Yale College Council

Yale College Grading Policy
Amidst COVID-19 Outbreak Report
2019-2020
Core Grading Policy Options

Universal Policies

Universal Pass/No-Credit -- Students receive a P on their transcript for every class they would (under traditional scaling) receive A-D; all other courses would not be recorded on their transcript

Universal Pass/Fail -- Students receive a P on their transcript for every class they would (under traditional scaling) receive A-D; all courses that they "fail" would be indicated as an F on their transcript

Core Arguments for Universal Policy

1. Ensures a collectively equitable outcome of Spring Semester grades amidst the crisis—repercussions of the outbreak (which include taking courses from home) will have no bearing on student academic assessment
   (a) Sabrina and Chad Example (made by Pro-Universal students)
2. Incentivizes students to prioritize health and well-being of self and family during the pandemic.
3. Places burden of pass/fail decision on the University, insulating students who would choose pass/fail otherwise from being uniquely scrutinized or disadvantaged
   (a) HMS will accept pass/fail grading for spring 2020 coursework provided it is the policy of the college/university to only award pass/fail grades
   (b) Yale students have been advised to "maintain the grade option for [their] science classes, as well as any other classes that might be considered a prerequisite for [their] intended health professions program" because “Yale College students have been given the option of taking courses for grades"
4. Supported by supermajority of Yale students—69% (see supplementary artifacts)
Core Arguments against Universal Policy

(1) Students who seek to boost their GPA this semester (and are able to do so from home/amidst the pandemic) will not have the option

(2) Students may not be as motivated to complete their coursework--some students are pushed to perform well academically due to the recognition provided by traditional A-F scale

(3) Some scholarships/post-grad opportunities are dependent on GPA and, as of now, there is no universal guarantee they will accept Pass/Fail grading

(4) Yale students may be at a competitive disadvantage to students who received letter grades this semester from other schools

*Note: the concerns in arguments (3) and (4) still stand with an optional policy, albeit they will only be faced by certain segments of the student population*

Universities with this policy

- Harvard
- Stanford
- Dartmouth
- Columbia/Barnard
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Smith College
- Johns Hopkins
- Bowdoin
- University of Michigan
- Wellesley
- Yale School of Management
- Yale Law School
Optional Policies

Optional Policy Options

**Opt-in Credit/D/Fail; Default Letter Grades** -- Students receive letter grades in all of their classes, but can opt-in to changing any course to Credit/D/Fail. *Current Policy*

**Opt-out Credit/D/Fail; Default Pass/Fail** -- Students receive Credit/D/Fail in all of their classes but can opt-in to changing any course to letter grades

Core Arguments for Optional Policy

1. Allows for each student to factor their personal situation into deciding the Grading Policy that will affect them
2. Students who need this semester to raise their GPA for jobs, scholarships, and other opportunities have the opportunity to do so. This is especially relevant for students who are on an upward academic trend from previous semesters.
   
   (a) *Note: this only applies to students in this circumstance that will be able to perform satisfactorily throughout the crisis*
3. Guarantees that there will be no disqualification issues with scholarships or graduate school applications (for students that choose letter grades and are able to perform at a satisfactory level)
4. Gives a traditional form of recognition for students’ hard work throughout the semester (for students that choose letter grades)

Core Arguments against Optional Policy

1. “Students left behind” -- Leaves segments of the population that choose Credit/D/Fail to deal with all of the scholarship/graduate school/job concerns raised above; albeit alone and without the ability to put the onus on university policy
2. May incentivize students to prioritize academic achievement over health and well-being of self, family, and community. Some students may want to take classes for letter grades to be competitive with peers.
3. Will result in an academic advantage (boost in GPA) for students that are not as "relatively" affected by the crisis -- students are stratified by health, access to technology and internet, physical location, family responsibilities, and financial security to name a few concerns
4. Professor leniency and grading will vary widely across the college, resulting in severe grade inflation and deflation (e.g. core Economics classes have a new curve that gives all students an A for remaining assignments whereas some CS professors have indicated the need for harsher grading now that students have more time at home). Additionally, letter grades have lost their “traditional” meaning now that performance is highly indicative of student’s home life and stability amidst pandemic rather than their ability to master the course material in an academically-accommodating location and time

Universities with this policy

- Caltech
- Vanderbilt
- University of Pennsylvania
- Georgetown
- Duke
- UC Berkeley
- USC
- Boston College
- Ohio State University
- Grinnell
- Tufts

Additional Policy

- **Individual Accommodations** -- All professors and faculty will need to work with students to directly accommodate (to the best of their ability) the wide variety of circumstances that may impede academic ability
- **Transcript Accompaniment** -- A note should accompany all transcripts highlighting the unique and severe circumstances faced by students amidst the COVID-19 outbreak
- **Optional Final Exams** -- Final exams present unique stress to students. Even under normal circumstances, exams cause students to prioritize grades over health by pulling all-nighters and maintaining poor habits like excessive caffeine consumption. It may be wise to remove this burden by making all final exams optional.
- **Accommodate for scholarships** - The university would have to implement a petition system for students that need letter grades for scholarships to have an exemption for this semester
  - An example can be found [here](#)
  - From MIT student body president:
    - “The assumption is that external scholarships will understand, and MIT has the authority to influence/decide internal scholarships. I know that there are discussions with federal scholarships to discuss eligibility.”
- **Allow funding for summer sessions** - To catch-up on requirements and learning without having to stay for an additional semester, Yale Summer Session courses should be offered at no cost to students, especially those who will be behind on credits or requirements due to current circumstances.
- **Retroactive decision-making (in any optional case)** - If an optional Grading Policy is chosen, students should not have to predict their performance under such evolving circumstances during the pandemic. Students should, even shortly after the semester is over, be able to withdraw from a course without a W and/or revert from C/D/F to Letter Grades (and vice-versa) after seeing their performance.
Supplementary Artifacts

- **IMPORTANT:** [Raw Survey Results](#)
  - N = 4618
  - Pro-Universal = 68.56% (3166)
  - Pro-Optional = 23.52% (1086)
  - No Preference = 3.55% (164)
  - Other = 4.37% (202)
- **Data Analysis**
- **Qualitative Answers Q8-Q17**
- **Qualitative Answers Q20**

- **Student Artifacts** (the following are all the artifacts have been sent to the YCC by students; if there are any additional artifacts, please have them sent to ycc@yale.edu)
  - Pro-Optional
    - Op-Ed by Lydia Burleson
    - #StudentVoicesMatter Petition for Opt-In
      - (Unknown signature amount)
  - Pro-Universal
    - UP Student Petition
      - (1987 signatures total/1735 from undergraduate students)
    - No Fail Yale Facebook page
    - Student-Created UP Frequently Asked Questions
    - Student Testimonials
    - First-Gen and/or Low-Income Community Statement
    - International Students Organization Statement
    - Yale Daily News Statement
    - Yale International Relations Association (YIRA) Statement
    - Yale Publications Statement
    - Yale Public Health Coalition Statement
    - Cultural Group Statement
      - (Asian American Students Alliance, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán de Yale, The Association of Native Americans at Yale, and the Black Student Alliance at Yale)
    - Yale Democrats Statement
    - Yale Herald Statement
    - Caribbean Student’s Organizations Statement
      - (Caribbean Students’ Organization, Despierta Boricua, and Dominican Students Association)
    - Sabrina and Chad Example
    - Make Every Class Pass/Fail Now - Op-Ed
Op-Ed by Abey Philip, YC’22
Op-Ed by Iman Iftikhar, YC’23

- Other
  - Updated List of Peer Institution Policies
  - Grading Policy: C is for Coronavirus
  - Yale Health Provisions Advisory Program Email
  - Op-Ed on Yale Mental Health and Counseling
  - NYT Article