



**Amendment to the University of Maryland Grading Symbols and Notations Used on Academic Transcripts Policy (Senate Document #20-21-32)**

**TO Darryll J. Pines | President**

**FROM Laura Dugan | Chair, University Senate**

I am pleased to forward the University of Maryland Grading Symbols and Notations Used on Academic Transcripts Policy (Senate Document #20-21-32) for your consideration and approval. This proposal amends the University of Maryland Grading Symbols and Notations Used on Academic Transcripts Policy III-6.20(A) to set the Pass grade equivalent minimum to a "C-" instead of the current "D-." The Senate Executive Committee (SEC) approved this amendment at its meeting on January 21, 2021 on behalf of the University Senate, under its authority in 4.3.a of the *Bylaws of the University Senate*. Please inform the Senate of your decision and any administrative action related to your conclusion.

**Approved:**

**Darryll J. Pines  
President**

**Date:**

**01-22-2021**

Copies of this approval and the accompanying legislation will be forwarded to:

- Mary Ann Rankin**, Senior Vice President and Provost
- Reka Montfort**, Executive Secretary and Director, University Senate
- Michael Poterala**, Vice President and General Counsel
- Cynthia Hale**, Associate Vice President for Finance and Personnel
- John Bertot**, Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs
- Elizabeth Beise**, Associate Provost for Academic Planning & Programs
- Rhonda Smith**, Acting Director, Division of Academic Affairs
- Adrian Cornelius**, University Registrar
- William Cohen**, Associate Provost & Dean for Undergraduate Studies
- Barbara Gill**, Associate Vice President, Enrollment Management
- Jeffrey K. Hollingsworth**, Vice President for Information Technology & Chief Information Officer



## 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) be amended to change the Pass

minimum grade equivalent from a D- to a C- as follows and as shown in the document immediately following this transmittal:

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 discussed the amendment to the University of Maryland Grading Symbols and Notations Used on Academic Transcripts Policy III-6.20(A) and any feedback received from the campus community. Following discussion on the merits of the change, the SEC voted unanimously to exercise its authority under 4.3.a. of the *Bylaws of the University Senate* to act on behalf of the Senate to approve the amendment to the policy, which changes the "Pass" minimum 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.

The SEC's recommendation will be forwarded to the President for his approval on an interim basis, pending formal Senate review so that the revisions to the policy can be approved in time to take effect by the Spring 2021 semester.

The SEC also voted to place the report on the amendment to the policy on the agenda for the February 9, 2020 Senate Meeting as an information item. In addition, the SEC voted to charge the Academic, Planning & Standards (APAS) Committee with a review of the revision to the policy and any unintended consequences that may result from the policy revision before it is formally codified.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

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The President or a group of ten Senators could reject the proposed amendment to the policy. If rejected, the minimum for a Pass equivalent would 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.