

EPC Minutes October 30, 2020

In attendance: Jim Barber, Magali Compan, Josh Erlich (chair), Jonathan Glasser, Rachel Li, Tom Linneman, Sallie Marchello, Elizabeth Mead, Christy Porter, Denise Ridley-Johnston, Cory Springer, Nori Thurman, Kristin Wustholz
Guest: Janice Zeman, Dean of Undergraduate Studies

Minutes from October 22, 2020 were approved.

Revised Pass/Fail Policy

Dean Zeman informed the committee about a just-completed survey of students regarding COVID-related stress and student desire for a more-flexible P/F policy. The P/F policy approved on October 22 was reconsidered in light of the results of that survey. EPC considered but rejected the idea of allowing more than two P/F courses, in fear that students would inadvertently harm future school and career prospects by virtue of having too many courses on their transcript without grades. In order to further help to relieve some of the stress experienced by students this semester, EPC voted to postpone the deadline for conversion of courses to P/F to the final day of grading.

Undergraduate students should be allowed to take a maximum of two classes in the Fall 2020 semester using the P/F grading modality if they choose to do so. These P/F options may be applied to any course in Arts & Sciences, including COLL courses and proficiency requirements as well as major and minor requirements. The decision to switch a course to the P/F modality must be made by Monday, December 7 at 11:59 pm (final grades are due at 9 am). Students subject to sanctions for Honor Code violations in Fall 2020 will not be permitted to make adjustments to the grading modality of their courses.

Rationale:

Earlier in the Fall semester, the P/F policy was modified to allow all students to take one course Pass/Fail (with some exclusions, including COLL courses). The intent was to recognize and help to alleviate the additional stresses on students due to the pandemic learning environment.

Since then, students have reported increasing anxiety and inequitably distributed challenges due to the pandemic conditions. Despite the remarkable creativity exhibited by students and faculty under these conditions, administration of courses has posed challenges that have impacted the ability of students to demonstrate their best work. Proctoring of exams and dissemination and collection of certain assignments are examples of routine educational activities that have continued to create difficulties for both faculty and students. International students and other off-campus students have faced unique barriers due to the difference in time zone, and in some cases restricted access to the internet and other critical resources. In addition, growing numbers of students have been impacted directly by COVID-19, both themselves and among family and friends.

Despite the importance of the COLL curriculum and major/minor requirements, EPC recognizes that students have faced similar, and sometimes additional, challenges in those courses.

Hence EPC's recommendation is to expand the P/F option to all courses. EPC has also concluded that it would be helpful for the students to be permitted to decide on P/F courses through the end of the grading period.

Students considering the P/F option should give due consideration to possible future implications of that choice. Graduate and professional schools, including medical schools, might not recognize courses taken as P/F. This is true even at William & Mary: Students interested in programs hosted by the W&M professional schools, for example the Undergraduate Business Program, should be aware that courses without a letter grade might not be given equal weight in applications to those programs. Similarly, it is not known how employers will view courses taken P/F. It is therefore recommended that all students who are considering taking advantage of the P/F option consult with their advisor prior to making that adjustment.

The Mason School of Business dissented, noting that students who have taken courses P/F applying for the Undergraduate Business Program or graduate programs may be penalized for not having letter grades in those courses. The recommendation to have students seek advice prior to adjusting the grading modality of their course(s) was considered insufficient by the Business School. However, there was strong support from the rest of the committee for the increased flexibility in P/F grading for the reasons outlined above.

Consent Calendar

HIST - 212 01 - America in the 1980s

COLL 200

HIST - 212 13 - The Perverse South

COLL 200

International Relations - International Relations

Curriculum Change

The consent calendar was approved.

Other Proposals

AMST - 390 - Online Citizenship

COLL 300

Approved.

ECON - 300 - Emerging Cities, Migration and Informality

COLL 300

Tabled until more information about the course is posted to curriculog.