


**MEMORANDUM**

To: Faculty Senate Executive Committee

From: Elizabeth S. Chilton, Provost and Executive Vice President 

Date: October 29, 2020

Subject: New Temporary COVID Grade—Fall 2020 and Spring 2021

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In Spring 2020 several steps were taken to provide a safety net for students vulnerable to becoming academically deficient, dropping out, or losing financial aid from low grades due to the disruptions of moving to remote learning. Those steps included:

- Extending the deadline for opting in to P/F grading to after grades posted—students could see final grades and then decide on a letter grade or P.
- A special one-time low pass grade was created (PP) to handle passing grades that would not satisfy prerequisites in most courses (C- and below).
- About 7,000 individual grades were manually changed from graded to P or PP by the Registrar's staff.
- The result was a significant climb in the average GPA (term GPA rose from 3.07 to 3.31).

Recognizing the inequitable impacts of COVID-19 and that many students this semester still need a safety net, and also that the previous solution overshot the mark, we propose the following new, temporary grade. By being marked explicitly as COVID-related, it will assist Student Financial Services in granting the appropriate flexibility for adjudicating satisfactory academic progress (SAP) for financial aid purposes.

Steps being taken at peer institutions to provide grading safety nets this fall led several offices to develop the proposal below, modeled on that of the University of Michigan.

Proposal: Create a new, temporary grade NRC (No Record, COVID) for Fall 2020 and Spring 2021.

- Faculty assign letter grades as usual.
- Students may elect to change C-, D+, D or F grades to NRC (No Record, COVID) once final grades are posted.
- Students may elect to change W grades already awarded Fall 2020 or spring 2021 to NRC.
- An NRC grade would function like extending the withdrawal deadline, but unlike such an extension, would not leave a potentially prejudicial transcript notation (W), replacing it instead with the neutral NRC.

- NRC provides no credit.
- NRC will not count toward the W limit.
- NRC will not count toward the number of allowed repeat attempts.
- Students may elect the NRC grade for all undergraduate and graduate courses unless an exception has been approved by the Provost's Office.
- Students taking courses in the professional health science careers of Medicine, Pharmacy, and Veterinary Medicine are excluded from choosing the NRC grade option; students in the online MBA program are also excluded.

Unlike extending the window for withdrawals, the NRC grade serves as a marker for special accommodations granted this fall under federal regulations for financial aid. It will assist Student Financial Services in addressing circumstances affecting satisfactory academic progress.

This proposal has been discussed with the Registrar and there is an implementation plan for processing these grades. Student Financial Services is fully supportive and sees this as an equity imperative to mitigate COVID impacts. Academic leadership at other campuses is also supportive. Bases on the frequency of grading issues being raised at town halls to date, we believe students will welcome this option. Thank you for your consideration of this proposal to mitigate some of the inequitable impacts of the pandemic.