

Pass/Fail Options during COVID-19

Conversations from the Partnership Listserv April 7, 2020

During these unprecedented circumstances, some post-secondary institutions are offering P/F or S/U options to students. I would like to hear opinions on when this may or may not be a good option for high schoolers. Are there situations when a grade of C is preferred over a P or S? Should a student take a D over a U (Unsatisfactory)? Will these choices affect entrance into competitive programs? Future financial aid and scholarships?

Some institutions may allow for flexibility in interpreting transcripts with P/F grades earned during Spring 2020, but will all?

I appreciate any ideas to consider as we coach our counselors and advisors.

Madeline, Colorado

Our college president is currently not in favor of providing P/F grades. She is concerned that it may have more of a negative impact than positive for students who are transferring to other institutions as well as implications for financial aid. Additionally, our system is not able to effectively handle an immediate switch to P/F grades.

Thank you.

Mara, Maryland

Good morning!

Our president is not in favor of Pass/Fail either. We have to consider how a dual credit students' college grades are going to affect their high school grades and their high school GPAs.

Here are some reasons we will not be using Pass/Fail:

❓ Pass/Fail does not provide all students with the opportunity to raise their overall semester average/GPA by being engaged in their learning.

❓ The NCAA Clearinghouse treats a grade of “Pass” as the lowest possible passing grade. This could put students who are interested in collegiate athletics at a disadvantage compared to students coming from districts that recorded numerical grades.

❓ Having numerical grades for each semester allows high school students in year-long courses to earn full credit if the average of the two semesters is 70 or higher. This averaging, which helps students, could not occur if students received “Pass” or “Fail” for the second semester.

Have a phenomenal day!!

Kelley, Texas

We did offer the P/NP option to all our students, but I sent out a letter to all high school counselors to strongly discourage our dual enrollment students from taking this option because it is quite possible the class will not then transfer, which was the point of dual enrollment.

We also, however, moved our withdrawal date to be the last day of the semester, in conjunction with offering the P/NP option, so that helps. Any dual enrollment student that is passing should just take their letter grade. Any dual enrollment student not passing should withdraw.

Now the student getting a D is a gray area. No answers there. 😞

Diane, Georgia

Are there any schools that are choosing to offer this pass/no pass option to high school students and have found it receptive from the high schools?

Heidi, Minnesota

Absolutely. We are allowing students (both our "traditional" students and our concurrent enrollment students) to determine whether they want a grade or a pass/fail at the end of the semester after their grades have been calculated. The high schools like this option because it gives students a choice and they will have all of the information to make the best decision for themselves.

Steve, Michigan

We are offering P/F to traditional students and dual credit students both. We did draft a document to our DC students detailing what a pass/fail means, including things they should consider for their future studies if they choose a pass/fail, and we have extended the withdrawal date. We did this because, as with many things, we find our dual credit students have a knowledge gap about the "ins and outs" of college, including transcripts, transfer credit, etc. Having said that, our state colleges did all agree to accept P/F for Spring 2020 for course equivalency and gen ed requirements both.

We have just as many dual credit students disadvantaged by the move to remote learning. We do not think it would be right to offer P/F to our "traditional" students and not our dual credit students.

Erika, Kentucky

In this time of extraordinary circumstances the Department of Education is asking all institutions who receive Title IV funding to work with students and their situations. Resources: <https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus>

Editorial perspective from a former and current Big Ten system academic advisor and institutional leadership:

If a high school family and their student has an environmentally and personally impacted situation where an "S" grade (if allowed by the University offering the dual enrollment) is the BEST situation for that student to continue making progress toward their degree (s) during COVID-19, then as professionals we need to consider what is best for the STUDENT right now and expect that institutions of higher education will accept those "S" grades as transfer credit just as if it was any

other passing grade. Fear of "not transferring" should not have more priority over what the student needs right now to be successful and earn a passing grade. "S" is passing.

If the institution that the student is considering does not accept this in their academic policy for transfer of credit, then I encourage ANY student to consider their options and go elsewhere for their post-secondary education. That institution may not share the same values of student success as of institutions who are committed passionately to student success and learning.

Kind regards,

Carla, Minnesota

Hello all,

We, as a college are not likely to move toward P/F grading and we have instructed our high school teachers they must maintain the same grading policies/scale that we follow. We have extended our drop deadlines for these classes, however, in an effort to 'do no harm' to students who did not make the transition well to online. For lab classes, we are open to Incompletes as long as there is a plan to make up the time within 6 weeks of the end of the class. Also, we are allowing some dual credit class cancellations for school districts where most students have little to no Internet access (we're in NW WI).

Stay well!

Sincerely,

Jeanne, Wisconsin

Yes and we have been talking to each of our high school's administration, staff and teachers.

Most think that A-F grading is what most of their students will be able to continue with, but they appreciate the option.

For the University of Minnesota, system wide, our President decided that ALL undergraduates would have the student option to stay A-F grading or choose S-N.

All agree that students will talk with their teachers, who will talk with the guidance counselors and administration, they may call a student 1:1 meeting to check in all of this done before any changes are sent to the University.

Hope this is helpful

Carla, Minnesota

At our school, we are going with a Pass/In Progress/No Pass. With the CEP students, they will receive a P/NP

on their high school transcript and a letter grade on their college transcript that is in line with what the college is doing during Distance Learning. For our students, this works very well, parents and students like this option because they do not want to have issues with credits transferring in the future. We have been very fortunate during this time because we have a portion of the work through online classrooms during the normal school year, so the transition to distance learning has had minimal stress.

I think it is important to consider the long term impact our decisions will make on the future opportunities the students will have. At the same time, Whatever the decision is it needs to be across MNSCU not just a select few. The more consistency we have the better.

*Great discussion. Thank you for including me,
Jennifer, Minnesota*

Here is a recent announcement we sent to our high school partners that will address how we are handling this. Most higher ed. institutions in the state of Utah are handling this the same with slight variations. Background: all public schools and higher ed. institutions have moved to online delivery . . .

To All Concurrent Enrollment Partners:

I would like to share both a major update as well as address a concern that was brought up with regards to students and parents struggling at home with their course loads.

Pass/Withdraw Option

First of all as many of you have heard, SLCC and many of the other Utah institutions of higher education have decided to add an option for traditional adult students to receive a P/W grade in lieu of their final grade toward the end of the semester.

As of today that option is now available to SLCC concurrent enrollment students for Spring semester only. Additionally, SLCC has extended the withdrawal deadline for CE students until April 30 for students wish to make the decision to withdraw sooner than the May 31 deadline listed below.

Here are some things you should know:

Students can choose Pass/Withdrawal only **AFTER** they have received their final Spring Semester course grade. The process to do this will be announced in a later email.

For each Spring Semester course that the student receives a letter grade for, they will have until May 31 to change that course grade to Pass/Withdrawal.

A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C grades change to Pass

C-, D+, D, D-, E grades change to Withdrawal

If a student changes a letter grade to a Withdrawal that student registration will no longer be eligible for state concurrent enrollment funding. Grades that are changed to a Pass will be. High schools will need to be sure that the high school transcript reflects this so that the grade on the college transcript matches with the grade on the high school transcript.

Changing a course from a letter grade to Pass/Withdrawal means *that course will not be included in the student's GPA calculation*. Non-major Gen Ed courses will transfer to USHE institutions with a Pass grade attached.

However, there is a catch with Pass/Withdrawal. Several majors courses (including Gen Ed courses that count toward a major) might not count toward majors credit if the grade is changed to Pass/Withdrawal. Because of this, *students must work very closely with their instructors and concurrent enrollment coordinators/counselors to determine whether Pass/Withdrawal is right for them.*

The Pass/Withdrawal option for Spring semester 2020 gives students flexibility to pursue their learning goals and manage their education progress.

Balancing the Concurrent Enrollment College Load at Home

We are aware that many students who are now working on their courses at home are having to resource-share computers and internet access with other siblings and parents. This can be particularly challenging for concurrent students who carry a heavy course load, and even more challenging for parents who may be attending SLCC or another college themselves. Our heart goes out to those students and parents.

While our accreditation guidelines do not allow us to reduce the required contact hours or course load, and reducing curriculum requirements would set students up to struggle in subsequent coursework, our hope is that the option mentioned above will help alleviate some of the anxiety that they may feel, knowing that there is an alternative if the load becomes too much.

As always we are here to help answer any questions you may have. Thanks for all you do to help support this program during such trying times.

Brandon, Utah

Dear colleagues,

This may or may not be helpful, but I will share with you our reasons for not using Pass/Fail for our own courses at Walla Walla Community Colleges. Some of this may be relevant to high school students' transcripts in terms of unintended negative consequences:

From Scott Copeland:

Chad, Carli [Schiffner, Deputy Executive Director of Education at SBCTC] asked that I reach out to you with a response with your grade/no grade question. I just reached out to our coding, research, financial aid and transfer colleagues here at SBCTC. I think you have covered potential issues with a possible change to pass/no pass. Collectively here's the potential unintended consequences to students responses:

- DTA or DTA/MRP students
 - o ICRC/JTC restricts or limits non-graded courses. Transferability in potential jeopardy without traditional letter/decimal grades, specifically in the Basic Skills and Distribution requirements.
 - o Most baccalaureate majors do not allow Pass/Fail grades to apply to degree requirements...or those that do, treat Pass as a 1.0 grade point.
- Prerequisite enrolled students
 - o Selective admission programs, including but not limited to, nursing, teacher education, graduate programs, require graded courses. Failure to award traditional grades would most likely exclude a student from admission consideration.
- Financial Aid/Scholarship students
 - o Satisfactory Academic Progress rules for federal student aid do not count Pass/Fail grades into the cumulative grade point average—they do count for attempted and completed coursework, however.
 - o Academic scholarship students may require a minimum grade point to continue to receive their funding. May be more of an impact with external versus institutional scholarships
- External certification/licensure
 - o Not known, but the potential exists that students seeking external program certification and/or licensure may require traditional grades. Allied health programs?
- PeopleSoft Data Conversion
 - o Potential migration from Legacy to PeopleSoft for a temporary grading modification.
- Transcript Notation
 - o Not sure if the transcript key indicated Pass/Fail grades---if not a transcript notation would need to be added.

So the collective reply would be to continue the grading practice currently employed by Walla Walla to first, protect your students from unintended

consequences, and then to eliminate additional staff time in amending grade configuration set-up for each class.

Richard, Washington