



MONTCLAIR STATE
UNIVERSITY

Academic Affairs Council

Recommendation of a Pass/No-Credit Option for the Spring 2020 Semester

April 17, 2020 - Approved by the Academic Affairs Council

The Academic Affairs Council recommends the adoption of a Pass/No-Credit (P/NC) grading system for Spring 2020 courses. The P/NC system is recommended for the Spring 2020 Semester on the basis of opt-in by individual students on a course-by-course basis, and in place of the extended option for Pass/Fail grading for this Semester. The P/NC grading system is recommended to include the following elements:

1. In each course graded as Pass/No-Credit, students receive a grade of Pass (P), which indicates academic credit for the course, or No-Credit (NC), which indicates no academic credit.
2. The criteria for a passing grade (P), and the academic significance, are the same as those for a course graded Pass/Fail.
3. Courses with a P/NC grade are not used in computation of a student's GPA. In particular, the grade of NC has no effect on a student's GPA, unlike a grade of F.
4. Transcripts where P or NC appears would include a notation: "Students could designate some coursework to be graded under a P/NC system in Spring 2020 due to unforeseeable circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic."
5. A Grade of "No Credit" (NC) would operate equivalently to a Withdrawal (WD) regarding repetition of the Course.
6. The Pass/No-Credit option would apply to courses eligible for Pass/Fail grading in Spring 2020, with the same exclusions and conditions.
7. The deadline for a student to opt for P/NC grading is 11:59PM EDT on May 13th, 2020.

Rationale

A grade of 'No Credit' (NC) accurately reflects a student's academic work while minimizing spillover effects. The AAC is worried that the current policy does not sufficiently address those students most dramatically affected by the pandemic. A GPA lowered due to F grades in P/F courses could discourage students, leading them to give up and not persist in their studies. The use of NC grades avoids the creation of additional hurdles and discouragement for students

who have been the most significantly impacted by the many ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conversely, a grade of 'Pass' (P) allows students to receive academic credit for passing-level work in a course without impact on their individual GPA of a passing grade below their current GPA. That is, students earning a P do not have their GPA lowered as a result of their struggles to handle the unforeseen challenges of adaptation to online-only instruction, as well as non-academic challenges related to the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

While an instructor could, as a means of acknowledging how the student has been negatively impacted by the Pandemic, use their discretion to assign a passing grade to a student whose work has not met their minimum expectations, this does a disservice to the student. For example, an academically unwarranted pass given to a student will allow them to enroll in subsequent courses for which they are not prepared. Moreover, the assignment of unwarranted passing grades does a disservice to students whose work merited a passing grade on academic grounds. The alternative of grade of NC mitigates this dilemma for instructors rightly concerned about the academic future of their students, but focuses the academic impact of a non-passing grade only to repeating the course (should it be required by their program.)

This adoption of Pass/No-Credit should also reduce grade grievances for students who, due to nonacademic circumstances, perform unexpectedly poorly on significant end-of-term assessments, and fail to demonstrate work at passing standards.

The recommended deadline of May 13th for students to opt-in to Pass/No-Credit grading for a given course is one day after the end of the Spring Semester, which provides students a better opportunity to make an informed decision. While all parties were uniform in their encouragement to instructors to reduce end-of-term high-stakes coursework, we are worried that some students will gamble on achieving a Pass yet suffer a Fail because of unanticipated events late in the course. Moving the deadline back gives those students the best opportunity to avoid academically undeserved consequences, even though we recognize it would increase the burden on the Registrar's staff.