THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

The University Faculty Senate

AGENDA

Thursday, October 29, 2020
SPECIAL SENATE MEETING

Via ZOOM at 1:00 p.m
Please click the link below to join the webinar:
https://psu.zoom.us/j/93585910342
Or Telephone:
Dial(for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):
US: +1 646 876 9923 or +1 301 715 8592 or +1 312 626 6799 or +1 669 900 6833 or +1 253 215 8782 or +1 346 248 7799
Webinar ID: 935 8591 0342
International numbers available: https://psu.zoom.us/u/adK6W5zrV1
Or iPhone one-tap :
US: +16468769923,,93585910342# or +13017158592,,93585910342#

In the event of severe weather conditions or other emergencies that would necessitate the cancellation of a Senate meeting, a communication will be posted on Penn State News at http://news.psu.edu/.

A. ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIR

B. PERIOD OF DISCUSSION

UPUA Senators
Report on Alternative Grading for the Fall 2020 Semester Appendix A

C. BUSINESS

COVID – 19 Resolution on Re-Enacting the Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory Grading System for the Fall 2020 Semester Appendix B

Policy 49-70 – Supplemental Satisfactory Grade/Passing Grade/No Grade Grading System – Baccalaureate and Associate Degree Candidates Appendix C

D. NEW LEGISLATIVE BUSINESS

E. COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GOOD OF THE UNIVERSITY

F. ADJOURNMENT
The next meeting of the University Faculty Senate will be held on Tuesday, December 1, 2020, 1:00 p.m.

Please click the link below to join the webinar:
https://psu.zoom.us/j/93585910342
Alternative Grading for the Fall 2020 Semester

Pennsylvania State University Faculty Senate

OCTOBER 2020

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Background

Following a university shutdown in light of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Pennsylvania State University Faculty Senate enacted an alternative grading system under Senate Policy 49-70: Supplemental Satisfactory Grade/Passing Grade/No Grade Grading System for Baccalaureate and Associate Degree Candidates for the Spring 2020 semester\(^1\). The policy was adopted and implemented by the Advising Council for Undergraduate Education through ACUE Policy G-11.

Senate Policy 49-70 is said to be enforced only when the Faculty Senate takes an extraordinary step due to a situation of special Senate concern. The policy has the following stipulations:

1. The option of alternative grading is only available during the situation of special Senate concern. (For the Spring 2020 Semester, this corresponded to courses that concluded after March 6. Students were not able to select alternative grading for courses that concluded prior to or on this date.)

2. Grade point averages for limited sets of courses, sometimes used in determining Entrance to Major, will be calculated using the same rules as cumulative GPAs. Students may, therefore, elect alternative grading for such courses without being penalized.

3. Courses for which students elect alternative grading will earn credits toward semester classification if the student earns a SAT or V grade.

4. Courses for which students select alternative grading will satisfy prerequisites in the same way as they would were a letter grade maintained. If a C or better is required in a prerequisite course, a SAT grade will satisfy this, but a V grade will not. If a passing (e.g., D or greater) grade is required in a prerequisite course, a SAT grade or a V grade will satisfy this.

\(^1\) [https://undergrad.psu.edu/aappm/G-11-alternative-grading.html](https://undergrad.psu.edu/aappm/G-11-alternative-grading.html)
5. If a C or better is required in a course to meet a curricular requirement, including ETM requirements, a SAT grade will count; a V or Z grade will not.

6. Programs that require a B or better in a particular course can continue to require this for courses. Units are expected to communicate this to students and recommend not using alternative grading if the necessary letter grade is achieved.

7. Courses taken for alternative grades are counted in the course repeat policy.

8. Courses taken for alternative grades do not count toward the ETM credit window, which will help students avoid surpassing the upper threshold of the ETM window. Colleges will provide the option for students to enter the major if counting earned credits from alternatively graded courses would have allowed a student to meet the minimum threshold.

9. Courses with passing grades for which students utilize alternative grades will count as University credits in determining eligibility for graduation with distinction.

10. In determining student eligibility for Dean’s lists, credits earned from courses using alternative grading (SAT and V grades only) will contribute to meeting the requirement of 12 credits for full time consideration.

11. Courses for which students elect alternative grades can be used in the grade forgiveness process.

12. The Faculty Senate has an expedited process and form to allow a student to submit a petition to use alternative grading in cases where a student’s grade is finalized after the deadline. This includes the following situations: an instructor changes the student’s letter grade in a course; a deferred grade is changed to a letter grade; or a grade is received after the deadline from a study-abroad program.

13. Selections are considered final unless there is a change in circumstance for which an exception would be appropriate. For example, a student who has changed majors, and now finds that they need a letter grade reported for a course for graduate school admission after having selected the alternative grade, may file a Faculty Senate petition through their adviser to request having their grade changed back to the original letter grade. For such requests, students will use the existing Faculty Senate petition process used to request exceptions to academic policies.

14. Students with academic integrity violations are permitted to utilize alternative grading for those courses. However, if a student received a conduct sanction including a recommendation of an XF grade, the contact sanction (indicated with an X) will be recorded on the transcript as an XF or XZ, making clear that the grade was impacted by an academic integrity violation. Note: for future implementation of G-9, prohibiting students with academic integrity violations from using alternative grading for those courses should be considered, a decision which will be affected by timing during the semester and the ability to communicate this policy to students, staff, and faculty.
Due to ongoing concerns of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pennsylvania State University announced its decision of an altered course structure for the Fall 2020 semester on July 15, 2020.2 Classes were to be held remotely, in person, or a hybrid of both modes. However, early communications indicated that the alternative grading system would not be reimplemented for the Fall 2020 semester.

On July 17, 2020, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) announced a flexible grading system for the Fall 2020 semester for undergraduate and graduate students.3 Undergraduate and graduate students are to be awarded the grades of A, B, C, D/NE, F/NE. A grade with NE indicates that it will not appear on the students’ external transcript. The grade of D/NE allows a student to accept a grade of D to fulfil a graduation requirement. Additionally, students may elect for one of their courses to be graded as PE/NE (PE indicates performance at any of the following levels: A, B, C; NE indicates performance at levels D or F for which no record will appear on the external transcript). Some courses may also be denoted as IE (Incomplete), which does not need to be absolved prior to graduation.

On September 17, 2020, the Ohio State University decided to reinstate their alternative grading system for all General Education courses (GEs) and electives, as well as for a substantial amount of major and minor required courses.4

On behalf of the Pennsylvania State University undergraduate student body, the University Park Undergraduate Association (UPUA) believes that the Faculty Senate should consider the Fall 2020 semester to be a situation of special Senate concern, and therefore enact Policy 49-70.

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**Method**

*Source of Data*

Student representatives of the University Park Undergraduate Association (UPUA) conducted a university-wide survey of students inquiring about the Alternative Grading System. The survey was published through Qualtrics and was open from October 15, 2020, at 9:40pm EST until October 19, 2020, at 9:06am EST. The data was collected through convenience sampling. The following distribution

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2 [https://news.psu.edu/story/625901/2020/07/15/academics/penn-state-expects-half-fall-classes-have-person-components](https://news.psu.edu/story/625901/2020/07/15/academics/penn-state-expects-half-fall-classes-have-person-components)
3 [https://facultygovernance.mit.edu/sites/default/files/Fall_2020_Grading_Policy_FULL_FINAL.pdf](https://facultygovernance.mit.edu/sites/default/files/Fall_2020_Grading_Policy_FULL_FINAL.pdf)
4 [https://oaa.osu.edu/pass-no-pass-fall-2020](https://oaa.osu.edu/pass-no-pass-fall-2020)
channels were used: academic colleges, student organizations, Penn State class Facebook groups, social media, and word of mouth.

**Statistical Methods**

Simple statistical techniques were used to tabulate the results of this survey. Percentages of responses were used to analyze the primary data. The survey aims to gain insight on three main areas: respondent demographic (current campus enrollment; current class standing), respondent use of the alternative grading system in the Spring 2020 semester, and intent/impact of the reimplementation of the alternative grading system for the Fall 2020 semester.

The survey asked the following questions, along with their respective answer fields:

1. What campus are you currently enrolled at?
   a. (fill in the blank)

2. What is your class standing?
   a. (fill in the blank)

3. Do you have plans to attend a graduate or professional school post-graduation?
   a. Yes
   b. I don’t know
   c. No

4. Did you utilize alternative grading last semester?

5. If you did utilize alternative grading last semester, how many courses did you use it for?
   a. 1
   b. 2
   c. 3
   d. 4
   e. 5 or more

6. If you did not utilize alternative grading last semester, what were the reasons? (Please select all that apply)
   a. I didn’t know about alternative grading
   b. The process was too complicated
   c. I couldn’t reach my advisor in time/I missed the deadline
   d. I didn’t understand what alternative grading was
   e. I was comfortable with keeping my current grade
   f. I needed my grades to be kept to supplement my GPA
   g. I needed to keep my grades to apply to a graduate or professional school
h. Other (fill in the blank)

7. If alternative grading was reinstated for the Fall 2020 semester, would you utilize it for one or more courses?
   a. Yes
   b. Maybe
   c. No

8. What effects would having the option of the alternative grading system for the Fall 2020 semester have on you as a student? (Please select all that apply.)
   a. Ease of mind/increased mental health
   b. Positive effect on my academic trajectory/GPA
   c. Indifferent/No Effect
   d. Negative effect on my academic trajectory/GPA
   e. Other (fill in the blank)

*See Appendix A for the full survey and formatting.

Participants:
As of October 19, 2020, at 9:06am EST, there were 5,270 survey respondents.

2019 Pennsylvania State University Total Enrollment*: 96,408 students
Percentage (%) of the Penn State student population captured by the survey: 5.46%

Of the 5,270 survey respondents:
Current Campus Enrollment
- 4,474 students are currently enrolled at University Park (11.01% of University Park students)
- 189 students are currently enrolled at a Commonwealth Campus (0.7% of students enrolled at Other Campuses)
- 28 students are currently enrolled at World Campus (0.1% of students enrolled at Other Campuses)
*579 respondents did not indicate their current campus enrollment

Class Standing
- 713 respondents are first-year students

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5 https://stats.psu.edu
6 https://admissions.psu.edu/apply/statistics/
● 1,609 respondents are second-year students
● 1,673 respondents are third-year students
● 1,127 respondents are fourth-year students
● 140 respondents are fifth-year students
*8 respondents did not indicate their class standing

Limitations of the Study
Due to time constraint and limited resources, the results of the study may be limited. The brief and overarching nature of the survey questions may have overlooked areas of student need that would be beneficial for analysis. Furthermore, the survey question inquiring about the intent of the respondent to attend a graduate or professional school post-graduation was not inclusive of Pennsylvania State University graduate students. The survey aimed to capture responses from all of Penn State students. In doing so, first-year respondents may have answered the question of “Did you utilize alternative grading last semester?” in reference to their high school’s grading policies. The use of convenience sampling from the surveyors was deemed to be the most efficient. In a second iteration of this survey, a stratified sample might be used for increased randomization and accuracy.

Data

Introduction
The survey was designed to determine Penn State students’ use of the alternative grading system for the Spring 2020 semester, reasons that students did not utilize the alternative grading system for the Spring 2020 semester, student want for the reimplementation of the alternative grading system for the Fall 2020 semester, and the effects of the reimplementation.

Findings
*The Qualtrics system renumbers questions as “Q#” in its database. However, the questions appeared on the survey and the results in the following order*
Question 2

Q6 - What is your class standing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What is your class standing?</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>5262</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>First-Year</td>
<td>13.55%</td>
<td>713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Second Year</td>
<td>30.58%</td>
<td>1609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Third-Year</td>
<td>31.79%</td>
<td>1673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fourth-Year</td>
<td>21.42%</td>
<td>1127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fifth-Year</td>
<td>2.05%</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5262
Question 3

Q8 - Do you have plans to attend a graduate or professional school post-graduation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you have plans to attend a graduate or professional school post-graduation?</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>5,260</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Choice Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>43.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I don't know</td>
<td>35.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>20.06%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Question 4

**Q2 - Did you utilize alternative grading last semester?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Choice Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2407</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Question 5

**Q9 - If you did utilize alternative grading last semester, how many courses did you use it for?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>If you did utilize alternative grading last semester, how many courses did you use it for?</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>2948</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 6

Q3 - If you did not utilize alternative grading last semester, what were the reasons?

(Please select all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Choice Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I didn't know about alternative grading</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The process was too complicated</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I couldn't reach my advisor in time I missed the deadline</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I didn't understand what alternative grading was</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I was comfortable with keeping my current grade</td>
<td>1499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I needed my grades to be kept to supplement my GPA</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I needed to keep my grades to apply to a graduate or professional school</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3094</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
*The majority of respondents that chose “other” are currently first-year students or not enrolled for Spring 2020. See Appendix B.*

**Question 7**

**Q4 - If alternative grading was reinstated for the Fall 2020 semester, would you utilize it for one or more courses?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>If alternative grading was reinstated for the Fall 2020 semester, would you utilize it for one or more courses?</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>5,257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Choice Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>68.75% 3614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>27.52% 1452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3.53% 191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Count 5257
Question 8

Q10 - What effects would having the option of the alternative grading system for the Fall 2020 semester have on you as a student? (Please select all that apply.)

The “other” answer choice for Question 8 allowed students to fill in testimonials regarding the effect that the reimplementation of the alternative grading system for the Spring 2020 semester would have on them as a student. The comprehensive list of responses can be found under Appendix C. The main topic areas of the responses include, but are not limited to:

- Mental health
○ “This semester is mentally draining on every student. Every single one of my peers feels lost and that they are drifting through this year not truly learning. This isn’t what college is about. Our brains are not equipped to sit in front of a screen all day without true human interaction and then be expected to excel as we would in a time when the pandemic was not around.”
○ “Lower chances of increased suicidal tendencies.”
○ “The stress and anxiety that I am going through because of the pandemic and increased workload of my classes. It would decrease my stress levels very much and help.”
○ “The idea of failing or doing poorly due to the immense increase in possible detrimental outside influences that affect state of mental health/studies/comfortable academic help availability. I think having a back door option there just in case, because every student’s academic and personal life is affected differently, would be really beneficial.”
○ “Provide relief to my intense anxiety from COVID.”
○ “I am with depression because I am isolated without contact to anyone. It has been hard to get out of bed and watch my classes. It’s a big change for a 4.0 student.”
○ “Dealing with family and friends getting COVID and my current health issues, worrying about my grades for grad school all has been taking a large toll on my mental health.”

● Physical health
  ○ “I had COVID and my grades suffered. I think it’s unfair to have these grades on my transcript.”
  ○ “I had [COVID-19] this semester and a sports injury so it was a brutal month.”
  ○ “Having a neurodevelopmental disorder makes learning particularly difficult in this environment.”

● Financial Burdens
  ○ “It would help me keep my scholarship. I have ADHD and online classes are very difficult for me.”
  ○ “Improve my GPA for scholarships.”

● Future Application to Professional/Graduate School
  ○ “Other schools allow P/F for fall 2020. Grad school applications uphold such decisions. If Penn State does not do it, it leaves us severely disadvantaged.”

● Family obligations
  ○ “There is a lot going on with my family due to COVID. So it will relax my mind a bit.”
  ○ “I’m staying at home working around 40 hours a week. There just aren’t enough hours in the day for me to adequately study to succeed in some of my classes.”

● University responsibility
○ “The alternative grading option would allow me to believe that the Penn State community feels for their students and the increased difficulty of “zoom university” throughout this pandemic.”
○ “Reassure me that Penn State cares more about my success as a student more than my tuition.”
○ “It would show the student body that administration actually cares about us, which is not what it looks like right now.”

● Course Structure
  ○ “A grading system consistent with having zoom/online classes like last semester.”
  ○ “Some professors have been wildly unfair in their practices. This can help mitigate some of these issues without having to monitor everyone.”
  ○ “My teachers are not as effective this year as they have been in person. Teachers are not as effective online as they are in person especially in office hours, labs, and classes teaching technical material. In person teaching is essential to convey information that is technical and involves hands-on lab work. Furthermore, office hours over the internet do not allow students and teachers to make the connection necessary to convey difficult material or to discuss research, job opportunities, graduate school, and other academic opportunities. This online lower quality of instruction demands an alternative grading system.”

● Academic Success
  ○ “As someone with ADHD it has been tremendously hard to keep up with my scattered online schedule and despite my teachers best efforts I noticeably haven’t been retaining the curriculum like I used to. I feel like these grades are not representative of my learning ability.”
  ○ “It would allow me to learn more by decreasing my stress of certain grades I’m getting due to the conditions around me.”
  ○ “I could focus on learning to learn instead of learning to get a very specific grade.”
  ○ “I can focus more on important classes for my major and just worry about passing gen eds.”
  ○ “Fairer: decrease incentive for rampant cheating from others.”

● Accessibility of Resources
  ○ “This will create the opportunity for many being impacted by this pandemic to be at ease. The pandemic is not over and students are still facing those same hardships they experienced during the first semester. Some being worse as time goes on with a lack of pay and internet connection. Being as though students aren’t able to access the
resources we would on the ideal day of classes, I believe this should matter in the
decision of grading.”

- **Impact on International Students**
  - “It will be more fair since all of my courses are online and with me being in another
    continent, my classes are all late at night because of the time zone difference therefore
    it is harder for me.”
  - “Better reflect my ability, due to timezone differences I’ve been receiving lower grades.”

- **Path to Graduation**
  - “Would greatly help GPA and getting into my entrance to major window.”
  - “Allows me a fighting chance to get into my Engineering Major that the pandemic has
    made significantly harder. I’m currently in the fight of my life for my future because the
    pandemic hindered my success in high gpa impactful classes. My test/quiz averages
    dropped once we went online.”
  - “Allow me to receive a passing grade in classes that I am taking this semester so it can
    count towards my graduation requirements and allow me to graduate this fall.”

- **Opposition of the reimplementation of the alternative grading system (and its structure)**
  - “If it was mandatory I would like it. However, for med school or grad programs, it looks
    bad to choose to use alt grading if it is optional.”
  - “Students would stop trying.”
  - “Reduced curves because professors will say ‘Just SAT’ it when I really need by GPA to
    go up.”
  - “Reduced motivation to do my classes.”
  - “I’m not sure what the consequences for future employment would be.”

- **Penn State Community**
  - “It would support my peers who need it. Just because I don’t need this doesn’t mean I
    shouldn’t advocate for it. My peers need the alternative grading option.”

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**Summary of Survey Findings**

Overall, the survey has expressed the following:
1. In the Spring 2020 semester, the majority of respondents utilized the alternative grading system for 1-2 courses.
   a. The survey indicates that 2,839 (54.12%) survey respondents utilized alternative grading for the Spring 2020 semester.
      i. 43.89% of survey respondents that utilized alternative grading for the Spring 2020 semester used it for one course.
      ii. 34.16% of survey respondents that utilized alternative grading for the Spring 2020 semester used it for two courses.
      iii. The mean amount of courses under the alternative grading system that were utilized by survey respondents for the Spring 2020 semester is 1.90.

2. Of the respondents that did not utilize the alternative grading system for the Spring 2020 semester, the most significant reason for not utilizing it was comfort keeping their current letter grades.
   a. 48.45% of respondents expressed that their reasoning for not utilizing the alternative grading system was comfort in keeping their current grade.
   b. Only 1.68% of respondents expressed that their reasoning for not utilizing the alternative grading system was that the process was too complicated.
   c. Only 3.75% of respondents expressed that their reasoning for not utilizing the alternative grading system was a lack of understanding.
   d. Only 6.79% of respondents expressed that their reasoning for not utilizing the alternative grading system was a lack of awareness.
   e. 15.9% of responses can be attributed to current first-year students or respondents that were not enrolled in the Spring 2020 semester.

3. If enacted, a significant amount of respondents would utilize the alternative grading system for the Fall 2020 semester.
   a. 68.75% responded “Yes” regarding their intent to utilize the alternative grading system for the Fall 2020 semester.
   b. 27.62% responded “Maybe” regarding their intent to utilize the alternative grading system for the Fall 2020 semester.
   c. Only 3.63% responded “No” regarding their intent to utilize the alternative grading system for the Fall 2020 semester.

4. Regardless of a respondent’s intent to opt-in to the alternative grading system for the Fall 2020 semester, the data indicates that the reimplementation would significantly contribute to an ease of mind and increased mental health.
   a. 92% of respondents who answered “Yes” to “If alternative grading was reinstated for Fall 2020, would you utilize it for one or more courses” also responded that the
alternative grading system would leave the effect of an “ease of mind/increased mental health.”

b. 86.7% of respondents who answered “Maybe” to “If alternative grading was reinstated for Fall 2020, would you utilize it for one or more courses” also responded that the alternative grading system would leave the effect of an “ease of mind/increased mental health.”

c. 22% of respondents who answered “No” to “If alternative grading was reinstated for Fall 2020, would you utilize it for one or more courses” also responded that the alternative grading system would leave the effect of an “ease of mind/increased mental health.”

5. The most significant effect that the reimplementation of the alternative grading system for the Spring 2020 semester would have on students that do not intend to utilize it is “no effect/indifferent.”

   a. 51.3% of respondents that do not intend to utilize alternative grading for the Spring 2020 semester believe that the reimplementation would have no effect on them as a student, and are therefore indifferent.

6. Students considering utilizing the alternative grading system for the Spring 2020 semester believe it will have a positive impact on their academic trajectory/GPA.

   a. 81.5% of respondents that selected “Yes” to utilizing the alternative grading system believe it will have a positive impact on their academic trajectory/GPA.
b. 64.4% of respondents that selected “Maybe” to utilizing the alternative grading system believe it will have a positive impact on their academic trajectory/GPA.

c. 7.9% of respondents that selected “No” to utilizing the alternative grading system believe it will have a positive impact on their academic trajectory/GPA.

7. A majority of the respondents that intend to attend a graduate or professional school post-graduation would utilize the alternative grading system for the Fall 2020 semester.

a. 43.97% of respondents selected “Yes” regarding their intent to attend a graduate or professional school post-graduation.

b. 35.97% of respondents selected “I don’t know” regarding their intent to attend a graduate or professional school post-graduation.

c. Of the respondents that responded “Yes” regarding their intent of attending a graduate or professional school post-graduation, 65.8% also responded “Yes” to utilizing the alternative grading system for the Fall 2020 semester.

d. Of the respondents that responded “I don’t know” regarding their intent of attending a graduate or professional school post-graduation, 70.3% responded “Yes” to utilizing the alternative grading system for the Fall 2020 semester.

e. Of the respondents that responded “No” regarding their intent attending a graduate or professional school post-graduation, 72.5% responded “Yes” to utilizing the alternative grading system for the Fall 2020 semester.

There is a very subtle but statistically significant relationship between Q8: Do you have plans to attend a graduate or professional school post-graduation? and Q4: If alternative grading was reinstated for t..., would you utilize it for one or more courses?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q8: Do you have plans...</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Maybe</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>65.8%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>70.3%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions and Recommendations
On behalf of the Pennsylvania State University undergraduate student body, the University Park Undergraduate Association (UPUA) believes that the results of the survey implore the University Faculty Senate to consider the Fall 2020 semester a situation of special Senate concern, therefore enacting Senate Policy 49-70: Supplemental Satisfactory Grade/Passing Grade/No Grade Grading System for Baccalaureate and Associate Degree Candidates.

The decisions made by the University in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic and their subsequent effects on students have yielded significant concern. Student testimonials regarding mental health, physical health, financial burdens, future application to professional/graduate school, family obligations, university responsibility, course structure, academic success, accessibility of resources, impact on international students, and path to graduation raise valid considerations and should not be ignored. Although some respondents acknowledge that their personal utilization of the alternative grading system might have a negative effect on their academic or professional trajectory, respondents also recognize the importance of empathy and acting for the common good. Moreover, the reimplementation of an alternative grading system for the Fall 2020 semester would be most beneficial to the Penn State community.

To increase information and awareness of the alternative grading system, the UPUA wishes to collaborate with the University Advising Council to create an educational campaign for students. The UPUA will promote this campaign throughout all of their channels, as well as in collaboration with the Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA), Council of Commonwealth Student Governments (CCSG), and World Campus Student Government Association (WCSCGA).

The Pennsylvania State University strives to uphold the values of discovery, community, integrity, excellence, respect, and responsibility. In the decision to enact Policy 49-70 for the Fall 2020 semester, the student body encourages the Faculty Senate and Penn State administration to reinforce these values.
Appendix A: Survey Questions and Format

Hello! In Spring 2020, Penn State implemented the alternative grading system in response to the global coronavirus pandemic. The University Park Undergraduate Association (UPUA) is advocating to the University Faculty Senate to reinstate alternative grading for the Fall 2020 semester.

Under the alternative grading system, students have the ability to keep their current grade, or to have courses graded with one of the three alternative grades:

- SAT (Satisfactory)
  - Available if a student earns a C or better in a course
  - Does not impact GPA
  - Can be used to meet all requirements, including entrance to major and prerequisites requiring a C or better
  - Counts toward total credits earned, semester standing, and the opportunity to purchase football tickets
  - Does not count toward the entrance-to-major requirement credit window in administratively controlled majors

- V (Pass)
  - Available if a student earns a D in a course
  - Considered a passing grade
  - Does not impact GPA
  - Can be used to meet requirements for which D is an acceptable grade
  - Cannot be used to meet C or better requirements
  - Counts toward total credits earned, semester standing, the opportunity to purchase football tickets
  - Does not count toward the entrance-to-major requirement credit window in administratively controlled majors

- Z (No Grade)
  - Available if a student earns an F in a course
  - Can be used to replace an F grade and will be treated similar to if the student had late-dropped the class
  - Does not impact GPA
  - Does not count toward total credits earned, the entrance-to-major requirement credit window, semester standing, or the opportunity to purchase football tickets

Fall 2020 has incited many challenges for students that directly affect their academic success. These challenges include, but are not limited to: mental health, remote/hybrid learning, unexpected illnesses, family commitments, financial burdens, challenges for international students, etc.

Please take the following survey regarding your interest in alternative grading for the Fall 2020 semester so that we can best advocate for you!
What campus are you currently enrolled at?

---

What is your class standing?

- First-Year
- Second-Year
- Third-Year
- Fourth-Year
- Fifth-Year

---

Do you have plans to attend a graduate or professional school post-graduation?

- Yes
- I don't know
- No

---

Did you utilize alternative grading last semester?

- Yes
- No
If you did use alternative grading last semester, how many courses did you use it for?

1

2

3

4

5 or more

If you did not use alternative grading last semester, what were the reasons? (Please select all that apply)

- I didn’t know about alternative grading
- The process was too complicated
- I couldn’t reach my advisor in time/I missed the deadline
- I didn’t understand what alternative grading was
- I was comfortable with keeping my current grade
- I needed my grades to be kept to supplement my GPA
- I needed to keep my grades to apply to a graduate or professional school
- Other
If alternative grading was reinstated for the Fall 2020 semester, would you utilize it for one or more courses?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What effects would having the option of the alternative grading system for the Fall 2020 semester have on you as a student? (Please select all that apply.)

- Ease of mind/increased mental health
- Positive effect on my academic trajectory/GPA
- Indifferent/No Effect
- Negative effect on my academic trajectory/GPA
- Other

Thank you for your responses and we will do our best to advocate for your needs. If you have any questions regarding your courses or the status of this initiative, please email academicaffairs@upua.org
Appendix B: Reasons for Not Utilizing Alternative Grading for Spring 2020 Semester

- I am a first year student
- Was/ Isn’t a Penn State student
- I transferred this semester. I didn’t have the parallel option at my previous university.
- I withdrew from the spring semester
- Not
- Not
- Needed my grades to maintain NROTC scholarship
- I was in high school
- We already were about halfway through the semester before we went online
- I noticed all A’s
- Did not attend yet
- I was not enrolled at Penn State last semester
- I used SAP
- Wasn’t a student at Penn State at the time
- Did not attend college
- I wasn’t a student at Penn State
- Was not in college
- I’m a first semester freshman
- I was in high school and they did not offer that option.
*Due to spacial restrictions, please go to https://psu.box.com/s/rfoou89u7mgcd88s7ud5fc3rarchjd8x to see the full report of responses*
Appendix C: “Other” Responses on the Effects of the Reimplementation of the Alternative Grading System
You shouldn't expect students to do well when we aren't getting proper teacher and then making the exams harder because you think we'll cheat, if you hold academic integrity so high follow it.

Would greatly help GPA and getting into my entrance to major window

This would help combat the difficulties of online class

This will create the opportunity for many being impacted by this pandemic to be at ease. The pandemic is not over and students are still facing those same hardships they experienced during the first semester. Some even being worse as time goes on with a lack of pay and internet connection. Being as though students aren't able to access the resources we would on the ideal day of classes, I believe this should matter in the decision of grading.

This semester is mentally draining on every student. Every single one of my peers feels lost and that they are drifting through this year not truly learning. This isn't what college is about. Our brains are not equipped to sit in front of a screen all day without true human interaction and then be expected to excel as we would in a time when the pandemic was not around.

This grading system would streamline accurate academic standing.

Third year is already the hardest and it being online is a stress on another level

There is a lot going with family due to COVID. So will relax my mind a bit

There are some teachers who aren't understanding about the situation. This is one of the hardest years I have ever experienced.

The way that exams are administered are not as well as they would be in person and therefore had caused a lot of students to do worse on exams and they're a no way for the professor to accommodate that.

The stress and anxiety that I am going through because of the pandemic and increased workload of my classes. It would decrease my stress levels very much and help.

The professors are continuously throwing so much work not only causing mental health problems but also not allowing any room for self-growth in other associations outside of classes. (Engineering Major, Industrial Engineering)

The possibility of saving my gpa. I wouldn't use it for any class that wouldn't negatively effect my gpa because online learning is much harder for me than in person classes.

The idea of failing or doing poorly due to the immense increase in possible detrimental outside influences that affect state of mental health studies. Comfortable academic help availabilities, I think having a back door option there just in case, because every students academic and personal life is affected differently, would really be beneficial.

The alternative grading option would allow me to believe that the Penn State community feels for their students and the increased difficulty of "zoom university" throughout this pandemic.

Students would stop trying

Stressed.

Some professors have been wildly unfair in their practices. This can help mitigate some of these issues without having to monitor everyone

Some professors have also fallen off a cliff as far as energy/effort with zoom classes. "Read the book/slides and take a test". I could CLEP this if I knew they were going to be hypocritical about effort in "these trying times". Jerks.
Appendix A
10/29/20

Other

Sleep

Since I am preparing GRE test at the same time, an alternative grading system will reduce some pressure.

Side effect: Reduced curves because professors will say “just SAT” it when I really need my GPA to go up.

Reduced motivation to do my classes

Reassure me that Penn State cares more about my success as a student more than my tuition.

Really right now I think a lot of kids need a break mentally

Provide relief to my intense anxiety from COVID

Prevent me from receiving a bad grade due to online learning.

People take advantage of alternative grading to get a good GPA. It’s a farce.

Other schools allow P/F for fall 2020. Grad school applications uphold such decisions. If Penn State does not do it, it leaves us severely disadvantaged.

Online schooling is too much for my brain

Online learning is very stressful and very difficult, this would ease the burden significantly.

Online learning is not the same as in person learning. Some people cannot learn through this way because there is no in person interaction. Older professors cannot use technology which makes the class harder. Screens are blurry, voices cut out, and if you have bad internet that day you can’t attend class. Certain classes are easier to take online then others, but science courses like Chemistry and Chemistry Lab should never be online. The same goes with Math courses as well.

Online classes are still not the same quality as in person classes so I feel my grade does is not equivalent to the past semester of fully in person classes.

Online classes are not the same as in person

None, but I feel that some (not all) students I know use it as an excuse to slack off in classes because they know it won’t matter

My teachers are not as effective this year as they have been in person. Teachers are not as effective online as they are in person especially in office hours, labs, and classes teaching technical material. In person teaching is essential to convey information that is technical and involves hands-on lab work. Furthermore, office hours over the Internet do not allow students and teachers to make the connection necessary to convey difficult material or to discuss research, job opportunities, graduate school, and other academic opportunities. This online lower quality of instruction demands an alternative grading system.

Less stress and time consumed to putting in an extra semester or more. Also helps financially

Less pressure and overall stress

Less of a chance for Summa Cum Laude

Less motivation to succeed
I'm staying at home working around 40 hours a week. There just aren't enough hours in the day for me to adequately study to succeed in some of my classes.

I'd be able to apply for my major after this semester if I get a bad grade or two. If I don't get alternative grading, I might have to go into a different major.

It's what's right in a pandemic

It would support my peers who need it. Just because I don't need this doesn't mean I shouldn't advocate for it. My peers need the alternative grading option.

It would show the student body that administration actually care about us, which is not what it looks like right now.

It would really help with my mental health, you have no idea.

It would make up for the fact that online learning is simply not the same, nor as effective as in person classes. Grades reflect what you've learned, and it is significantly harder to learn whilst attending classes online.

It would make me feel like the school cared about students more, even if I didn't use it.

It would help me keep my scholarship. I have ADHD and online classes are very difficult for me.

It would definitely realize a lot of stress in the fact that some courses I am really struggling to grasp over online for example organic chem.

It would be a tremendous help to bring back alternative grading.

It would allow me to stay competitive for law school. Learning Spanish online wasn’t what I was expecting when I registered for the mandatory language class.

It will be more fair since all of my courses are online and with me being in another continent, my classes are all late at night because of the time zone difference therefore it is harder for me.

It seems that certain professors are still unprepared for online formats and some have even said it themselves. My class had an exam and the teacher watched us through Zoom, sent an email of the exam when we showed our cameras (forcing kids to get cameras who didn’t have one) and made mistakes of sending out the exams which wasted students time which most likely affected their score.

It is difficult learning in a remote environment where you basically have to self motivate and self teach. Often, we forget a chapter or are unable to completely understand the concept in a way that would have been different had we been in person and had in person office hours. The professors themselves also seem to struggle at times and keep trying to understand us as best as possible but you can only do so much virtually. Having this ability to use alternative grading should be allowed, as people could have done much better in an in person environment compared to now.

Insurance of on-time graduation.

In the majority of my classes the professors are making the exams true or false or fill in the blank (with numerical values) in 400 level differential-equation heavy topic classes. These classes are usually passed solely on the merit of partial credit, which most professors have taken away. This being said they might weight them, but they haven’t made this clear yet, so many of us are scared to not drop the class for fear of plummeting our GPAs.

Improve my GPA for scholarships
I'm not sure what the consequences for future employment would be

I wouldn't drop a class and take it next semester instead as I am worried I will get another B

I would honestly feel like it would make my education less valuable than it already is because we are online. I think some employers think if I do really well I am cheating and really bad I am stupid.

I think that it bail out students who are not putting in the work

I just want to emphasize how much this would help my mental health

I had covid and my grades suffered. I think it's unfair to have these grades on my transcript.

I had corona this semester and a sports injury so it was a brutal month

I feel like it would cheapen any good grades I earn

I feel as though alternative grading would be extremely impactful because I do not believe that I am gaining the same experience from in person classes. Therefore, my grades would be negatively impacted if there is no alternative grading because I was not able to perform to the best of my ability because of the online format.

I don't know what half the grades are in my classes. Professors had the summer to figure things out and they didn't. I hate everything about this semester and it has made things extremely difficult.

I could focus on learning to learn instead of learning to get a very specific grade

I can focus more on important classes for my major just worry about passing gen eds

I believe this would compensate for the increased difficulty of my engineering courses as they have been made harder to account for possibility of cheating

I am with depression because I am isolated without contact to anyone. It has been hard to get out of bed and watch my classes. It's a big change for a 4.0 student

I am taking entrance to major classes so it won't help me

I am having a lot of stress at school right now and this would help me so much so thanks!

Helps me deal with the additional stress of managing family finance because my parents are now unemployed and running out of money

Help manage 30+ hours of working outside of class to afford college.

Having a neurodevelopmental disorder makes learning particularly difficult in this environment

For one of my classes my professor would not let me retake a quiz I had missed due to my father being in the hospital. It was also due on a sunday and worth 10% of my total grade. I found this unfair and certainly didn't help my mental health.

For courses that are virtually impossible to teach online

Fell behind academically after falling sick - this would help immensely
Other

Fairer: decrease incentive for rampant cheating from others,

Decreased pressure from family

Dealing with family and friends getting COVID and my current health issues, worrying about my grades for grad school has been taking a large toll on my mental health.

Damage the reputation of a Penn State degree (our GPAs will become worthless)

Compensates for difficulty/ stress of online classes

Better reflect my ability, due to time zone difference I’ve been receiving lower grades

Better prepared for next semester

Being on zoom all day and then having to do hours of readings and other work is absolutely exhausting.

Be a huge thing for me. Please please do this.

As someone with ADHD it has been tremendously hard to keep up with my scattered online schedule and despite my teachers best efforts I noticeably haven’t been retaining the curriculum like I used to. I feel like these grades are not representative of my learning ability.

As a student who likes in-person classes and find difficulty in on-line classes I very much prefer the alternative grading system to help maintain my GPA.

Alternative Grading reflects the status of the world. It shows that we are in a pandemic with crippling effects on each of us that cannot be summed up in any other way. No general curve could make up for what COVID-19 has done to the study body and our support systems both here and back home. Alternative Grading is like an understanding that yes we are here and we are still pushing to get our education but we are struggling and need to be assisted through this time.

Allows me a fighting chance to get into my Engineering Major that the pandemic has made significantly harder. I’m currently in the fight of my life for my future because the pandemic hindered my successes in high gas impactful classes. My test/quiz averages dropped once we went online.

Allowing me to take classes requiring a C or better at community colleges

Allow me to receive a passing grade classes that I am taking this semester so it can count towards my graduation requirements and allow me to graduate this fall

All depends on how the semester plays out. It’s much different than when we already had half the semester done before going online. Doing the full semester just kinda sucked the life out of me.

Accounts for points lost due to complications in online submissions

Able to learn more efficiently with ease of mind.

Ability to focus on learning material rather than trying to sit on a computer and focus on handing in what I know will give me a good grade

A grading system consistent with having zoom/online classes like last semester.

utilizing that for grading policy is really helpful for students
Low chances of increased suicidal tendencies.

Any class can be online, it’s easier than normal schooling.

It's really taking a toll on me how adjusting to this is normally mid-week my grades are not like how they are right now.

It would allow me to learn more by decreasing my stress of certain grades I'm getting due to the conditions around me.

If it was mandatory I would like it, however, for med school or grad programs, it looks bad to choose to use alt grading if it is OPTIONAL.

Zoom doesn't help me learn.
COVID-19 RESOLUTION ON RE-ENACTING THE SATISFACTORY/UNSATISFACTORY GRADING SYSTEM FOR THE FALL 2020 SEMESTER

Erin Boas, College of the Liberal Arts
(Legislative)

WHEREAS, the global COVID-19 pandemic has continued to cause unprecedented challenges and uncertainty for faculty, students, and the University as a whole; and

WHEREAS, in this extraordinary situation, we need to provide students with additional flexibility and options that will allow them to make academic progress and adjust to the COVID-19 learning environment; and

WHEREAS, students have expressed concerns that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have negative impacts on their mental health, physical health, financial burdens, family obligations, impact on international students, ability to succeed academically, and accessibility of resources; and

WHEREAS, multiple institutions across the nation have reinstated the alternative grading system for the Fall 2020 semester.

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate encourages the Administrative Council on Undergraduate Education to reconsider item 14 in procedure G-11 regarding the access of the alternative grading system for students with academic integrity violations.

BE IT RESOLVED, that the administration should consider that students will be permitted to change, if they opt to, the grading basis from a quality grade to satisfactory/unsatisfactory up until the last class day of Fall 2020, for any number of their classes, including general education classes. These changes should be made in consultation with the student’s academic advisor or instructor to consider academic and financial implications.
49-70 Supplemental Satisfactory Grade/Passing Grade/No Grade Grading System – Baccalaureate and Associate Degree Candidates

Senate Policy 49-70 may be temporarily enabled by the University Faculty Senate to supplement Senate Policy 49-60 “Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory–Baccalaureate and Associate Degree Candidates” under a situation of special Senate concern. When enacted, there is no limit to the number of courses that may be taken for credit by any baccalaureate or associate degree candidates under the satisfactory grade/passing grade/no grade (SAT/V/Z) optional and temporary grading system, subject to regulations of the college and the limits of the degree program in which the candidate is enrolled; the SAT/V/Z grading system option also applies to General Education courses; the SAT/V/Z grading system option is available only for the designated semester to candidates after conventional grades have been submitted by instructors. Courses may not be offered under the SAT/V/Z grading system.

1. Each candidate, depending on the requirements and limitations of the candidate’s college or unit of enrollment, may select the SAT/V/Z grading system option for any currently enrolled course. The candidate should confirm that the regulations of the proposed program of study are not violated.

2. Once the SAT/V/Z grading system option is selected, the candidate cannot revert to a conventional (A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, D, F) grade, except by petition to the Faculty Senate.

3. After conventional grades are submitted by the instructor to the Office of the University Registrar, candidates have to option to have their conventional grades for each eligible class recorded as SAT, replacing a satisfactory grade or better (A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, D, F), V, replacing a passing grade (D), or Z, replacing a failing grade (F) and being treated as a late drop/no grade, where applicable.

4. If the grade is SAT, V, or Z, a course may be taken again.

5. The SAT/V/Z grading system option applies to courses taken abroad.

6. This policy applies to courses taken for credit by any baccalaureate or associate degree candidates in the same (single) semester in which the policy is passed as formal legislation by the University Faculty Senate. Some programs, including IUG programs, may have specific requirements on which courses are eligible for the SAT/V/Z grading option. Students should discuss the requirements of their program with their academic adviser.

7. If the grade is SAT, V, or Z, it will not be used in computing grade points.