38% of C grades were changed to CR; 34.69% of D grades (875 of 2522) were changed to NC; and 49.35% of F grades were changed to NC.

In Fall 2020, students were able to choose the CR/NC option after the official grade submission deadline. In doing so, 1.3% of A grades were changed to CR; 8.95% of B grades were changed to CR; 46.09% of C grades were changed to CR; 25.97% of D grades were changed to NC (894 of 3422); and 95.10% of F grades were changed to NC. The majority of F grade to NC changes were done at the request of the Undergraduate Deans.

EP worked swiftly and thoughtfully to bring this proposal to the first Senate meeting of the Spring 2021 semester, knowing that any modifications to academic policies should be implemented quickly in order to facilitate advising needs. The modifications have been written with the belief they may help ease the stress and anxiety of our higher achieving students, plus help those students who have confronted exceptionally challenging educational and personal issues. The modifications include grade options that do not impact student GPAs, and a credit option for those who feel that the grade earned in a course is not representative of their more typical academic work. EP also realizes an early decision on any changes to the Academic Policy would lessen any angst associated with the knowledge such modifications were in a planning process.

RECOMMENDATION
The Senate Committee on Educational Policy recommends the Senate approve the following academic policy modifications for Spring 2021.

This proposal includes two components:

1. Extend the deadline to drop any course without a grade of W to the last day of instruction; this includes all instructional periods (POT1, POTA, POTB, nonstandard):

- The last day to drop a first-half semester course (POTA): Friday, March 19, 11:59 pm Central Time.
- The last day to drop a second-half semester course (POTB): Wednesday, May 5, 11:59 pm Central Time.
- The last day to drop a full-semester course (POT1): Wednesday, May 5, 11:59 pm Central Time.
- The last day to drop a nonstandard course: Last day of instruction, 11:59 pm Central Time.
- Extending the drop deadline to the last day of instruction does not change the refund schedule.
- Students who drop a course via Self-Service, or who completely withdraw from the semester, before the drop deadline will not receive W grades. Students who successfully petition their college for a course drop, or who completely withdraw from the semester, after the drop deadline will receive W grades.

  Rationale: This modification allows students to drop a course at the end of the instructional sequence, when they are able to make a more informed decision than the current mid-term deadline allows. While some students receive mid-term grades from instructors, other students may not know how well they are doing in a course until after the normal drop deadline, which is midway through the course instruction period.

2. Allow students to use a Pass COVID/No Pass COVID grade option for any course. The Pass COVID grade option will apply to grades of D- or higher, which currently serve as passing grades on our campus, and will carry course credit. A No Pass COVID grade option equates to a failing grade of F and will not carry course credit. Pass COVID/No Pass COVID grades do not factor into a student's GPA.

   - Courses in which the Pass COVID grade is earned will fulfill major, minor, and general education requirements.
   - The use of the Pass COVID/No Pass COVID grade option suspends the use of the CR/NC option for the Spring 2021 semester.
   - Undergraduate students will be able to select the Pass COVID/No Pass COVID option after the May 21 grade submission deadline. The selection period (May 22-27) gives students a six-day window of time to decide if they want to exchange a letter grade for credit or no credit with no consequence to their GPA.
   - Graduate students will work with the Graduate College to submit requests for the Pass COVID/No Pass COVID option.
   - The deadline for undergraduate and graduate students to elect, or rescind, the Pass COVID/No Pass COVID grade option is Thursday, May 27, 11:59 pm Central Time.
   - Grades of F that are a result of an academic integrity violation will not have this option.
   - A Pass COVID grade will display as PZ on a student's academic record; a No Pass COVID grade will display as NZ.

- This grade option is not available to students in the College of Law, or students in the MD or DVM programs.

    Rationale: Unlike the CR/NC grade option, the Pass COVID/No Pass COVID grade option captures more students earning passing grades (A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-).

    In CR/NC, credit is given only to grades of A, B and C; grades of D receive no credit. The Pass COVID/No Pass COVID option provides a significant accommodation for students in recognition of the challenges they have faced in light of COVID-19. It also helps undeclared students who have struggled greatly to not have such an immense GPA barrier to their declaration of a major and continued progress. The rationale for not adding the D grade to a CR/NC option is simple. We did not want to alter the definition of a grading mode that has been in existence; CR is given only for grades of A, B, or C in the CR/NC option.

    Why confine the date range to select Pass COVID/No Pass COVID grade option to May 22-27? The Office of Admissions, Office of the Registrar, and Office of the Provost discussed at length the six-day window as being a mixture of business days and a weekend. This allows students to reflect on a decision over a weekend, and it gives students four business days to consult with advisors and college offices. All of this would be after months of communication and information about the grading mode. More importantly, a May 22-27 window allows the process to take place <u>after</u> grades have been submitted; the official grade deadline is May 21. Students should know the majority, if not all, their grades by this time so they can make the best decision for their degree progress.

    Another reason has to do with the request process. A Pass COVID/No Pass COVID request form will rely on data that is only available after final grades are posted to ensure accurate submissions are processed in a timely manner. As mentioned above, we believe there is more value to setting the date range for selection of this grading option to after the official grade submission deadline. We will have months to publicize the Pass COVID/No Pass COVID grade option, and advisors will be able to assist students with any questions they have about the process.

    Why the May 27 deadline date? All of the post-processes of degree certification can begin only when the six-day window of Pass COVID/No Pass COVID selection has ended. After much discussion, it was confirmed May 27 is the last possible date we can use for a deadline without having significant impacts on campus. These include pushing end of term academic standing reviews into new student registration programming, which is next to impossible with most college offices and advisors, as these are often the same people. A later deadline would impact even more our ability to issue official transcripts, which holds up students needing those transcripts for graduate school applications, etc. This pushes into the degree certification timeline, as well. The Thursday, May 27 deadline also gives instructors who miss the Friday, May 21 grade submission deadline a

small allowance of time to submit late grades. In a Fall 2020 Senate meeting, we heard from graduate student senators how our grade submission deadlines have been difficult to manage, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that students always have the option to petition their college to elect/rescind a grading option after a deadline. In Spring 2020, students had a large window of time to select CR/NC before grades were due officially. The Office of the Registrar ended up processing thousands of CR/NC requests to reverse what students had selected (elect and rescind). Conversely, in Fall 2020, the Registrar's Office processed fewer than 250 requests to reverse decisions. The Fall 2020 process allowed students a small window of time (three business days) for CR/NC selection <u>after</u> grades were due.

EP proposes these modifications go into effect immediately for the Spring 2021 semester. If enacted, a communication campaign for students, academic staff, and faculty will be implemented. This plan will explain the proposed modifications, plus continue to make students aware 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.

EP would like to emphasize the importance of advising at this time. While students are given autonomy and choice in the selection of grade modifications as seen in this proposal, there is no substitute for working with campus academic advisors, who not only understand fully a unit's curriculum, but the pathways needed to complete a degree in the most expedient and steadfast manner. Students who plan to attend graduate school should commit to seeking advising guidance on the impact that Pass COVID/No Pass COVID and previous CR/NC grades may have on their future options.

EP would like to thank all of the various campus entities (mentioned in the beginning of this proposal) for compiling data over the Winter break in such a swift and thorough manner. The data helped drive our conversations to suggest the modifications presented in this proposal.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY

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