



Lehigh University Student Senate XXXIII
October 20, 2020

Introduction

Student Senate acknowledges common concerns of grade inflation and how employers will view GPAs from Lehigh given another adjusted grading policy this semester, but also the unforeseen hurdles this semester has thrown at students and professors.

It is to our understanding that some believe an adjusted grading policy this semester (more specifically, CR/DCR/NCR) should not be reinstated to stimulate a return to normalcy in terms of bringing back the dean's list and straightforward GPA's. However, there is no denying that this is not a normal semester. The summer semester's grading system was not on an adjusted grading system and did not receive any protest, but a minority of students elect to take Summer courses, the semester is shorter, it is rare for a student to take a full course load, and no students were taking these courses while living on campus in the middle of an outbreak.

During this semester, many students have caught COVID-19, had to worry about their health on top of schoolwork, spent weeks in quarantine, worked extra hours for their families, took care of sick family members, had limited or no access to wifi, and had to live in an unstable environments.

For first year students, remote learning at a university level is completely new to them, and for many, it could even be the first time they have learned remotely. This puts first years another leg behind their upperclassmen peers in their classes and does not allow them to adjust to university as they have expected. Additionally, many first year students on campus have COVID-19 and dealing with health complications on top of schoolwork is especially hard.

While Lehigh professors are amazing, every class is so different in this online environment and learning has been made much more difficult for students. Online teaching quality truly varies from course to course and professor to professor when it comes to the remote environment. Certain professors are using the exact course materials from prior semesters, while students are in a completely different learning environment than they are during a typical semester. Another

issue is that turning scrap paper into PDFs to submit during an exam takes away valuable time from students, especially those who do not have access to fast technology.

Between the above reasons, the outbreak on campus, this being our first fully remote semester, students' declining mental health in quarantine, and zoom fatigue, *we believe that it would only be fair for an adjusted grading system to be granted for this Fall 2020 semester.* With 1,964+ signatures on the [Pass/Fail petition](#) advocating for an adjusted grading policy this semester, this desire belongs to a significant portion of the student body.

Fall 2020 adjusted grading system options have been implemented to their *fullest extent*, meaning there is *no* upper limit on the amount of courses students can have adjusted grading for, at colleges such as University of Pennsylvania, University of Southern California, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Georgetown University, University of Michigan, and Bucknell University. At University of Pennsylvania, students can take however many courses they please on an adjusted grading system this semester, but they had to opt in by October 30th before seeing their final grades. For the rest of these schools, students have until after they see their final grades to opt into the adjusted grading system.

Adjusted grading system options for the Fall 2020 semester have already been declared to *some extent*, meaning there is an upper limit on the amount of courses students can have adjusted grading for, at schools such as George Washington University and University of Massachusetts Amherst. At George Washington University, students can take up to one course on the adjusted grading system. At University of Massachusetts Amherst, students can take up to three courses on the adjusted grading system this semester.

We outlined proposals that advocate for a compromise between the concerns and desires present within the Lehigh community regarding an adjusted grading system. Our proposals are meant to encourage students to think deeply before electing or applying to opt into an adjusted grading system to ensure that the system will not be “manipulated” and make sure that students whose performances have been inhibited due to the remote semester can have the option available.

Proposals

There are two sections of proposals outlined below. Section A focuses on the different adjusted grading policies that could be utilized this semester and Section B focuses on controlling the use of them.

In addition to the proposals outlined below, we encourage professors to analyze their classes by looking at how averages compare to prior semesters and adjust grades to fit their usual

distribution accordingly. For many classes, there are limited office hours and a remote learning environment makes picking up on information more difficult. By comparing how students are performing to other years, professors can adjust what the definition of A-level, B-level, C-level, etc. performance means. This is necessary because students cannot be held to the same standards when their learning context has entirely changed.

A) Adjusted Grading Policy Proposals

I. CR/DCR/NCR Option (Spring 2020)

In Spring 2020 after courses were moved to a remote environment, students were allowed to take an unlimited amount of their courses for grades under the CR/DCR/NCR grading policy. They were able to opt into this system after receiving their final grades for each course.

“CR,” “DCR,” or “NCR” appears on the students’ transcript:

- CR (A - C-) = Passing grade, awarded credit and student can move onto the next course if it is a prerequisite.
- DCR (D+ - D-) = Credit is granted, but the student did not pass and the course would not count as a prerequisite
- NCR (F) = No Credit, the student failed the course.

II. Amend CR/DCR/NCR: Add GPA component

We propose keeping the Spring 2020 CR/DCR/NCR grading policy in place, but adding a GPA component to it. By adding a GPA aspect to CR/DCR/NCR, we are hopeful that the dean’s list can be brought back and transcripts would look more consistent and make more sense to employers than if the traditional Pass/Fail system was expanded.

- A “CR” would not affect a student’s GPA.
- A “DCR” would count as receiving a D in a student’s GPA.
- A “NCR” would count as receiving a F in a student’s GPA.

III. Amend Current Pass/Fail Policy: Extend deadline and eliminate limits

Simply extending the deadline to do a traditional Pass/Fail is not ideal for students working toward a degree, because the student would have to retake the course. For an engineering or business student, most classes are prerequisites for the next ones and even having one class not count due to choosing the current policy, even though they may have a passing grade, can set a student back a year (and \$70,000).

We extend an expanded Pass/Fail system where a passing grade would be counted as a prerequisite for the subsequent courses and the extended deadline for it until the end of the semester.

- A drawback of this plan is that it is almost identical to the CR/DCR/NCR option if a student passes a class they Pass/Fail, but the selected grade will appear inconsistent on the academic transcript as CR/DCR/NCR was used in the Spring 2020 semester.

B) Controlling the Use of Adjusted Grading Policies

I. Limit amount Adjusted Grading Option is used

We propose a system where the adjusted grading option is limited to no more than 75% of one's credits. Students will have to think wisely about which classes they would prefer to adjust grades in so the system does not become overused or completely relied upon. With a limited adjusted grading option, students will have to think deeply about which courses they are struggling the most within the remote environment if they choose to pursue it.

George Washington University and University of Massachusetts Amherst are pursuing this option:

- George Washington University is allowing students to “Pass/No Pass” up to three courses.

Undergraduate Policy

- Undergraduates will be permitted the pass/no pass grading option in a **maximum of one course** (usually the equivalent of three or four credits) per semester, through the 2020-2021 academic year.
- Students seeking that option would not be required to obtain formal approval or authorization. However, we realize that the option is not obvious or easy, and we believe that students who are uncertain would benefit by consulting with their faculty and academic advisors.
- Students seeking to exercise the grading option for more than the proposed limit would need approval from their advisor and/or dean of their school, based on review of relevant and extenuating circumstances.
- In rare cases, students may request a review outside of their school or college. The Provost's office will create a process for such reviews.
- The deadline for a decision in the fall semester will be **November 6, 2020**, with no changes permitted after the deadline. The decision deadline for the spring semester will be announced in the future.
- Grades for Summer 2020 will not be changed retroactively.

Figure 1. Email from Provost of GW and GW Student association to the GW community. Courtesy of Santiago Delgado. October 21, 2020, from <https://slack-files.com>.

- University of Massachusetts Amherst is allowing students to Pass/Fail up to three courses.

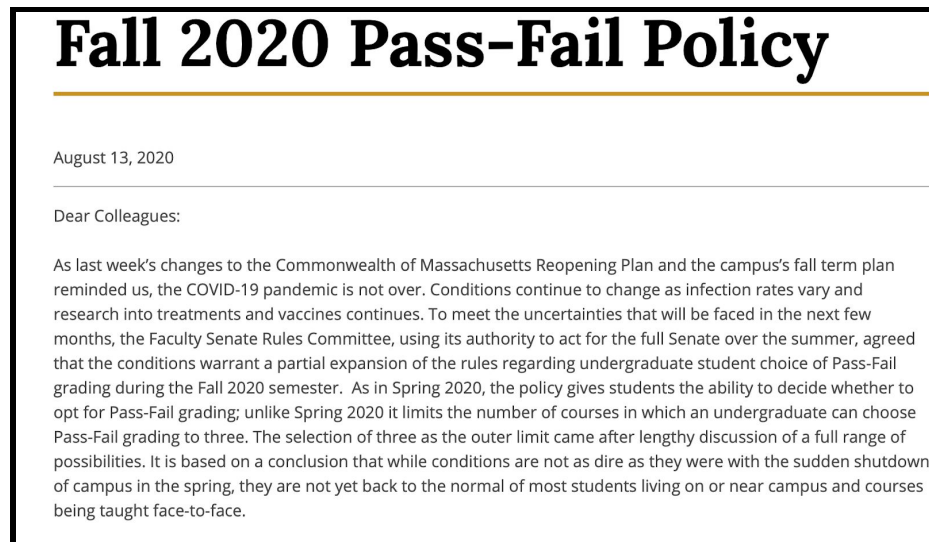


Figure 2. Letter from MJ Peterson, secretary of University of Massachusetts Amherst's Faculty Senate regarding their decision to all students to Pass/Fail up to 3 Classes. Retrieved October 22, 2020, from www.umass.edu/coronavirus/news/fall-2020-pass-fail-policy.

II. Adjusted Grading Application System

We propose a system where students can apply for adjusted grading. We suggest that students can apply for use of the adjusted grading system by explaining which courses they would want adjusted grading and why. If their concern is legitimate, their request will be approved by the Dean of their college, a university administrator, or another faculty member whom it would concern.

- This can be in conjunction with any of the other options if students feel they need adjusted grading beyond what is offered.
- A fallacy in this plan is that it could easily be problematic if Lehigh accepts certain requests and denies other similar ones.
 - It would be ideal if all requests would be approved. Ultimately, the point of this should be for the student to still have the freedom to choose how they are graded, but with caution.

III. Adjusted Grading Selection *before Final Grade*

We propose a system where students can elect to take their courses with adjusted grading, but before final exams and receiving their final grades. This forces students to make the decision

before seeing how a class is curved and how challenging the rest of the course will be for them. By not knowing how they will do in the later part of the semester or how big the curve for final grades will be, students will have to think about how challenging the remote environment has been for them in each course and whether or not they believe it inhibits their usual abilities in the classroom.

Thank you for reading our proposals and concerns. We hope that you will take our ideas into account and we look forward to hearing your thoughts.

Respectfully,
Alyssa Milrod and David Peterson
Student Senate XXXIII

Senators Consulted:

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- Ethan Smith
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- Matthew Hornung
- Santiago Delgado