



A MESSAGE FROM THE DIVISION OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT (SDEM)

To: All Faculty and Staff
From: David Primak, Registrar
Re: Clarification Memo on CUNY's NEW Flexible Grading Policy,
Implementation, and Other Important Matters

The purpose of this memo is to provide our faculty and staff with some clarity regarding the implementation of the recently approved flexible grading policy. Additionally, I would like to offer some information on other grading matters, end-of-term processes, and timelines.

Flexible Grading Policy – Credit/No Credit, (CR/NC) Grades

On Monday, March 30, the CUNY Board of Trustees approved the, “*Special COVID-19 Flexible Grading Policy for the Spring 2020 Semester*.”^[1] Briefly, this policy applies to all students and all courses, whether in the major, minor, core requirement, general education, or elective.^[2] The policy permits students to request that any earned passing grade be converted to “CR,” for “Credit,” and failing grades to be converted to “NC,” for “No Credit.” Neither grade is factored into the students Grade Point Average, (GPA).

As a faculty member, you may be asking a few questions like, “How will this work?” “What do I need to do?” “How can I help students with this process?” The good news is that there are no paper or online applications that need to be submitted. The University is working with CUNYIT on a process in CUNYFirst that will allow students to make the declaration within the CUNYFirst system. However, there are at least three things faculty can do to assist students.

1. **Submit final grades on time.** The deadline date for Spring 2020 final grade submission is **May 28, 2020**. This is a very important date for several reasons. Students can declare the CR/NC option as but not until after final grades post. In other words, students cannot make the declaration until final grades are submitted. They must wait until their grades are reflected in CUNYfirst. Once grades are posted, students will have 20 business days from the grade submission deadline to make the declaration. If your grades are late, students lose time they need to consult with advisors if needed and make their decisions. The deadline the University has established for students to declare the CR/NC option is **June 25, 2020**.
2. **Help advise students.** The attached memo was sent to students explaining how the flexible grading policy applies to them. Nonetheless, students may approach advisors to ask questions regarding the declaration decision. There are a few instances, highlighted in greater depth in the memo, where it may **not** be in the students’ best interest to declare the option.
3. **Refer students** to advising, financial aid, and registrar when additional questions arise that are confusing or when in doubt.

A few more highlights regarding the flexible grading policy. The policy overrides requirements for minimum grades in pre-requisite courses and instructs all CUNY colleges to accept the grade of “CR” for transfer credit within the system and without restriction.^[3] As well, CUNY colleges are not permitted to override the policy through councils or executive leadership.^[4] As of now, the policy only applies to the Spring 2020 semester, but the University can extend it to future terms if it deems necessary.

The University has created an “FAQs” document regarding the New Flexible Grading Policy that you can access by clicking [here](#).

INC Grade

Students who receive INC grades in the Spring 2020 term would generally be required to submit any outstanding work assignments during the first few weeks of the following semester. However, the University will allow students to submit incomplete work to faculty for resolution of INC grades for courses taken in Spring 2020 through the Fall 2020 semester, and the new deadline for faculty to submit Incomplete to Grade forms to the Office of the Registrar for resolution will be Wednesday, **December 23, 2020**.

Faculty and staff should be aware that the Office of the Registrar typically converts a majority of INC grades “FIN.” The grade of FIN is computed into the GPA as a failing grade. For this reason, an “INC” grade should be considered the last resort, and for many students, it may be a better option to convert grades using the CR/NC option. As a rule

of thumb, the INC grade should only be assigned when there is a potential for the student to receive a passing grade once outstanding work is submitted.

In addition, prior to assigning the INC, the faculty member and the student should discuss and agree on the missing work and a timeline for submission of the INC to Grade Change form – students must be aware that they are getting an INC grade. Faculty should never assign INC grades in lieu of failing grades or WUs.

End-of-Term Processes

As many of you are aware, once final grades are posted for a given term, the Office of the Registrar must run a series of CUNY first end-of-term processes to close out the term. This includes the F-Repeat process, GPA Recalculations, Academic Standing, Dean's List, Degree Conferral, Latin Honor's calculations, etc. However, in Spring 2020 the various processes cannot be run until after all students are afforded the opportunity to use the flexible grading policy. This means that much of our standard business processes will be significantly delayed. *For this reason, it is extremely important for all faculty to submit final grades by the deadline date of May 28, 2020, or earlier if possible.*

[1] <https://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/trustees/meetings-of-the-board/CAL0320rev.pdf> (refer specifically to pages 22-24)

² The only ineligible students are Senior Auditors who receive an "AUD" grade for all courses.

³ See page 24, item 6 for transfer credit and item 11 for, " ... *override all undergraduate and graduate program-level grading policies currently in effect...* " including pre-requisites and minimum grades.

⁴ "RESOLVED, That the Special COVID-19 Flexible Grading Policy shall be codified in the Manual of General Policy as Policy 1.4. and *cannot be overwritten by any individual units of the University, including presidents, provosts, or college councils.*" (Italics and underline mine).

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Flexible Grading Policy: Faculty Information Sheet

COVID-19-related struggles threaten every student's success and may disproportionately impact the CUNY community of under-represented minority, low socioeconomic status, first-generation, single-parent, and female students. Ultimately, the new CUNY Flexible Grading Policy approved for Spring 2020 will advance equity for our students. CUNY students may consider not electing the CR/NC option for fear that their choice may reflect negatively on them or may be uninformed about considerations of this grading option for their specific program or discipline. Therefore, **it is critical for faculty to be actively engaged in informing and advising students on the Policy and related implications of the CR/NC option.**

The following are **10 THINGS FACULTY SHOULD KNOW** to successfully implement the new Flexibility Grading Policy:

1. **The CR/NC option is available to ALL students for ALL CUNY courses** in the current semester in response to conditions created by COVID-19. The policy supersedes all local policies, and explicitly states that **no student may be denied the option of a CR/NC grade in any course.**
2. Ultimately, **students make the final decision to apply the CR/NC option** on a per course basis and elect the non-letter grade option without counting it against their maximum allowed number of non-letter grade courses.
3. **A faculty member does not award a CR/NC grade to the student**, nor are students required to inform their professors that they are opting for CR/NC prior to the end of the semester, unless seeking guidance on the implications of the grading option for program or professional considerations. **CR/NC is a choice students make in CUNYfirst after they have seen the letter grades that they have earned.** Students have up to 20 business days after the University's final grade submission deadline to make this irreversible decision.
4. The policy also states that **no student with a CR grade in a course will be prevented from taking a subsequent course**, even if a particular grade in a course taken in the Spring 2020 semester is normally required for entry. In the cases of subsequent courses with prerequisites or students seeking admission to competitive professional programs leading to licensure, we strongly suggest faculty **consult with the licensing board and/or accreditors** to verify considerations in response to COVID-19 and advise students accordingly of implications and options for CR/NC. Students may want to consider asking for a W or INC grade if they do not meet the required proficiency level and are concerned about being adequately prepared for the next course or their desired program. The University has extended both the withdrawal and INC deadlines for all impacted Spring 2020 courses.
5. **Faculty advising is strongly recommended** to advise students on the implications of selecting a CR/NC option and to verify letter-grade dependent policies that impact their funding, academic career progression, or professional goals. Individual programs may choose to develop a decision tree or a "pros and cons" list that students can use to guide their thinking. **Advising is especially important for those courses in programs that typically do not allow a Pass/Fail option.**
6. Students should also be **referred to relevant specialized academic and financial aid advisors** to evaluate how the CR/NC option may affect meeting program requirements (e.g., in pre-health), future graduate school applications, as well as financial aid eligibility. Faculty are encouraged to consult with relevant accrediting bodies and licensing boards, as appropriate, to determine the repercussions of non-letter grading on degree progression within programs with programmatic accreditation or that lead to licensure or certification.
7. **Use your college's COVID-19 information webpage** to help students identify the relevant specialized program advisors and financial aid counselors for assistance to evaluate implications of selecting the CR/NC option.
8. For advising on implications of the CR/NC option for future career and graduate training considerations, a key, yet difficult-to-answer question is, **"To what extent will the current semester be recognized as an exception (an "asterisk semester") by your discipline's graduate and professional programs when reviewing the transcript in the future?"** In these cases, students are encouraged to check with respective graduate and professional programs on admission requirements and considerations for COVID-related policies before making a final decision.
9. **Clearly review with students the requirements for earning a CR in your course.** This information may already be on your syllabus, but given the tumult of recent weeks, it may help to refresh students on the minimum course requirements for a CR if they are considering the CR/NC option.
10. Note the **3 grading options for students to consider if they are not doing well** in a course--a) the W, to withdraw from the course by the appropriate deadline (which may have financial aid implications), b) the INC to complete course requirements by the end of the following semester, and c) the CR/NC option.