

Dear Students,

I wanted to provide you with an update on today's very long, but very productive, faculty meeting. Note: This email will not answer every question or address every situation; more details will follow next week. But, I know that the grading policy has been of great concern for many students, and I wanted to update you as soon as a decision was made.

All of us on the faculty know that there can be no resolution to this issue that satisfies every goal or every student; in fact, of the close to 200 comments that I received from students, a great number acknowledged that there were pros and cons to every option. Indeed, as one dean at another school noted, this is an exercise in choosing the least-bad option.

In the end, the faculty has adopted a Mandatory Credit / No Credit Grading Policy for the spring semester.

The pandemic has affected each of us differently, but it has affected a subset of our community very dramatically. While many of us are able to perform our work with very little change (other than using Zoom rather than sitting in a classroom in the Tower), others are not. Some are limited by technology. Others are hampered by challenging living conditions. Many have seen their work schedules or their financial lives thrown into disarray. Too many have been touched -- personally, or within their families -- by COVID-19; and, based on the projections and the experiences elsewhere, those numbers will likely rise dramatically in the coming days.

The purpose of assessment and of grading is to differentiate performance between different students. In fact, that is why we grade anonymously: to ensure that we are assessing performance only, and not other criteria that could influence the outcome. Of course, this process of differentiation cannot be fair or effective unless students are given a fair opportunity to perform. And that is where, in this pandemic, the system breaks down. Many, many students, through no fault of their own, will not have a fair opportunity to prepare for and to take their exams. Thus, any attempt to distinguish between different students necessarily will be skewed and arbitrary -- because it can't account for the impediments that create those differences in performance.

As such, fairness mandates that we not attempt to distinguish. Thus, mandatory credit / no credit is the best, most fair approach.

Please note that, regardless of the grading process, it remains just as important for students to master the material in each class. The material that is taught in law school is important not just because mastery of it will lead to a good grade in a class. (And, note that preparation and participation expectations for class remain unchanged under a credit / no credit policy.) Rather, the knowledge and skills learned in law school classes are tested on the bar exam, which is the mandatory doorway through which each attorney must pass. More important, however, mastering that knowledge and those

skills is crucial to a successful professional career. Your future clients are relying on you to maintain your diligence today. Please, please, do not let up on your studies.

I know that this decision will raise several questions, most of which will be addressed in the more formal document next week. Let me address a few of the more pressing ones now:

- How will mandatory credit / no credit affect employment? First, as of today, more than 70% of law schools that have made a decision on grading have opted for a mandatory pass / fail or credit / no credit model, so employers will not be surprised. Second, employers have told us that they recognize that this semester is unusual. Work done in courses in other semesters, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and internships and work experience will help fill the gap from this semester.
- What about scholarships that require a GPA threshold or those students on academic probation who need to achieve a particular GPA? We recognize that, through no fault of their own, students may not be able to hit certain GPA thresholds this semester, and we will adjust those thresholds or timelines appropriately.
- Are there exceptions to this mandatory credit / no credit policy? For the very few classes that were substantially completed prior to spring break (for instance, the paper was turned in before spring break), the regular grading policy applies.
- What is the difference between pass / fail and credit / no credit? If a student fails a pass / fail class, the student's GPA would drop; if a student does not earn credit in a credit / no credit class, there is no impact to a student's GPA. The faculty chose credit / no credit because that approach is more favorable to students.

In short, while this is not an easy decision, it is the correct decision for our school and for our community. We, as a community, should not and cannot turn a blind eye towards those who are most affected -- or, thinking ahead, to those who will be affected in the coming weeks -- by this once-in-a-century event. Grades, GPA, class ranks, and the curve are all perfectly appropriate when everyone has a fair opportunity to perform and to be assessed -- that is, when those grades accurately reflect a student's realized potential. This spring, that is not the case. Mandatory credit / no credit is the best, most fair option.

If you have questions that you would like to see addressed in the more formal communication next week, please send them to president@stcl.edu. And, please know that we continue to examine other outstanding issues, like procedures for final exams.

In the meantime, please be safe.

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