

**Subject:** Grading Options for Fall 2020 Undergraduate Students

**Should the CR/DCR/NCR option be reinstated for Fall Semester 2020?**

During Spring Semester 2020, the mid-semester Covid-19 driven closure of Lehigh's campus combined with the rapid transition to online learning led to great confusion and stress among our students. As part of the University's response, the Provost – with the support of the Educational Policy and Executive Committees – enacted the CR/DCR/NCR grading option for Spring Semester 2020. The key components of this option are summarized below. This option was especially generous since it allowed undergraduate students to choose credit/no credit grading *after* grades were reported to students at the end of the semester. As can be seen in the usage table below, 47% of Lehigh's undergraduates opted for one or more of their courses to be converted to credit/no credit during Spring Semester 2020. Of these, 57 students – about 1% of all undergraduates – opted to have all of their courses converted to credit/no credit.

**Pro:** During Fall Semester 2020, Covid-19 continued to restrict activities. Among the students attending virtually, there have been reports of difficulties involving internet connections and time zones. In addition, the decision to allow in-person classes, limited access to libraries, dining halls, gyms, etc. was reversed mid-semester after an increase in cases and the university went back to entirely online. A significant number of students who began the semester on campus have returned home. As a result of these and other issues; student representatives, counselors, gryphons, and faculty have reported increased student stress especially with respect to grades.

**Con:** Spring Semester 2020 was *sui generis*. The dramatic actions of the University in mid-March to deal with the severe impact of Covid-19 were unprecedented. However, through the summer, faculty and students were under no illusions that the Fall Semester would be “normal”. In particular, the administration was careful in its communications with students and prospective students to make sure that they understood the uncertainties. Faculty, students, and the administration spent many hours during the summer preparing for the Fall. Specifically, with the support of LTS, faculty prepared to provide quality learning online during the Fall Semester.

There are two disadvantages to reinstating the CR/DCR/NCR option in Fall Semester 2020. First, only 57 students adopted this option for all of their courses, the other 2,264 students were selective. After they received their semester grades, they chose – almost without exception - the credit/no credit option only for those grades that were C- or below. Therefore, one of the long-term effects of the credit/no credit option was to improve GPAs of students experiencing difficulties in one or more of their courses and therefore make it more difficult for faculty and advisers to get an accurate view of student's progress. In addition, the option to exclude bad grades from the GPA has not only led to a suspension of the much sought after Dean's List but also complicated selection of the best students for various honors, programs, employment, and post Lehigh education opportunities.

Second, for Lehigh to reinstate CR/DCR/NCR with its very liberal options seems to be a statement that the quality of Lehigh's education is still below where it should be – it is Lehigh education “lite”. It is important in this increasingly competitive higher education market that Lehigh not only provide a quality undergraduate education but make it clear to current students, prospective students, and their parents that Lehigh is continuing to provide a high value education even during the continuing Covid-19 situation.

**Recommendation:** Due to time pressure, the Educational Policy Committee did not decide on a single proposal for dealing with student stress concerning grades. However, rather than reinstate the

CR/DCR/NCR option, there seemed to be more support for modifying existing procedures to meet students' concerns. These procedures are Drop/Add (R&P 3.8.4) and Pass/Fail (R&P 3.3). Modifications of one or both of these existing procedures would have the great advantage of being better understood both inside and outside the university.

Alternative 1: Modify Drop/Add (R&P 3.8.4) to allow a temporary extension of the choice of this option through the thirteenth week of the semester. During Fall Semester 2020, this would allow a student to drop a course through November 20, 2020. This modification in R&P 3.8.4 are shown below in red text.

Alternative 2: Modify Pass/Fail (R&P 3.3) to allow a student to choose pass/fail even for courses that are otherwise ineligible for such grading. In addition, increase the limit on the number of pass/fail courses that a student is allowed to take. These modifications in R&P 3.3 are shown below in red text.

Alternative 3: Modify both Drop/Add and Pass/Fail as stated in alternatives 1 and 2.

Alternative 4: Reinstate the CR/DCR/NCR option but require that students choose this option before semester grades are posted. This modification would delete bullet 2 in the CR/DCR/NCR summary.

Alternative 5: Reinstate the unchanged CR/DCR/NCR option.

*Frank R. Gunter, Educational Policy Chairperson, frg2@lehigh.edu*

**SUMMARY OF SPRING 2020 CR/DCR/NCR GRADING** (Provost Letter of 19 March 2020)

1. “UG Students will be able to elect out of the regular grading system and convert a course grade to what we will call the CR (credit) grading system.”
2. “They can make this choice beginning in April and any time through to after grades are reported to students at the end of the semester.”
3. Grading system
  - a. CR replaces grades of C- or better.
  - b. DCR replaces grades of D+, D, or D-. “Credit is given but this grade may not be satisfactory for certain requirements.”
  - c. NCR replaces a grade of F.
4. “CR/DCR/NCR courses will not count toward the existing limit of six P/F courses in a four-year degree program, nor will there be a limit on the number of Spring 2020 courses that a student may convert to the CR grading system.”
5. “Courses that receive a grade of CR will fulfill college and major requirements, even in cases where a grade of P (passing) would not. This policy supersedes department and college grading policies.”
6. “Grades of CR, DCR, and NCR will not be computed in a student’s GPA.”

**CR/DCR/NCR USAGE IN SPRING SEMESTER 2020**

<b>Total UG Students</b>	4,890	100%
<b>Total Selected CR/DCR/NCR</b>	2,321	47%
<b>CR/DCR/NCR for All Classes</b>	57	1%
<b>CR/DCR/NCR Change for Some Classes</b>	2,264	46%

## ALTERNATIVES TO CR/DCR/NCR GRADING

### Alternative 1: Modify R&P 3.8.4 Drop/Add Period

A withdrawal from a course within the first ten days of instruction is not recorded on the student's record.

A student wishing to withdraw from a course after the tenth day, but not after the ~~eleventh~~ **thirteenth** week of instruction, must follow the procedure set up by the registrar and notify both the advisor and course instructor.

A student who officially withdraws from the university or a course after the tenth day of classes through the ~~eleventh~~ **thirteenth** week of instruction receives grades of W in the course(s) for which he or she is registered. After the ~~eleventh~~ **thirteenth** week of instruction, no grade of W may be given.

A student who reduces his or her course load below the minimum required for standing as a full-time student but does not withdraw from the university, becomes a part-time student for the rest of that semester.

Some areas affected by part-time status are financial aid, athletic eligibility, veteran's affairs, selective service, and immigration status.

A student may add any course through the fifth day of the semester. From the sixth to the tenth day of the semester, students wishing to add a course must follow the procedure set up by the registrar, obtaining the permission of the course instructor and notifying the advisor.

After the tenth day of the semester, students must petition the Committee on the Standing of Students to add a course.

## Alternative 2: Modify R&P 3.3 Pass-Fail System for Undergraduates

### 3.3.1 Student Option System

The pass-fail grading option is intended to encourage students to take challenging courses outside the major field that otherwise might be avoided for fear of lowering grade point averages. Students should avoid wasting this option on unsuitable courses, such as introductory courses having no college-level prerequisite or co-requisite. The restrictions on the use of the system are listed below.

The restrictions on the use of the system are:

- 1) Before a student can take a course pass-fail, he or she must have achieved sophomore standing, have declared a major, and be in good academic standing. ~~(Suspend the previous sentence.)~~ In addition, the student must abide by any restrictions on pass-fail grading imposed by the student's program of study.
- 2) Courses numbered below 100 are generally not available for pass-fail grading. However, the College offering a course may establish a petition process to determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether a student is allowed to take a course numbered below 100 with pass-fail grading. A student may designate one course pass-fail in any one semester. ~~(Suspend the previous three sentences.)~~ He or she may take a maximum of ~~six~~ **ten** courses pass-fail per undergraduate career if the student is on a four-year program, or a maximum of ~~eight~~ **twelve** courses per undergraduate career with a five-year, two-degree program. If a student changes a course after the first ten days of instruction from pass-fail grading to regular grading, as provided in paragraph 4 below, that course shall still count toward the maximum number of courses taken pass-fail during the student's undergraduate career.
- 3) Each college faculty shall decide under what conditions and which courses or categories of courses throughout the university may be taken for pass-fail credit by students registered in that college, except for courses designated specifically for pass-fail grading by sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3, respectively, and by paragraph 8 of this section. ~~(Suspend the previous sentence.)~~ Each college shall keep the educational policy committee advised of changes in its rules.
- 4) A student must complete and file the pass-fail form with the registrar no later than the end of the ~~thirteenth week~~ ~~fifteenth day~~ of instruction. After the deadline no change of status is permitted except under the conditions stated in paragraph 6. Summer/Winter session deadlines are prorated according to the length of the session. The course designated for pass-fail grading by the student require the written acknowledgement of the academic advisor.

The instructor giving the course is not officially notified which students are taking the course pass-fail. Therefore, a regular letter grade is reported for the pass-fail students. The registrar then records "P" for reported letter grades from A through D-, and "F" for a reported letter grade of F.

- 5) Under this system, the student surrenders his or her equity to letter grades of A through D-, except as specified in paragraph 7. A grade of P applies to the student's graduation requirements but is not used in the computation of the cumulative average. ~~An F grade is computed in the normal manner.~~ **An F grade does not apply to the student's graduation requirements and is not used in the computation of the cumulative average.**

- 6) If a student changes his or her program such that a course previously taken for pass-fail grading is not allowed for pass-fail grading in the new program, the student must submit a petition to the committee on standing of students requesting acceptance by the new program of the pass-fail grading for that course, or substitution of the original letter grade submitted by the instructor for the pass-fail grade, or the substitution of another course for the course taken pass-fail. The recommendation of the curriculum director must accompany the petition. Acceptance into a program that does not allow pass-fail grading in a required course is the only valid reason for converting the grade for a completed course from pass-fail to a letter grade.
- 7) Courses at the 400 level are excluded from pass-fail grading.