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March 19, 2020

## ACADEMIC SENATE DIVISION CHAIRS

### Re: Divisional Flexibility for Grading Options in 2020

Dear Colleagues:

With Academic Council's endorsement, I am now formally transmitting a letter from the University Committee on Educational Policy (UCEP) regarding "Divisional flexibility for grading options during winter quarter and spring quarter/semester 2020." Set forth in light of current challenges presented by COVID-19, the overarching recommendation is as follows:

*To help reduce stress on students and faculty, UCEP recommends that all Divisions be allowed to set local grading policies flexibly, especially regarding the use of P/NP grading for the 2020 winter quarter and spring quarter/semester.*

I ask that Senate Division Chairs send the UCEP document to respective Committees on Education Policy/Undergraduate Councils for follow up accordingly. In doing so, it is important to call attention to two items of note for campus committees. First, neither Council nor UCEP seeks to dictate the course of action to be taken, but rather simply to highlight that Senate Regulation 778 grants Divisions broad authority to determine how letter grades and P/NP grades are applied on campus. The University Committee on Rules and Jurisdiction (UCRJ) confirmed this interpretation.

In addition, Council members wish to underscore the importance of advising for students considering different grade options. Consulting an advisor can help students make fully informed decisions and prevent unintended adverse consequences of a particular selection (e.g., coursework taken P/NP may not be accepted by graduate academic and professional programs).

I wish to thank UCEP and to UCRJ for their speedy and thorough work on this topic. If questions arise, please route them through Council so we can address them and respond accordingly.

Sincerely,

Kum-Kum Bhavnani, Chair  
Academic Council

Cc: Senate Directors  
Hilary Baxter, Executive Director, Academic Senate



UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY (UCEP)  
John Serences, Chair  
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Wednesday, March 18, 2020

**RE: Divisional flexibility for grading options during winter quarter and spring quarter/semester 2020.**

Dear Kum-Kum,

**CURRENT INSTRUCTION SITUATION:** Recent emergency measures due to the Coronavirus Pandemic necessitate a rapid shift to remote learning for all undergraduate and graduate instruction.

**UCEP RECOMMENDATION:**

**To help reduce stress on students and faculty, UCEP recommends that all Divisions be allowed to set local grading policies flexibly, especially regarding the use of P/NP grading for the 2020 winter quarter and spring quarter/semester.**

This is consistent with standing policy. UCEP's opinion, supported by the Systemwide Rules and Jurisdiction committee, is that relevant system-wide Senate Regulations (SR778.A, SR778.B) already grant broad authority to Divisions to determine how letter grades and P/NP grades are applied on their campus.

We include the relevant Senate Regulations and our interpretation (as Appendix A) with this letter.

We also include a section below that outlines several **potential unintended consequences** that Divisions should consider when making decisions regarding flexibility around the P/NP grading option.

**COMMON DIVISION-LEVEL POLICIES**

There are other regulations that impact the P/NP grading option that are already largely under Divisional control. These include:

- 1) Limit on number of P/NP courses of total course units. Some campuses have adopted a limit of one-fourth of total units and others have adopted a limit of one-third of total units graded as P/NP. This policy follows from SR 782, which states that:

Under such regulations as each Division may determine, a student in good standing is authorized to undertake up to an average of one course per term on a Passed or Not Passed basis. A grade of Passed shall be awarded only for work which would otherwise receive a grade of C or better. Units thus earned shall be counted in satisfaction of degree requirements.

- 2) Departments may not allow P/NP for courses that count for your major. This is a local Division/department decision, it is not set by system-wide Senate Regulations.
- 3) A student must opt for P/NP within the first four weeks of a quarter. This deadline is at the discretion of Divisions, and semester campuses have a different deadline in place.
- 4) A student's course work must be equivalent to C- or better to receive a P. This is set at the Division level based on regulation 778.C.1.:

For Passed/Not Passed grading, determination of whether the minimum standard of performance for a grade of P shall be the grade of C or C- shall be made by the Division.

- 5) P/NP courses count for unit requirements but not toward your GPA. This is set by SR 782:

Units thus earned [P/NP] shall be counted in satisfaction of degree requirements, but such courses shall be disregarded in determining a student's grade-point average.

The exclusion of P/NP grades from GPA calculations is inherent in the nature of the P/NP grading option and has no direct bearing on Division-level flexibility regarding policy.

### **POTENTIAL UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES P/NP GRADES**

While allowing flexibility around the adoption of P/NP grades is intended to relieve stress in the context of the present emergency, there are a number of potential unintended consequences that each Division should carefully consider when developing local policy.

- **STUDENTS WHO PLAN TO APPLY FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDY.** UCEP urges caution in mandating that students take a course for a P/NP grade. Medical/professional/graduate schools may not accept a grading option of P/NP for some courses, so mandated adoption of this grading scheme, by a Division, department, or individual instructor, may have a significant negative impact on these students. For this reason, UCEP urges caution in mandating that students take a course for a P/NP grade. If such mandates are put in place, perhaps because instructors feel that they cannot accurately assess students due to the constraints of remote learning, then each Division should work to ensure that students who need a letter grade are afforded the opportunity to obtain one by some alternate means (such as a delayed final exam, etc.). This will require a careful planning at the Division level to ensure that adequate human resources (TAs, instructors) and adequate structural resources (space on campus) are available.
- **VETERANS.**
  - Veterans who receive financial assistance may have a strong motivation to take classes for a letter grade, as the receipt of a non-punitive grade such as a "NP" can retroactively impact financial aid. This is a complex issue and Divisions should consult closely with Veterans Affairs liaisons (or relevant personnel on their campus) to ensure that changes in policy do not unduly burden veterans.
  - Some branches of the armed services (e.g. the Air Force) require that students maintain a 2.0 GPA or higher. Thus, forcing some students to take a P/NP option may hinder their ability to raise their GPAs above this required minimum.

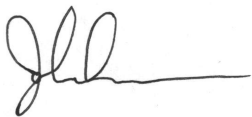
- **STUDENTS TRYING TO RAISE THEIR GPA TO BE IN GOOD STANDING.** Students who need to raise their GPA above a 2.0 to be in good standing or for purposes of financial aid may be harmed by the adoption of P/NP grades.
- **MAINTAINING SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS FOR FINANCIAL AID:** In addition to GPA, a student must maintain “Satisfactory Academic Progress” (SAP). Students are still considered to be making SAP according to the standard “PACE formula” even if they get a C-, D+, or D. For example: If a student with 15 units received 10 (c)’s and 5 (C-)’s, they would be fine in terms of GPA and SAP. The same student receives 10 (C)’s and 5 NP’s would show lack of SAP and may have issues with financial aid.

NOTE: This is not an exhaustive list of potential unintended consequences and Divisions should also be mindful that if given the option of switching to P/NP, many students will be making the decision under extreme stress. Students who are uncertain of the effects of this decision should be encouraged to seek guidance from academic advisors to understand the full implications of their choices. Accordingly, campuses should be prepared to meet the increased demands on academic advising.

### **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

- **PETITIONS TO CHANGE TO P/NP.** In many departments, permission for a course graded as P/NP to count for a major is handled by petition. In the current situation, departments might decide to waive this requirement, thus avoiding a massive influx of petitions, or they could choose to operate through the normal petition process.
- **ILLNESS.** Existing policies and mechanisms are already in place on each campus to accommodate students who become seriously ill, due to covid-19 or any other condition. Giving the student an “incomplete” in this scenario, with the ability to make up missing work after they recover, is standard operating procedure on most campuses.
- **CONSULTATION:** Divisions might consider adopting policy to allow department-wide comments/consultation before individual faculty members make decisions to change grading options. While time is short, a careful consideration of unintended harm to students should be a part of all decision-making processes.
- **THIRD-PARTY VENDORS AND ADDITIONAL FEES.** In this time of remote learning, many instructors may opt for online final exams that are proctored by third party vendors such as “proctorU”. If these services are engaged, Divisions/departments should be mindful of the added economic burden that this may place on students, and where possible, steps should be taken to defray any additional costs.

Sincerely,



John Serences,  
Chair UCEP  
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## Appendix A.

Senate Regulation 778 sets basic guidelines for grading, and in particular states that each Senate Division may determine the “grading system” given approval by UCEP, UCRJ, and Senate Assembly (SR 778.A, SR 778.B.). Moreover, as of May 1978, SR 778 takes precedence over other regulations related to grading such as SR780, 782, 784. The full text of SR 778 is reproduced below, with a focus on SR778A and SR778B:

### SENATE REGULATION 778\*

- A. **Under the conditions stated below, each Senate Division *may determine the categories of grades used in reporting student work undertaken for credit under the jurisdiction of the Division.***
- B. **The *grading system* to be used by a Division and modifications thereof must be reviewed by the University Committee on Educational Policy and be certified for consonance with the Code of the Academic Senate by the University Committee on Rules and Jurisdiction. These Committees report their findings to the Senate Assembly for information. Thereafter the proposed grading system becomes effective as provided by Divisional action unless the Assembly determines otherwise. (EC 4 Dec 75)**
- C. Modifications of a Divisional grading system that are authorized by subsections (1) through (2) below shall be submitted to the University Committee on Rules and Jurisdiction for certification of consonance with the Code of the Academic Senate. If certification is received, the proposed modifications become effective as provided by Divisional action. (En 9 May 84)
  1. For Passed/Not Passed grading, determination of whether the minimum standard of performance for a grade of P shall be the grade of C or C- shall be made by the Division.
  2. For Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading, determination of whether the minimum standard of performance for a grade of S shall be the grade of B or B- shall be made by the Division.
- D. Each Divisional grading system shall be formulated in legislation for inclusion in an appendix to the Senate Manual, and shall define all symbols employed, state their grade-point value or credit value, and shall specify those grades which shall count toward the completion of degree requirements.
- E. Pending review of a proposed Divisional grading system as provided in (B) above, grades in that Division shall be assigned in accordance with SR's 780-784, subject to such variances from these regulations as have been approved by the Senate Assembly.
- F. Subject to variances authorized by the Assembly, any provision of SR 780-784 not explicitly provided for in an approved Divisional grading system remains in effect in that Division, e.g. conditions for incompletes. (En 17 Nov 70; Am 7 Jun 72)

NOTE: A divisional grading system, when approved in accordance with SR 778, supersedes SRs 780, [782](#) and [784](#) and renders them inoperative within that Division on all topics covered in the divisional legislation. (En 24 May 78)

It is UCEP's opinion that there is already considerable Division-level flexibility regarding how the P/NP grade option can be applied. This follows from SR778.A, which specifies that system-wide review by UCEP and UCRJ, as specified in SR778.B, would only be required to change the "categories of grades" used by a Division. Given that letter grades and P/NP grades are already standard categories of grades on all campuses, it further follows that each Division already has the flexibility to set local policy.

**SENATE REGULATION 780.C**

This regulation specifies that "Courses in which a grade of D or F has been earned may not be repeated on a Passed or Not Passed basis."

Under this regulation, if a student is trying to make up a previous grade of a D/F by re-taking a course during the 2020 winter quarter or spring semester/quarter, they cannot opt for a P/NP grading option under current regulations. Given the exigent circumstances and given that SR778 supersedes SR780 (see Note at end of SR778), UCEP believes that campuses can temporarily suspend SR780.C for winter quarter 2020 and the duration of the 2020 winter quarter and spring quarter/semester. Following the end of the 2020 winter quarter and spring 2020 quarter/semester, SR780.C could be re-instated as currently written.