

Subject: Re: Grading Policy Working Group

Date: Wednesday, April 22, 2020 at 6:44:38 PM Eastern Daylight Time

From: Michael Orr

To: Faculty List

Dear Colleagues,

As I reported to you earlier this week, a Grading Policy Working Group was recently created by FEC to consider whether to recommend adoption of a double A grading policy for this semester (see below). On behalf of the working group, I want to thank those of you who submitted comments to the group for its consideration. The Grading Policy Working Group has since met and has decided against recommending adoption of the double A policy. Members of the group expressed a number of concerns about the proposed policy, including the concern that a mandatory double A policy would be inconsistent with Skidmore's existing definition of a grade of A-. Nevertheless, the working group was sympathetic to the very real difficulties that students are facing as they negotiate the demands of working remotely in the midst of an international pandemic. For that reason, it has made two recommendations.

The group has recommended that the deadline for declaring the S/U option (and the W option) be extended until after letter grades are posted. There are some details to be worked out regarding the revised deadlines and establishing a deadline for students with incompletes. The working group has asked CAS to resolve these questions and to make a recommendation to the DOF/VPAA.

The group has also recommended that we hold a Committee of the Whole discussion on Friday at the faculty meeting to discuss the idea of temporarily changing the S/U grading option by establishing a third grade option to cover grades of C-, D+, and D. This grade option could be noted as "CR" (signifying credit) on the transcript. Such a change would be a temporary measure that would only apply to the current semester and would be noted as such on the transcript. It would allow students to receive credit toward graduation for final grades of C-, D+, or D without those grades appearing on the transcript. If sufficient support for this idea emerged during the COW, a motion could be made following the COW to suspend the layover provision for changes in policy and to approve this measure.

Thanks,

Michael

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From: Michael Orr <morr@skidmore.edu>
Date: Monday, April 20, 2020 at 1:13 PM
To: Faculty List <faculty-list@skidmore.edu>
Subject: Grading Policy Working Group

Dear Colleagues,

The Faculty Executive Committee has recommended the creation of Grading Policy Working Group to take up consideration of a student request to consider a double A grading policy for this semester (see request below). The Grading Policy Working Group has been charged to examine the request and to determine whether to recommend any changes from the current S/U policy to the faculty. The working group is constituted of representatives from CEPP (Steve Ives), CAS (Christine Page), Curriculum Committee (Christopher Mann), CAFR (Ben Bogin), together with Dave DeConno, myself and two student members (Riley Filester, Rachael Borthwick). FEC has charged the group to report back to the faculty promptly.

Thanks,

Michael

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From: SGA VP for Academic Affairs <SGA_VPAA@skidmore.edu>

Date: Friday, April 3, 2020 at 3:06 PM

To: Michael Orr <morr@skidmore.edu>, Ronald Seyb <rseyb@skidmore.edu>, Joshua Woodfork <woodfork@skidmore.edu>, Grace Burton <gburton@skidmore.edu>, Kendrah Murphy <kmurphy1@skidmore.edu>, Casey Schofield <cschofie@skidmore.edu>, Stephen Ives <sives@skidmore.edu>, Feryaz Ocakli <focakli@skidmore.edu>, Christine Page <cpage@skidmore.edu>, Amy Tweedy <atweedy@skidmore.edu>, Peter von Allmen <pvonallm@skidmore.edu>, Jennifer Mueller <jmueller@skidmore.edu>

Subject: Grading Systems

Dear all,

You are receiving this email due to your positions at Skidmore; namely, you are the Dean of the Faculty / Vice President for Academic Affairs, Associate Dean of the Faculty for Student Academic Affairs, the Vice President for Strategic Planning and Institutional Diversity, the Vice-Chair of IPPC, the current and future chair of FEC, the current and future chair of CEPP, the chair of CAS, the co-chair of SIE, and the co-chair of CIGU.

I am writing to you on behalf of SGA, the Skidmore COVID-19 Student Working Group, and other members of our student body to ask for the college to consider moving to a double A grading system.

While extending the S/U deadline may allow for some students to avoid the effects of the pandemic appearing on their GPAs, this option is flawed. The burden associated with moving away from campus and to remote learning, losing on- and off-campus jobs, experiencing anxiety, the sickness and death of loved ones, and managing other responsibilities falls unevenly upon the student body. Though many of our students come from privileged backgrounds that will allow them to engage with their classes similarly to before, many others are now in positions in which they no longer have a distraction-free learning environment, reliable access to nutritious food, or a steady source of income. The opt-in S/U system forces those most impacted by COVID-19 to decide whether the diminished chance of a GPA boost is worth the risk of a sub-optimal grade resulting from their new living and learning situations, or if they should resign themselves to opting into S/U in recognition of how they do not have the privilege to keep on as if nothing has happened.

We appreciate the work done to quickly establish the extended S/U deadline and to inform students and faculty about this decision. We agree with the Committee on Academic Standing that a mandatory S/U option would be detrimental to many students (e.g., those on the cusp of Latin/departmental honors, applying to post-secondary education, on academic waiver, etc.). However, the opt-in S/U system does not really give students who are severely impacted by everything going on in the college (and worldwide) a safety net for their transcript so much as it requires them to decide whether they have the privilege to keep their classes graded. We know that the college is working to adapt in a timely manner to the situation at large and believe that moving to a double A policy should be one of our next steps moving forward.

Adopting a double A policy would be the best way for the college to recognize the humanity of its students. **We are not simply taking our classes at home; we are at our homes during a global pandemic, trying to take our classes.** Some of us may have the privilege to put the same amount of work into our classes as we could while on campus, but others of us are now forced to distribute that work between our classes, homeschooling our siblings, finding our next meal, and more. Though some may feel that a double A policy would be unfair to those individuals who are able to maintain their grades due to their hard work and “merit,” the reality is that those students who might opt-in to the current S/U option are doing just as much work as their peers. While there are other grading systems preferable to opt-in S/U, such as an A-B-C policy, a double A system would best address the class-performance inequities students are facing.

A double A policy would not only benefit those without suitable learning environments. In light of the shift to remote learning, some professors are no longer holding classes, no longer holding office hours, and assigning more work and exams because “students have more time to do their work and study.” This is simply untrue. Even for the students who this is true of, the burden of added work will be harmful to their ability to succeed in their classes. Now, imagine for the students who this *is not* true of... this extra work delivers a crushing blow to their ability to achieve the grades they might otherwise and forces them into choosing the S/U option. One of the last things that students need at this time is more to worry about; we hope that professors receive the message that students have enough to manage as it is and that they should not be adding additional work to their classes. As a whole, Skidmore has cultivated a highly skilled and empathetic faculty; however, there are members of this faculty who have been unsuccessful in understanding, empathizing, and adapting to students’ needs in this unprecedented time. We are calling for a double A policy for **all** students.

I have sat through every faculty meeting I have been able to during my tenure as SGA’s Vice President for Academic Affairs, and will be at the meeting this afternoon. I am acutely aware of how painstakingly slow it can be to approve even clerical changes to college policy, not to mention the required layover between the introduction of a motion and voting. With that in mind, I ask for action. Rules can be suspended and, if not, broken. Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. These are extraordinary times.

Sincerely,
Riley Filister, SGA Vice President for Academic Affairs
Raymi Ramirez
Malchijah Hoskins
Abby Ciccarone
Sophie Cramer-Benjamin
Melanie Nolan
Haja Isatu Bah
Rachael Borthwick
David Robakidze
Tucker Boyd
Amira Silverman
Dana Tohme

Raphael Baum
Lily He