



## Amendment to the University of Maryland Grading Symbols and Notations Used on Academic Transcripts Policy

**PRESENTED BY** Laura Dugan, Chair

**REVIEW DATES** SEC – January 21, 2021 | SENATE – February 9, 2021

**VOTING METHOD** In a single vote

**RELEVANT POLICY/DOCUMENT** [III-6.20\(A\) – University of Maryland Grading Symbols and Notations Used on Academic Transcripts](#)

**NECESSARY APPROVALS** President

### ISSUE

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The University of Maryland Grading Symbols and Notations Used on Academic Transcripts Policy III-6.20(A) sets the Pass grade equivalent minimum at a D-. As stated in the policy, a grade of D+, D, or D- denotes borderline understanding of the subject, marginal performance, and it does not represent satisfactory progress toward a degree. Use of the current pass/fail system is limited because of concerns related to adversely affecting students' progress towards mastery of their chosen major or doing real harm to a student's academic progress.

On March 10, 2020, President Loh issued a directive for UMD to implement policies to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission on the campus by moving University operations to the online environment on March 18, 2020 and by moving all instruction online on March 30, 2020. Due to the significant impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and to address student needs, the University made a major shift from normal practice by moving to an all pass/fail grading model as the default while allowing students to choose to receive letter grades in specific courses, and by removing all pass/fail restrictions for major & general education requirements. The measures that the University put in place in Spring 2020 were intended to be a one-time emergency response to the immediate issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The extended duration of the pandemic is something that could not have been foreseen.

In Fall 2020, in response to feedback from the University community about the extended pressures and difficulties caused by the pandemic, Provost Rankin met with the Senate leadership to discuss these concerns and potential options associated with the pass/fail grading option. In January 2021, the Senate leadership and Provost Rankin asked the SEC to consider whether changes to University policy or practice are needed to better serve the University community, both in times of emergency and in normal circumstances.

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

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The Senate Executive Committee recommends that the University of Maryland Grading Symbols and Notations Used on Academic Transcripts Policy III-6.20(A) should be amended to change the Pass minimum grade equivalent from a D- to a C- as follows:

The mark of "P" is a student option mark, equivalent to a grade of ~~C-~~ ~~D-~~ or better. The student must inform the registrar's office of the selection of this option by the end of the schedule adjustment period.

## COMMITTEE WORK

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Provost Rankin met with the SEC on January 12, 2021 to request its feedback on amending the Pass minimum grade equivalent to a C- and developing emergency pass/fail guidelines. She provided background information on the emergency policies that were developed and implemented in Spring 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and noted that they were intended to be one-time measures. However, she also noted that at the time, the administration did not anticipate that the pandemic would still be affecting the country so significantly in Fall 2020. Provost Rankin noted that there are multiple concerns with the pass/fail grading system, including that it may adversely affect students' progress towards mastery of their chosen major or do real harm to a student's academic progress, and that accreditation boards, graduate programs or employers may not be willing to accept multiple semesters of P grades. Provost Rankin suggested that raising the Pass minimum grade equivalent from a D- to a C- would mitigate those concerns, provide more opportunities for using the Pass/Fail grading system for LEP and hierarchical course series, and align the University with the majority of Big10 and other peer institutions. Provost Rankin also suggested that new guidelines on how the Pass/Fail grading system could be used during emergency conditions could go further in providing support to students, and she shared major principles, constraints, decision points, and recommendations from the deans related to emergency pass/fail guidelines.

The SEC discussed the recommended emergency guidelines as well as the constraints with Provost Rankin and other key administrators to better understand the complexity of the issue and the need to have any revisions to policy or guidelines in place prior to the start of the Spring 2021 semester. SEC Members agreed that changing Pass minimum grade equivalent to a C- would more appropriately reflect a student's academic program and align the University with the majority of the Big10 and other peer institutions. The SEC also learned that it was critical that any changes to the grading system be made prior to the start of the semester so as not to adversely affect students who may choose the option either because of associated academic or financial deadlines. Provost Rankin shared the slides from her presentation and a spreadsheet of Big10 data with the SEC in order to help facilitate their engagement with their constituents. SEC members were tasked with soliciting feedback from their constituents prior to the next SEC meeting.

At the January 21, 2021 SEC Meeting, the SEC will discuss the amendment to the University of Maryland Grading Symbols and Notations Used on Academic Transcripts Policy III-6.20(A) and the recommendations for emergency pass/fail guidelines and any feedback received from the campus community. The SEC will make any necessary revisions and vote on whether or not to approve each of these proposals. Following the SEC's vote, any approved actions would be sent directly to the President for approval since the Senate does not formally open its Spring 2021 session until February 8, 2021. The President will be asked to approve the actions on an interim basis pending Senate review so that the revisions to the policy and the emergency guidelines can be utilized for the Spring 2021 semester.

The SEC will also vote to charge the Academic, Planning & Standards (APAS) Committee with a comprehensive review of the revision to the policy and the emergency pass/fail guidelines that include engagement of the campus community and the Senate before each is formally codified.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

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The minimum for a Pass equivalent could remain a D-.

## **RISKS**

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There are no risks to the University in adopting these recommendations.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

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There are no known financial implications in adopting these recommendations.



**III-6.20(A) UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND GRADING SYMBOLS AND NOTATIONS USED ON ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPTS**

(Approved by the President August 1, 1991; Updated June 8, 2001; Amended effective fall 2012; Technical Amendments approved by the President May 4, 2016)

The following symbols are used on students' permanent records:

A+, A, A-	Denotes excellent mastery of the subject and outstanding scholarship. 4.0 quality points per semester hour for the grades of "A+" and "A" 3.7 quality points per semester hour for the grade of "A-"
B+, B, B-	Denotes good mastery of the subject and good scholarship. 3.3 quality points per semester hour for the grade of "B+" 3.0 quality points per semester hour for the grade of "B" 2.7 quality points per semester hour for the grade of "B-"
C+, C, C-	Denotes acceptable mastery of the subject. 2.3 quality points per semester hour for the grade of "C+" 2.0 quality points per semester hour for the grade of "C" 1.7 quality points per semester hour for the grade of "C-"
D+, D, D-	Denotes borderline understanding of the subject, marginal performance, and it does not represent satisfactory progress toward a degree. 1.3 quality points per semester hour for the grade of "D+" 1.0 quality points per semester hour for the grade of "D" 0.7 quality points per semester hour for the grade of "D-"
F	Denotes failure to understand the subject and unsatisfactory performance. 0.0 quality points per semester hour for the grade of "F"
S	This is a department option mark which may be used to denote satisfactory performance. This is not included in computation of cumulative average.
W	Used to indicate withdrawal from a course by the end of the schedule adjustment period. This is not included in computation of cumulative average.

XF	Used to indicate failure due to academic dishonesty. Treated in the same way as "F" for the purposes of cumulative average.
Aud	A student may register to audit a course which has been designated as available under the audit option where space is available. This does not imply attendance or any other effort in the course.
Pass/Fail	The mark of "P" is a student option mark, equivalent to a grade of <del>C-</del> <del>D-</del> or better. The student must inform the registrar's office of the selection of this option by the end of the schedule adjustment period.
Incomplete	The mark of "I" is an exceptional mark that is an instructor option. It is only given to a student whose work has been qualitatively satisfactory, when, because of illness or other circumstances beyond the student's control, he or she has been unable to complete some small portion of the work of the course. In no case will the mark "I" be recorded for a student who has not completed the major portion of the work of the course.
Repeat	For information on the University's repeat guidelines for undergraduate students, consult the Undergraduate Catalog. For graduate students, departments may permit a student to repeat a course in an effort to earn a better grade. Whether higher or lower, the most recent grade will be used in computing the grade point average. All grades for graduate students remain as part of the student's permanent record.
Duplicate Course	This is used to indicate two courses with the same course content. The second course is counted in cumulative totals unless an exception is made by the dean.
Non-app	Used by the dean of the receiving college in cases of transfer from one college to another at UMCP to indicate courses in the previous academic program which are not applicable to the new program.
Excl Crd	Excluded credit is noted when academic clemency has been granted.