

Academic Policy Amendments for COVID-19

The committee on Academic Standards and Policies (AS&P), in consultation with Department Chairs, has discussed possible academic policy changes in response to the extraordinary circumstances that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to our campus and world. At the heart of what follows is an attempt to alleviate some portion of the academic stress and duress that our students and faculty may be encountering in these times of great uncertainty. Nationally and regionally, many institutes of higher education have moved to alternative grading options for spring courses, such as converting all courses to pass/fail grades. While the AS&P committee feels strongly that such a blanket policy for all students in all classes is not appropriate for our students and institution, we believe that temporary academic policy changes are warranted. This memo seeks to review the college's existing policies surrounding course grading plans and incompletes, and recommend temporary changes to those policies in response to the unprecedented circumstances we and our students are currently in.

Please note: Some of the recommendations by the committee require substantial technical support on the part of the Registrar's Office and IT, which may lead to further amendments to these proposed policy changes as unforeseen issues arise. Your patience is greatly appreciated as we work through this ever-changing process.

Policies on Final Course Grading:

Under the current policy outlined in the Hood College Catalog, undergraduate students have the option to elect for a course to be graded on a Satisfactory (S)/Unsatisfactory (U) basis. This declaration must be made at the beginning of the semester and cannot apply to courses required for either the Core Curriculum, any declared major or minor, or independent study. In addition, current policy limits to the number of credits a student can earn on S/U basis towards the 124 credits required for graduation. Under the current S/U catalog option, students either receive a grade of "S" and credit for work of "C-" caliber or better; or, they receive a "U" and no credit for work of "D+" or lower quality. Grades of "S" or "U" are never computed in the cumulative GPA.

The AS&P committee recommends the following changes to the current policy on S/U coursework, to apply to courses taken in Spring 2020 only:

- **Reopen the option and extend the deadline to enable students to declare an S/U on any spring 2020 course.** Deadline to declare the S/U option will be Friday, May 1, 2020. An S/U declaration form will be available on the [Registrar's Office website](#) beginning April 1, which can be submitted electronically.
- **Suspend policy limitations on pre-requisite, major, minor, and Core coursework to allow all courses to be converted to S/U grading.** Put differently, *all* undergraduate courses could be taken on an S/U basis.
- **Provide that any S/U declaration for Spring 2020 will not be counted toward the total number of credits allowed in S/U coursework towards graduation.**

- **Hood transcripts would acknowledge, perhaps by way of an asterisk and note, or some other such notation, that S/U courses in Spring 2020 may have been undertaken by students as a response to circumstances beyond their control.**
- **Students who are repeating courses under the “grace grade” policy must keep the original grading plan for the course being repeated.** If the original course was taken on S/U basis, they must keep the S/U plan. Likewise, if the original course was taken on a letter-grading plan they may NOT opt for S/U grading.

Policies on Incompletes:

The current policy states that students may request an Incomplete (INC) in cases of serious illness or emergency (see specific language embedded at end of this document). To qualify, students must have completed half of the course with a grade of D- or higher and receive approval from their instructor and the registrar’s office. Students taking more than 3 credits on Incomplete extending into the subsequent semester may be reviewed by the AS&P committee and potentially have their credit limit reduced for that semester.

The AS&P committee recommends the following changes to the current policy on Incomplete coursework, to apply to courses taken in Spring 2020 only:

- **Allow faculty to extend the option of an Incomplete to any student in any course, provided they earned a midterm grade of D- or higher.**
- **Extend the deadline for requesting an Incomplete to Friday, May 15, 2020.**
- **Allow faculty the discretion to assign an Incomplete to any student for any reason the faculty member feels is appropriate.**

NOTE: Under these recommendations, the student requesting an Incomplete must still obtain approval from their instructor and the registrar. A faculty member who unilaterally assigns an Incomplete may consider this option as an alternative to failing a student.

In the event a student is unreachable:

The AS&P committee recommends employing the Academic Alert system on Self-Service and notifying the Dean of Students for further assistance in making contact. If the student has not responded to the College by the last day of class (May 1), the instructor may choose to assign a failing final grade. Later, if the student reaches out for an exception, the instructor may grant a retroactive Incomplete at their discretion.

Graduate Course Policies:

The AS&P Committee has purview over the undergraduate policies, whereas the Graduate Council oversees the graduate policies. Decisions regarding graduate classes will be forthcoming following the Graduate Council meeting on 3/30/2020 and will be announced to graduate students via email immediately thereafter.

Academic Advising – Considerations for Students to Keep in Mind

The committee recognizes that there are many potential consequences of selecting S/U and INC for spring courses. Below are some of our thoughts to help faculty and students during academic advising:

- Some graduate and professional schools may frown upon S/U grades since it is unclear what level of mastery the student achieved in the course.
- Certain academic programs on campus require letter grades or GPA minimums that could be affected by opting for S/U.
- Since S/U grades do not get calculated in the GPA, students trying to boost their GPA may not want to pursue this option.
- An Incomplete does not mean that the student has unlimited time to complete their course requirements. Courses for which an Incomplete has been assigned must be completed and final grade issued by October 15, 2020. If not completed successfully, then the student will receive the final grade earned. With fall courses starting in August (hopefully!) the students may find they are temporarily doing the work for many more credits than their fall course schedule reflects. The student should consult with their academic advisor prior to taking an INC in any course this semester, given that the number of credits taken on INC may significantly impact the student's fall course load.
- Taking a course as S/U will not negatively impact a student's standing in the Honors Program provided that no low or unsatisfactory grades are earned.
- First-year students interested in the possibility of joining the Honors Program are encouraged to retain letter grades in their classes so that their end-of-semester GPA includes those grades.
- Tischer Scholars writing Departmental Honors Papers must retain a letter grade in the 499 class.
- This temporary change does not change the existing grade requirements for specific majors. For example, if a C or better is required in a specific class, an S grade will not suffice. Refer to the College Catalog for clarification on course grade requirements for specific majors.
- As per the catalog, the definition of an "S" (C- or better) and "U" remain in place.

Considerations for Faculty to Keep in Mind

The decisions we are currently faced with, as a faculty, recognizably come with numerous benefits and problems. The ripple effects of altering the policies above are not lost on this committee. It is a difficult recommendation for us to make knowing the effect it may have on our colleagues as we adjust to the immense changes to our normal academic routines. We hope that our faculty colleagues will not pressure any student into making a decision on S/U. Rather, we hope that the pros and cons of such a decision are made clear to the student. According to the College Catalog, the decision to take S/U resides with the student, and this

policy will not change under our recommendation. Since taking an INC requires additional work on the part of the instructor, we leave it to each instructor to decide whether that choice is appropriate.

The deadline for midterm grades to be reported has been extended to **Monday, March 30th**. We cannot stress enough the importance of every faculty member reporting ALL midterm grades, not just low grades. Students will rely heavily upon their midterm grades in deciding whether to declare S/U for each course. Thank you very much, in advance, for your compliance!

Overview of Dates and Deadlines:

- Midterm Grades due 3/30 at 11:59 pm
- Academic Advising Period: Monday, 3/23 through Friday, 4/17
- Undergraduate Registration Period: Monday, 4/20 (12:01 am) by current class standing. Please refer to [Registrar's Office website](#) for more information.
- Current Graduate Registration Period: Monday, 4/20
- Graduate Deadline for Thesis and Final Project Submission: Friday, 4/24
- Non-degree and New Student Registration Period: Monday, 4/27
- Course Withdrawal Deadline: Friday, 5/1
- Declaration of S/U Deadline: Friday, 5/1
- Last Day of Undergraduate Classes: Friday, 5/1
- Petition to Declare Incomplete: Friday, 5/15