

University Senate Minutes

**Special Meeting: Wednesday, November 18, 2020
3:30pm – 5:00pm, Zoom**

- Chairperson Piper called the November 18, 2020 meeting of the University Senate to order at 3:34pm

Reports and Announcements

A. Chair's Report:

- I would like to thank the Academic Affairs Committee for their work in proposing a temporary change to the Pass/Fail Policy. I called this meeting today so that we can move the policy forward in a timely manner, if it is approved.

New Business

A. Academic Affairs Committee (Chair Dugan)

Senator Fefolt made a motion (seconded by Senator Lomax) to amend the policy to:

- undergraduate and graduate students will have until ~~Monday December 7, 2020 (last day of classes)~~ **Wednesday, December 23, 2020 (one full week after the deadline for faculty to submit final grades)** to select the pass-fail option for courses taken this semester

After much discussion, a poll was launched to vote on this motion

- 67 Senators voted against the motion and 37 Senators voted in favor of the motion
- The amendment to the policy did not pass

A second poll was launched to vote on the Temporary Modification to Pass-Fail Policy

- 75 Senators voted for the policy and 27 Senators voted against the policy

FOR ACTION:

APPROVED

TEMPORARY MODIFICATION TO PASS-FAIL POLICY (FALL 2020 SEMESTER)

In response to the continuing extraordinary circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and following consultations with IUP's Student Government Association and leadership teams, the Senate Academic Committee proposes the following temporary modification to the Pass-Fail Policy for the Fall 2020 term only:

Effective immediately, undergraduate and graduate students will have until Monday December 7, 2020 (last day of classes) to select the pass-fail option for courses taken this semester, thereby extending the pass-fail selection deadline from its original date of October 5, 2020. A student may select a maximum of two Fall 2020 courses to apply this pass-fail grading option to as a part of this deadline extension.

For the Fall 2020 term, this policy modification supersedes the following restrictions or exclusions in the existing Pass-Fail Policy: (1) the exclusion of freshman-level students, (2) the student limitation to one pass-fail course in any given semester during the sophomore, junior, and senior years,

(3) the student declaration of choosing pass-fail in a specific course no later than six weeks after the beginning of the semester, and (4) the exclusion of courses that count as part of a student's Liberal Studies requirements and/or major and minor program requirements. All other elements of the existing Pass-Fail Policy remain in effect.

Specifics of this temporary policy modification are as follows:

- a. Courses will not automatically be moved to a pass-fail grading. This is something that students must individually decide to request.
- b. Specifics on the mechanism as to how students submit pass-fail requests will be posted on the Registrar's website and widely communicated to students, faculty and staff. **Student requests must be approved by the Department Chair (or the Chair's designee) of the student's major. (NOTE: Some courses may be excluded from the option of Pass-Fail due to program and/or accreditation requirements; see sections e. and f. below).**
- c. All courses for which passing (P) grades have been assigned will count toward degree requirements.
- d. Once the request has been submitted, this pass-fail option may not be reversed.
- e. At the undergraduate level, all grades of D or better in courses that have been elected by the student for pass-fail grading will convert to P. However, this would not apply to courses in certain IUP programs (to be identified by the dean of their college) that require their students to earn a C or better to progress in the program. In these cases, C or better grades will convert to P, and D and F grades will remain on the transcript.
- f. At the graduate level, the letter grade for which a P can be assigned will be made at the program or college level. In some programs a C grade would be considered an F in a pass-fail system. Students need to contact the Department Chair of their program and/or the appropriate program coordinator.
- g. If a student fails a pass-fail course, the student will receive an F or N (non-participation failure) grade which will then be used in calculating the student's grade point average.
- h. This policy does not apply for incomplete grades being converted in the Fall 2020 semester.
- i. Incomplete designations for Fall 2020 courses may not be converted to a Pass-Fail grade.

Important note: Students need to be aware that the conversion of courses to pass-fail may affect their eligibility for financial aid, visa status (for international students), veterans' educational benefits, scholarships, compliance with accreditation standards, their ability to transfer credits to another academic institution, their chances of being accepted into a post-graduate institution, prospective employment options based on employer or industry standards, or their ability to repeat the course. **It is strongly recommended that students talk to the Office of Financial Aid (if applicable), their advisors, and/or department chairpersons about the potential ramifications of pass-fail grading as soon as possible and prior to submitting their requests for pass-fail grading.**

RATIONALE:

SGA approached the Academic Committee and the Senate chair Senator Piper about considering the option of a Fall pandemic-related change to the usual grading and P/F policy. This was the result of several factors:

- SGA was hearing about extreme student distress.
- When they conducted a survey, 1733 student responded (18% response rate, respondents both undergrad and grad). Overwhelmingly, students indicated that they are (essentially) being instructed using online learning and that this was not the modality through which they can effectively learn.

- Respondents indicated an enormous amount of psychological distress and isolation.
- Even students who pivoted to online last semester, reported this semester as being more stressful due to the isolation. (They reported that last semester was terribly difficult but they, at least, had a good portion of their work begun with a professor in the classroom with whom there was a relationship, and through which they had experienced learning which was more effective.)
- The primary reason for the Spring 2020 temporary modification was due to the transitioning of courses to on-line formats and anticipated difficulties for instructors and students in this changing environment. The primary reason for the Fall 2020 temporary P/F policy modification request is due to student stress – stress related to the implementation of a hybrid teaching model that had difficulties in consistent implementation and stress due to the COVID-19 situation. It has been reported that students are “struggling.”
- Realizing that despite heroic efforts by IUP and our faculty, what could not be well-factored into the planning equation was the difficulty of tracking everything online, whilst lacking many of the traditional structures that a student would normally have access to in person (tutoring, faculty mentoring, service office interpersonal contacts and face-to-face explanations).
- The move to on-line learning further exacerbated the already extant socio-cultural gaps between students.
- On-line learning was not a preferred or comfortable learning modality for many students, and in fact, due to circumstances beyond everyone’s control, hybrid still meant that courses were significantly online, if not totally online. Students are having a negative reaction to the asynchronous learning modality which many students find non-engaging and of lower-than-expected quality.
- Students are struggling with either COVID diagnoses or the psychological stress of knowing that they may have been exposed through a roommate or friend.

In crafting this Fall 2020 proposed policy:

1. We realize that we must all adjust to our new circumstances. As such, we moved from the spring “all courses, if eligible, could be “P,” to two courses, if eligible, may be requested to be converted to “P” during this deadline extension period which ends the last day of regular classes.
2. Again, moving toward the goal of adjustment, seeking help early, etc., analyzing one’s progress critically, and ensuring continued and earnest effort on the part of the students, the committee has indicated that a “P” must be requested BEFORE the final grades are posted.
3. We continue to realize that there will not be a “perfect” policy for all students. For instance, a “P,” may not be appropriate for students seeking professional school admissions; nor for some accrediting bodies. Taking a “P” when on academic probation at the undergraduate or graduate levels may have implications that require advisement.
4. We continue to recognize that not all programs or courses, be they undergraduate or graduate, may be eligible for this option.
5. We have committed to reviewing the overall, extant, regular P/F policy to see if permanent revisions are needed so that the need for emergency policy modification would be decreased or eliminated in the future.

Knowing that this is a tenuous time and wanting to support students remaining as students and continuing toward degree progress, we strongly urge passing of this policy. Again, there is NO PERFECT policy in this extraordinary time. We URGE the passing of this temporary policy, to allow our students to see a glimmer of hope if their best learning modality is not hybrid/online, or if they are overwhelmed by the situation in which we find ourselves and/or life in general in these unusual times.

Adjournment

- The meeting adjourned at 5:04pm.

Respectfully submitted:

Amber N. Racchini