

Item: Recommendation Regarding Pass/Fail Grading In The 2020-2021 Academic Year:

Recommendation: The University should not return to Pass/Fail grading for the upcoming year.

Rationale: The Pass/Fail(P/F) option was an urgent response resulting from the COVID 19 pandemic that occurred towards the end of the term. It was to mitigate the effects of quickly closing the campus and moving classes to virtual instruction. Given that the situation is no longer urgent, there should be a return to normal grading practices.

Context: Pass/Fail (P/F) grading was adopted in the Winter term of the 2019-2020 academic year when it became clear that the University would have to quickly pivot to an alternate learning environment. Because of the inevitable disruption in courses, and the parallel disturbance of the lives of the students as they returned home or made other arrangements, steps were taken to ensure students would not be negatively impacted by the situation. Faculty were encouraged to re-weight grade schemes, course content was reduced to the essentials, and it was recommended to give students the benefit of the doubt where possible. One of the measures used was to offer the option of P/F grading. Students were permitted to convert some or all of their grades for 3-credit winter 2020 term courses to P or F. The choice was irrevocable and would persist on the transcript. This would allow students who felt that the switch to on-line teaching had negatively impacted their studies ,and that the resulting grades were not reflective of the students' actual abilities. Opting for a P or F grade would avoid having a poor numerical grade reflected on the record . Many Universities in Canada instituted similar policies.

While the P/F option was a useful response to an unforeseen situation, it is not without its problems, not the least of which is that only numerical grades are used in GPA calculations, Dean's list assignments, and so on. Ranking student performance becomes difficult if many grades are absent. Additionally, it is not clear how P/F grades would be viewed by other institutions, such as professional or graduate schools, to which our students might apply in the future. The appearance of such grades on a transcript for this year is to be expected, but perhaps not going forward. There also was not a large uptake of the option among students. Only 620 grades were adjusted for 386 students out of a total enrolment of over 5300 students(522 to P, 98 to F). This term, students will be aware from the beginning what the teaching model and grade scheme will be, so there is no need to introduce a further complication.

Going Forward:

Faculty will return to standard numerical grading practices. The actual methods of assessment, and their weighting, may change because of the on-line model, but P/F will not be an option for a final course grade.

Students' questions regarding this policy should be referred to the appropriate Chair or Dean, but it would be helpful if the University released a statement explaining this situation.