

## **PASS/FAIL POLICY – SPRING SEMESTER 2020 ONLY**

### **Annotated**

*The annotated version of this proposal adds, for each item, a brief description of the issue being addressed, the options considered, and the rationale for the proposed approach (**Issues, Options and Rationale**). The goal is to provide governance committee members and the academic community with an understanding of work on the policy to date, in order to facilitate an open and efficient discussion as we expedite consideration and approval of the proposal.*

### **PURPOSE**

Westfield State students will face extraordinary hurdles completing Spring semester, 2020, coursework due to the challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic. Online platforms are unfamiliar to many students and faculty alike, and the brief window when the University will operate fully online will not provide ample time for a fully effective transition to online learning. Students will be differentially impacted as they work off-campus in contexts where their resources and responsibilities vary greatly, and where they cannot rely on many of the supports (study groups, Ely library, secure food and housing, friends, extra-curricular activities) that ensure their academic success on campus. This policy represents an effort to define student success differently during the brief period when students are working fully online, often far from campus, in the context of families and communities experiencing high levels of stress. The goal of the policy is to support student success and ensure the highest levels of student engagement and retention.

### **POLICY**

- A. During the Spring 2020 semester only, the end date for students to change their grading status to Pass/Fail is extended past the original date of March 5, 2020, to May 5, 2020, for all undergraduate courses, except as specified in Section B below.

#### ***Issues, Options and Rationale***

*#1 – Some schools have mandated universal Pass/Fail, while others allow students to choose whether to receive a grade or choose the Pass/Fail Option. A mandate denies students the opportunity to risk a grade in an uncertain period. Choice empowers students to chart their own course, though there is also a concern that choice favors more privileged students who approach the looming economic crisis and mandated online courses with more resources. This proposal allows student to make the choice.*

*#2 – The mechanism for giving students this choice is to extend our existing deadline for a Pass/Fail Option. But how long should we extend the deadline? While some students may quickly choose the Pass/Fail Option, others may want to see how their economic and family situations hold up in the coming weeks, how well they adapt to the unknown*

*amount of work they'll be asked to do online, how well their technology needs are met, and how their grades progress in the second half of the semester. We'd like to support students, if they choose to, to aim for the highest grade they can achieve while also limiting their risk if, due to conditions outside their control, they don't meet expectations. The last day of classes is May 5 and the last day of exams is May 11, with graduating senior grades due on May 13. Students could be allowed to choose the Pass/Fail Option after assessing how they've done through the end of classes (May 5) or the end of exams (May 11). For the sake of this proposal we've chosen May 5.*

- B. Department Chairs may determine that specific courses are not eligible for this extension based on accreditation and professional licensing demands. Pass/Fail eligibility must be consistent across all sections of a course. The Registrar will be notified of these excluded courses within 5 business days of the policy being approved by AUC. The Registrar will be notified of these excluded courses within days of the policy being approved by AUC. For any courses determined not eligible for the Pass/Fail option, the Department Chair must email students in those sections within 10 business days of the policy being approved by AUC, letting students know the course is not eligible for Pass/Fail grading and providing a brief rationale as to why that decision was made.

***Issues, Options and Rationale***

*#1 – While some schools have mandated universal Pass/Fail, with no opt out for specific courses, this policy creates an exception for courses that need to be completed for a grade to satisfy accreditation or licensing requirements. Department Chairs are empowered to make this decision. There are additional courses that, historically, graduate school admissions processes have required be taken for a grade. Faculty can choose to advise students of this. In the national discussion of this issue there is speculation that graduate schools will be adjusting their expectations for courses taken this semester. The proposal requires a Pass/Fail Option be available for these courses.*

- C. Students are responsible for being aware of their grades in a class and for choosing whether to register for the Pass/Fail Option. Students who are unsure of their standing in a class should contact their professor for information about their current standing.

***Issues, Options and Rationale***

*#1 – Students are reminded that it is their responsibility to monitor their progress and make their decisions. We considered including language encouraging faculty to provide progress updates at the end of the semester but were concerned this was burdensome given class sizes. Student access to the gradebook function on Plato will ease this process.*

- D. Students wishing to convert to a Pass/Fail grade must submit the Pass/Fail Option Form to the Registrar's Office by May 5, 2020.

***Issues, Options and Rationale***

*#1 – The policy directs students to use existing system to request the Pass/Fail Option.*

- E. Consistent with current practice, faculty will submit a letter grade for each student. The Registrar will then convert letter grades to Pass/Fail for students who have submitted the request form for classes that Department Chairs have not specifically made ineligible for a grade of Pass/Fail.

***Issues, Options and Rationale***

*#1 - Again, the policy will utilize the existing system to award a grade of Pass/Fail.*

- F. Pass/Fail grades issued under this policy will be followed on transcripts by an asterisk, indicating that the course was taken during the COVID-19 emergency.

***Issues, Options and Rationale***

*#1 – This is in response to a student request.*

- G. If a student is retaking a course due to a previous unsatisfactory letter grade, and chooses to take the course Pass/Fail, the Pass/Fail designation will replace the letter grade.

***Issues, Options and Rationale***

*#1 – GPA will likely increase, and other requirements not previously met may be satisfied, when the Pass/Fail replaces the low grade that led to repeating the course.*

- H. Any course taken Pass/Fail during the Spring 2020 semester only, with a Pass/Fail election date after March 5, 2020, will fulfill Major, Minor, Concentration, Prerequisite, Common Core and Honors requirements, except as specified in Section B above.

***Issues, Options and Rationale***

*#1 – The conditions of this policy do not apply to courses students have chosen to take Pass/Fail before March 6, 2020.*

*#2 – The effort to support student success and to relieve students of unnecessary stress during this emergency period is only meaningful if it applies to all of their courses, except where accreditation and licensure mandates prohibit this. There is a risk that a grade of Pass will not indicate adequate competence to proceed to the next level of a course or*

*the demands of a major. There is also a competing risk, that requiring a minimum grade this semester will prohibit more students from progressing than is the norm, disrupting both individual courses of study and also enrollment in majors, minors and concentrations across Departments.*

- I. This policy intends, for the Spring 2020 semester only, to override Pass/Fail Policy 1180 Section A 1, 2, 4 and Section B 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10.

***Issues, Options and Rationale***

*#1 - Section I, for the sake of clarity, specifies the sections of our standing Pass/Fail policy that are overridden by the proposed policy for this semester.*