



**Emergency Pass/Fail Guidelines for the University of Maryland  
(Senate Document #20-21-33)**

**TO Darryll J. Pines | President**

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

I am pleased to forward the Senate Executive Committee’s proposal for the Emergency Pass/Fail Guidelines for the University of Maryland (Senate Document #20-21-33) for your consideration and approval. This proposal establishes standard emergency pass/fail guidelines that may be used during emergency conditions at the University of Maryland at the discretion of the President and the Senior Vice President & Provost. The Senate Executive Committee (SEC) approved this item 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

**Emergency Pass/Fail Guidelines for the University of Maryland****PRESENTED BY** Laura Dugan, Chair**REVIEW DATES** SEC – January 21, 2021 | SENATE – February 9, 2021**VOTING METHOD** In a single vote**RELEVANT  
POLICY/DOCUMENT** N/A**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. Changing the Pass grade equivalent minimum to a C- would provide opportunities to develop emergency pass/fail guidelines that could apply to address the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic or future emergency conditions, if needed.

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

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The Senate Executive Committee recommends that the Emergency Pass/Fail Guidelines for the University of Maryland, immediately following this transmittal be approved.

## 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 pass/fail 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 the Pass minimum grade equivalent to a C- would more appropriately reflect a student’s academic progress 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 draft Emergency Pass/Fail Guidelines and any feedback received from the campus community. Following extensive discussion on the importance of the guidelines, 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 Emergency Pass/Fail Guidelines for the University of Maryland as shown in the document following this transmittal.

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

The SEC also voted to place the report on the emergency guidelines on the agenda for the February 9, 2020 Senate Meeting agenda as an information item. In addition, the SEC voted to charge the Academic, Planning & Standards (APAS) Committee with a comprehensive review of

the Emergency Pass/Fail Guidelines that includes campus community input through the formal Senate process 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 University would not formally codify emergency pass/fail guidelines.

## **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.

# Proposed Emergency Pass/Fail Guidelines



UNIVERSITY SENATE

Senate Document #20-21-33

Emergency Pass/Fail Guidelines for the University of Maryland

These pass/fail guidelines may be used during emergency conditions at the University of Maryland. They can only be invoked when the President and the Senior Vice President and Provost deem it appropriate. At all other times, the University's standard grading policy will be followed.

1. Students will be able to **opt in** to courses that they wish to take as pass/fail.
2. Students will receive automatic approval when they choose the pass/fail option for up to seven (7) credits/semester.
3. Students experiencing exceptional circumstances may request an exception to the seven-credit limit through their advisor and with the approval of their dean.
4. The deadline for both choosing the pass/fail grading option and dropping a course with a W in the course will be extended until 10:59 PM EST on the last day of classes.
5. Faculty will be encouraged to keep in-course grades current, so students have a good idea of the grade they have earned in the course by the last day of classes.
6. Faculty will not be aware of which students in their course are taking it pass/fail.