



**SMCCCD Academic Senate**

**Faculty Guidance Memo on Grading**

**Date:** April 20, 2020

**To:** All District Faculty

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**Subject:** Faculty Guidance on Spring 2020 Grading

We realize that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted not only your instruction, but also your daily lives. These have been trying times as we all do our best to adapt as best as we can to this new and complicated reality. We also know that our students have felt the impact of this pandemic as well, and we have seen many of them struggle and disappear during the last few weeks. From our student surveys, we have identified a multitude of challenges and issues students are currently experiencing: caring for children at home and homeschooling, lack of access to and knowledge of technology (internet, Canvas, school email addresses), lack of comfort with remote learning, anxiety and mental health complications, and struggling to meet basic needs of food, shelter, and safety.

Given the difficulties and challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has created, we would like to encourage you to center compassion and flexibility in your grading. These are not normal times, and we cannot expect normal results.

The following is an overview of grading policies, including changes made in response to the COVID -19 pandemic, and recommendations on how to implement those changes. *Please strongly encourage your students to speak with a counselor about the potential impact that the withdrawals and various grading options noted below may have an impact on their ability to transfer, receive financial aid, or complete a degree or certificate.*

**I. Faculty initiated grades**

**Letter grading scale:** For this semester, the letter grading scale has been modified to A/B/C/D/NP. A student who would have received an 'F' grade should be assigned a No Pass (NP) grade. Unlike an 'F' grade, a NP grade will not have a negative impact on the student GPA. An NP grade thus minimizes the impact to students receiving financial aid and transferring to 4-year schools, and it will not count against course repetition limits or in probation and dismissal proceedings.

**Incomplete:** Faculty should work directly with students to assign a grade of 'Incomplete' (I). You will need to identify the assignments, projects, exams, etc. the student needs to complete and the current grade they would earn if the work is not completed (reflective of the current grade they are receiving with the missing work). You will be able to change the student's final grade upon completion and evaluation of the agreed-upon work. Faculty will need to submit an Incomplete grade form to Admissions and Records to assign the incomplete, and then, once the student work is completed, will need to submit a grade change form with the updated grade for each student. Assigning an Incomplete grade is solely the purview of the faculty, and students have up to one year to complete the missing work.

## **II. Student initiated grades**

**Pass/No Pass grading:** A Pass (P) grade is equivalent to a 'C' or higher, and a No Pass (NP) grade is equivalent to a 'D' or lower. For the spring 2020 semester, all courses have been allowed the P/NP grading option. Students can choose the P/NP grading option until May 21<sup>st</sup> by logging into their WebSmart account to switch to the Pass/No Pass grading option.

**Excused Withdrawal (EW):** An Excused Withdrawal is reserved for when a student has to withdraw from a course due to an extenuating circumstance. Given guidance we have received from the state, our district has decided to convert all withdrawals this semester from March 17<sup>th</sup> to May 21<sup>st</sup> to EWs. EW grades are not calculated in a student's GPA and will not be considered as part of academic progress locally. Faculty cannot assign a grade of EW in the final grading process. If a faculty withdraws a student between March 17<sup>th</sup> and April 23<sup>rd</sup>, the student will receive an EW. Students are being refunded for any withdrawals that take place March 17<sup>th</sup> and thereafter.

### **Equity vs. Equality in Grading**

While not all students are experiencing the same circumstances right now, we need to be as compassionate and flexible as possible in working with them. Faculty have purview over their grading mechanisms, but that also means that you can choose to work with and evaluate students differently based on individual circumstances, and we strongly encourage you to do so. Not all students need to be, or should be, treated the same way, and being fair in grading is not necessarily giving all students the same thing, but ensuring they all have the things that they individually need to succeed. Please take into consideration what is needed to assess that learning has taken place, what is needed to demonstrate that a student has learned enough to allow them to succeed at the next level, if necessary, and that learning can be demonstrated and evaluated in different ways. You may also want to consider changing your normal policies on penalties to or accepting late assignments and tests - the gift of time can go quite a long way for many of our students right now.

### **FAQs**

#### **Will the faculty withdrawal deadline remain the same?**

- Yes, the withdrawal deadline for faculty remains the same: April 23<sup>rd</sup>. If possible, wait until the deadline to withdraw students as many of them are responding to re-engagement efforts. Please reach out to any students that you are considering withdrawing and allow them a few days to respond to you or reengage. Many of our students are experiencing access issues and have delays in accessing their emails and Canvas accounts.
- Please be cautious about withdrawing students from your classes without speaking to the student first, as there are implications for our Veteran students, students who receive federal financial aid, students who are about to transfer, students who depend on enrollment status for health insurance, and international students who may be negatively impacted. Students are able to withdraw themselves at any point during the semester, and they can petition for an EW after the semester has ended.

- After the faculty deadline of April 23<sup>rd</sup>, do your best to contact students who are at risk of not passing or completing the class to let them know where they stand in the course. If they decide to withdraw themselves, as they will receive an EW and receive a refund. They can also petition for an EW after the semester has ended.
- When in doubt, do not Withdraw your student and assign a grade of NP at the end of the semester.

### **Some of my students have just disappeared - what is the best way to grade them at the end of the semester?**

- If you are not able to get in contact with your student by the end of the semester:
  - If they are missing significant amounts of work, then you should consider assigning a NP grade.
  - If they are missing a few key assignments but could earn a 'D' or higher in the class based on what they have completed, you may want to consider assigning a letter grade. Encourage your student to speak with a counselor about their grading options.
- If you are able to get in contact with your student by the end of the semester, and they are unable to continue in the class or make up the work, you have a few options:
  - Depending on their standing in the class and how much work they have completed, you can work with your student to assign an Incomplete (I) grade. You will need to communicate to the student the make-up assignments they will need to complete or what knowledge they will need to demonstrate to later assign a grade.
  - You could also encourage your students to speak with a counselor who can help them consider their grading options.

### **How long do students have to be able to change their grading options or request an EW?**

- Students will have until May 21<sup>st</sup> to change their grading options or request an EW in WebSmart. After the semester has ended, students have up to one year to petition for a change in the grading options (to change letter grade to P/NP, or vice versa) or for an EW. The petition information will be available on each college's Admissions and Records webpage.

### **When does assigning an Incomplete grade make sense?**

- Assigning an Incomplete grade is solely the purview of the faculty. Please take into consideration the amount of work that a student is missing to complete the course and the potential increase on workload for you as a faculty depending on what is needed. Also note that you can have alternate assignments or requirements than what is listed in the syllabus to allow a student to complete the course if you feel that those alternatives demonstrate an equivalent learning to the in-class assignments (for example, instead of having the student complete a final exam, they can complete a paper or project that demonstrates the concepts you tested students on during the final exam). All of that should be outlined on the Incomplete paperwork that is filed with Admissions and Records.
- Incompletes are not always the best grading option for students. While they can work well, often the work is not completed and the student ends up with the original grade. Earning an I grade also prevents the student from registering for any section of the same class for a full year.
- Incompletes can be awarded in cases where the student is receiving a passing grade in the course, but could complete missing work to further raise that grade.
- In general, you should not expect a student to sit in on an entire course in subsequent semesters and complete all assignments when awarding an Incomplete. There are liability issues with having students in a classroom if they are not registered for the course. However, there may be times when a student is missing some lecture components of a course - you can determine how to work with your student to get that material on a case-by-case basis.

- You should not give incompletes to your entire class unless you have discussed that with your dean and informed the class. This has to be done on a case-by-case basis and requires dean approval.
- If a student is currently receiving an equivalent of an 'F' grade this semester, when you submit the Incomplete paperwork, assign the default grade as 'NP' as we are not assigning 'F' grades this semester.
- If a faculty gives an incomplete and no longer is available for a grade change, then the student should work with the division dean on a process to finalize the grade change.

#### **Can I assign a grade of EW for a student when I submit final grades?**

- No, only students can withdraw themselves from a course after the April 23<sup>rd</sup> deadline. You will be able to assign letter grades, P/NP, or I grades based on the grading option the individual student has chosen for that class. As a reminder, students will have up to 1 year to request a grade change to EW by petition.

#### **How is an EW different than a W?**

- With an EW, students need to provide proof of an extenuating circumstance and receive a different notation on their transcript that is not calculated as part of satisfactory academic progress and local financial aid qualification. With a 'W' (Withdrawal) grade, a student can choose to withdraw a course without needing to provide an explanation, and a faculty can withdraw a student and have this final grade be noted on their transcript. The state chancellor's office, however, has suspended any requirements that students must prove extenuating circumstances this semester, and it is recognized that any students who Withdraw after March 17<sup>th</sup> have been impacted by COVID-19.

#### **I am teaching an online class. Should I be grading any differently?**

- Though you may not have had to change your teaching modality this semester, both you and your students are having to deal with the impacts of a shelter in place order. Please be as compassionate and flexible as possible in your grading considerations.

#### **When should I assign a 'D' grade vs a NP grade? Why isn't the 'D' grade just part of the NP option of letter grades?**

- 'D' grades can be helpful to students in that they can still count for credit for transfer, Associate degrees, and GE areas, hence why it isn't included as part of the NP options for letter grading. Thus, if you have a student who, with any grading considerations that you are implementing this semester, will earn a 'D' grade, please assign a 'D' as opposed to a NP. If you have any doubts about potential negative impact to your student, please have those conversations with them and let them know that they have up to a year to request a grade change to P/NP or EW.

#### **I have a student who has accommodations and I am concerned about their performance in the class. Should I consider a student's accommodation in the grading?**

If you have concerns about student accommodations, please contact the DRC to work with them to ensure students with disabilities have equal access to your curriculum. Best practice during this time is to consider all students holistically and the variety of challenges they are facing. Please be as compassionate and flexible as possible in your grading.

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