

MEMORANDUM

TO: Penn State Law Students
FROM: Penn State Law Governing Faculty
DATE: April 2, 2020
RE: COVID-19 Grading Changes for Spring 2020 Semester

The Penn State Law Governing Faculty recognizes that many of our students have been significantly impacted by COVID-19 and that their situations may change over the course of the semester. After a deliberative process that included extensive input from students and benchmarking of other law schools, the faculty decided to adopt mandatory credit/no-credit for Spring 2020 out of concern for our students most impacted by COVID-19.

This approach prevents students facing severe challenges from being additionally comparatively disadvantaged and from having to make hard choices about whether to opt in or out of the usual grading scheme in a semester where they simply could not perform as well as usual. It also is the approach most adopted by other law schools nationally.

Students will receive a grade of “no credit” only if they would have received an “F” for a course. For courses that have a graduation requirement of earning a grade of “C” or better (experiential courses, seminars that satisfy the upper-level writing requirement, and professional responsibility), a “credit” grade satisfies the graduation requirement. For purposes of obtaining a concentration, any course in which a student receives credit during Spring 2020 will count towards the concentration, even if the usual requirement is a grade of “C” or better. Faculty will not give CALI awards this semester because of the reasons for moving to a credit/no-credit grading scheme for Spring 2020.

Students who need a certain GPA this semester to remain in good standing will be able to remain in good standing for now and use their Fall 2020 grades to attain the required minimum GPA. No student will fall out of good standing or lose Penn State Law scholarship awards based on this semester’s grades.

This change will not affect a student’s right to choose to take one course Pass/Fail in the future. The students who have already requested to take a course Pass/Fail for the Spring 2020 semester will now be receiving credit/no-credit for that course, and they may take a different course Pass/Fail during a future semester. Further, a student’s credit/no-credit grades for the Spring 2020 semester courses will not put the student in violation of other academic rules.

The class rankings will be calculated at the completion of the Spring 2020 grading period and will be published on each student’s transcript. A student’s cumulative GPA will remain the same as it was after Fall 2019 because neither a “credit” nor a “no-credit” grade will affect the GPA calculation (although class rank may change slightly based on the total number of students in each graduating class). Students graduating in May 2020 will be eligible for Woolsack honors and Latin Honors (cum laude, etc.) if they would have been eligible based on their class rank at the end of either Fall 2019 or Spring 2020.

For students whose sponsoring institutions require grades, we will provide their sponsoring institution with information about the reasons for the changes in this semester's grading scheme.

Penn State Law will work with any students, including joint degree students, who are taking courses outside of the law school that may be graded differently or who need to count this semester's law courses towards their graduate degree. Courses outside of the law school are not included in the calculation of a student's law school GPA.

Faculty will inform students in writing of any changes to course requirements or grading assessment methods (including the format of the exam) by April 10, 2020. For students who receive accommodation, Dean Elkin and the Penn State Students Disabilities Resources office will work together to modify the accommodation as necessary in light of any such changes. Students will be held to the Honor Code for their course work, projects, and exams this semester.

Final exams will be administered as remote exams, via Canvas, or other means via the internet. No in-person exams will be held, but grading of final exams will be done anonymously for all final exams that were previously designated to be graded anonymously. Faculty may choose to proctor their own exams remotely using Zoom or another platform, and will inform students of their proctoring approach in advance of the exam.

No student will be penalized for technological difficulties during an exam; if a student does encounter technical difficulties during an exam, the student must notify help@pennstatelaw.psu.edu during the exam. As necessary, Dean Gardner and the technology team will work with the student and the instructor to devise a plan for the student to have additional time to finish the exam. In extenuating circumstances where it is impossible for the student to reach the technology team during the exam, the student must contact help@pennstatelaw.psu.edu within 24 hours after the exam and they will work with the student and instructor to come up with a plan to enable the student to complete the course requirements.