

Motion by the Educational Policy Committee to the Faculty of Arts & Sciences

Pass/Fail Policy Proposal

Actively enrolled Bachelor's degree-seeking undergraduate students may select up to four standard-grade elective courses in Arts & Sciences and Education as Pass/Fail. This selection occurs when a student is a social Junior or Senior.

A maximum of two courses may change to Pass/Fail from any one semester. Up to two of the four Pass/Fail selections may be applied retroactively to courses that have already received a letter grade. The remainder must be selected by the published deadline of the current semester. The selection of any retroactive Pass/Fail grades must occur by the published deadline of the student's last semester. The published deadlines shall not be earlier than the withdrawal deadline in the given semester.

A student's decision to designate courses as Pass/Fail is irrevocable. For this reason, when changing a graded course to a Pass, students are required to consult with their Major Advisor or Department Chair/Program Director.

The following guidelines apply to Pass/Fail designations:

- COLL curriculum requirements, proficiency requirements (Arts, Math, and Foreign Language), and Major/Minor course requirements are ineligible for Pass/Fail.
- Pass/Fail courses count toward the minimum enrollment requirement of 12 credits, but do not count toward the 12-credit hour Dean's List requirement. Retroactive grade changes could, therefore, result in a change to Dean's List status for a prior semester.
- Students may not elect Pass/Fail when found responsible for an Honor Code violation in that course if the student receives a grade consequence because of the violation.
- A successful Pass will not count toward a student's GPA. However, a Fail will count toward the GPA.

Exceptions to this policy should be submitted to the Committee on Degrees.

Rationale:

According to the current P/F policy, in the Junior and Senior years, students may take a maximum of one course per semester P/F. The decision is made before the end of Add/Drop period each semester.

The course grade is intended to reflect a student's knowledge in a discipline, their general academic ability, and their dedication to their studies. In times of extenuating circumstances, such as illness and other personal circumstances, the grade might not serve its intended function. Fear of this possibility can cause sustained mental stress on students, leading to poor outcomes. One goal of the Pass/Fail option is to mitigate this stress, and to allow for grades inconsistent with student knowledge and ability to have less of an impact on the student's transcript. A second goal of the Pass/Fail option is to encourage greater exploration by students in their course selection and to avoid decisions based solely on the perception of risk to the student's GPA.

- The restrictive nature of the current policy limits its effectiveness in mitigating student stress and supporting exploration and risk-taking in course selection.
- In the current system with P/F decisions made by Add/Drop date in the same semester as the course is taken, students who ultimately perform well in those courses lose the opportunity to have that performance reflected on the transcript.
- In the current system, which forces the P/F decision early in the semester, students may be less inclined to focus on the coursework in that class.
- The opportunity to retroactively convert courses to P/F is intended to apply the benefits of a P/F option throughout the degree and in cases where extenuating circumstances arise late in a course.
- The increase from a maximum of one to two P/F courses in a semester is to recognize that certain circumstances, such as pandemic or other illness, may create temporary challenges that still do not warrant withdrawal of the student from the program.
- The restriction to decisions made in the Junior/Senior years, and the requirement to confer with an advisor, is to avoid premature decisions that could harm employment and graduate/professional school opportunities.
- The limit to four courses total is consistent with current policy, and intends to avoid diminishing the value of the degree.

This motion was brought to EPC by the Pass/Fail Task Force, and was approved in a 9-2 vote by EPC on November 19, 2021.

Background of the Pass/Fail Task Force

Charged by Provost Agouris to analyze and make recommendations regarding W&M's long-term Pass/Fail policy — September, 2021

Members

- **Rachel Li**, Student, former EPC
- **Alex Johnson**, Student, former EPC
- **Mary Kardos**, Student Assembly
- **Kristin Wustholz**, Chemistry, EPC
- **Elizabeth Mead**, Art & Art History, former EPC
- **Josh Erlich**, Physics, EPC
- **Sallie Marchello**, Associate Provost & University Registrar, ex-officio EPC
- **Ben Boone**, Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Education, Faculty of Arts & Sciences
- **Amy Xia**, Mason School of Business representative, EPC
- **Jim Barber**, School of Education, EPC
- **Brad Weiss**, Faculty Assembly
- **Steve Hanson**, Vice Provost for Academic and International Affairs

Activities

- Considered the intent of the letter grade and of the P/F option
- Considered student mental health concerns
- Studied P/F policies of a dozen of our peer institutions
- Considered data on W&M student use of the P/F option
- Considered lessons from the pandemic

Consulted with:

- Ginger Ambler (VP for Student Affairs)
- Kathleen Powell (Associate VP for Career Development)
- Kelly Crace (Associate VP for Health and Wellness)
- Student Assembly
- Mason School of Business representatives
- A&S Educational Policy Committee
- Registrar of Davidson College (which has a retroactive P/F option)
- FAS faculty