

April 3, 2020

Department Chairs  
Program Directors  
College Provosts

**Re: P/NP Grading in the Spring Quarter**

Dear Colleagues,

In this letter, we address the question of P/NP grading for Spring Quarter 2020 classes. The letter includes:

- An introductory rationale for the letter;
- Costs and benefits of deciding on mandatory vs. optional letter grades;
- Our decision to allow students to choose P/NP or grades;
- Policies that do not relate to requirements for academic programs, i.e., how P/NP grades will be excluded from campus limits, students who require grades for financial aid, etc.; and students needing to repeat courses; and
- Policies that do relate to requirements for academic programs, i.e., qualification requirements, minimum GPAs, etc.

Over the past two weeks, the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) has received several requests to move towards a P/NP grading scheme for Spring 2020. Many universities have taken steps in this direction. UC Berkeley, which has often been cited in these requests, has allowed students to change their grading option until one week before the end of the term (which UCSC does even under normal circumstances), and has suspended some regulations that impel students to take courses for a letter grade. Berkeley has also changed the default grading option for courses to P/NP, but students can still choose a letter grade. In effect, Berkeley has tried to provide the maximum flexibility for its students.

There are good arguments for allowing P/NP grades more liberally. After transitioning to remote instruction so quickly, it is not clear that the courses in Spring 2020 will be of the same standard as regular courses. Students may also experience difficulty in engaging with the course and the instructor to the extent they would in a regular term, especially if their access to technology is limited.

At the same time, letter grades are beneficial for some students. A student who is not in good academic standing needs passing letter grades to improve their status. Students receiving financial aid have to maintain satisfactory academic progress; any letter grade better than an F counts towards this, but an NP grade does not. (Satisfactory academic progress also requires a minimum GPA, and letter grades for GPA improvement are needed by some students.) Veterans and students in the armed forces may also be affected by the absence of letter grades. Finally, quoting from a letter from the University Committee on Educational Policy:

UCEP urges caution in mandating that students take a course for a P/NP grade. Medical/professional/ graduate schools may not accept a grading option of P/NP for some courses, so mandated adoption of this grading scheme, by a Division, department, or individual instructor, may have a significant negative impact on these students. For this reason, UCEP urges caution in mandating that students take a course for a P/NP grade. If such mandates are put in place, perhaps because instructors feel that they cannot accurately assess students due to the constraints of remote learning, then each Division should work to ensure that students who need

a letter grade are afforded the opportunity to obtain one by some alternate means (such as a delayed final exam, etc.). This will require a careful planning at the Division level to ensure that adequate human resources (TAs, instructors) and adequate structural resources (space on campus) are available.

After considerable discussion, CEP has decided to follow the path of UC Berkeley: to retain the option of letter grades in all courses that have not been approved previously as P/NP courses, while liberalizing the policies that prevent students from taking courses on a P/NP basis. The steps we are taking are as follows:

#### **Policies that do not relate to requirements for academic programs**

1. P/NP grades earned at UC Santa Cruz during the period that courses are taught through remote instruction will not be included in the requirement that at least 75% of the credits completed at UC Santa Cruz must be for a letter grade.
2. Students who are not in good academic standing can take courses on a P/NP basis by contacting the Office of the Registrar. This only applies to Spring 2020, even if remote instruction continues longer. (In normal circumstances, such students have to take courses for a letter grade; the letter grade option remains available to them.)
3. Students who failed a course with a letter grade can retake it on a P/NP basis. This only applies to Spring 2020, even if remote instruction continues longer.

As discussed above, CEP recommends that students exercise caution in deciding to forego letter grades in their courses. Course instructors are requested to convey this message to students who may have difficulty in contacting academic advisors as they would normally do. This letter is being published on [our website](#) for ready reference.

#### **Policies that relate to requirements for academic programs**

1. Many major programs have major qualification (MQ) requirements that require students to complete a set of courses with letter grades, often with a certain minimum GPA. The number of such courses and the GPA required varies from one program to another. MQ requirements are intended to exclude students who are unlikely to succeed in the major, and so it should not be assumed that all students would benefit if these requirements were ignored.

The impact of P/NP grades in MQ courses will depend on the number of such grades, the number of MQ courses, and the required MQ GPA, and it would be very difficult for CEP to come up with a uniform policy. For this reason, we leave it to departments to decide what flexibility they wish to provide for MQ courses completed in Spring 2020 or completed during remote instruction. Any flexibility has to apply equally to students entering UCSC as frosh and transfer students. (A department may make additional allowances for transfer students from institutions that mandate P/NP grades in Spring 2020.)

As always, departments can review applications of individual students, both frosh and transfer, to decide if a student should be admitted to the major even though they do not satisfy the MQ criteria. Departments are urged to be flexible when a student seems capable of succeeding in the major, especially for transfer students who may have been advised against taking letter graded courses this term.

2. Many academic programs also have letter grade policies that apply to courses other than MQ courses: all courses taken for a major, a certain percentage of courses, or specific courses. Most departments supported suspending these policies. However, CEP believes that it will be clearer for students if they obtain information about all major-related letter grade policies — both for MQ courses and for other courses — from a single source. Accordingly, we leave this question to departments, with the recommendation that they do not apply letter grade policies to non-MQ courses taken in Spring 2020.

For both of these points, we request that departments discuss them with the appropriate faculty committees to decide what they wish to do and to notify us and the Director of Admissions as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Onuttom Narayan, Chair  
Committee on Educational Policy

cc: Kimberly Lau, Chair, Academic Senate  
Lindsay Hinck, Chair, Committee on Courses of Instruction  
Don Smith, Chair, Graduate Council  
Richard Hughey, Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education  
Stacey Sketo-Rosener, Assistant Vice Provost of Undergraduate Advising  
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