

Senate Scholastic Standards Committee
Report to the University Senate
September 13, 2021

A. Background:

Historically and before COVID-19, policies and practices were in place at the University of Connecticut to assist students who were facing challenges (e.g., personal or familial illnesses, death of family and next of kin, or serious academic difficulties). Faculty, advising staff, and other support offices worked with affected students using an existing portfolio or "tool-kit" of policies to address difficult situations and/or facilitate completion of work. Those policies and practices remain in place. However, temporary modifications were made to some of these University-wide policies to address COVID-specific impacts.

In Spring 2020, Fall 2020, and Spring 2021, Scholastics Standards Committee recommended -- and the Senate passed -- *extensions* to Pass-Fail and Withdraw deadlines to help students deal with the uncertainties and stresses related to COVID-19. Associated deliberations over 18 months allowed the SSC to delve into these policies/deadlines, through discussion with Financial Aid offices, Registrar, undergraduate advising, USG, and other offices. These efforts yielded critical insights, including which and how many students utilized the amended policies, and how advising networks perceived the initial impacts a year+ later. This information provides insight on unintended negative consequences of leniency changes (e.g., impacts on degree completion and post-graduate programs such as law/medical/dental/business school applications and other professional endeavors).

Since COVID-19 remains an active concern, SSC has performed further assessment of the Senate By-Laws associated with Pass-Fail and Withdrawal, looking to the fall 2021 semester *as well as the longer term* (in anticipation of ongoing stressors that P/F and W policies are intended to offset). We have two important findings to report:

1) **The current deadlines for Pass-Fall and Withdraw in the Senate By-Laws appear to be arbitrary.** SSC has found nothing to substantiate that the current deadlines for Pass-Fail (at the end of the 10th day of semester) or Withdraw (at the end of the 9th week of the semester) are sacrosanct, nor tied to Federal policy.

2) **The extended deadlines** over the past three semesters, while allowing students additional time to make decisions, **have indeed had non-optimal consequences** for:

a) Our **students**, who were making decisions late in the semester under very stressful circumstances, potentially compromising grades in other courses, enrollment in sequential courses (where pre-recs were invalidated *after* Registration), and time to graduation (with associated expense);

b) our **advising staff**, who were charged with assisting students in these consequential grade-related decisions, and were inundated and stressed by managing late grade-related requests. Moreover, this led to delayed dismissal decisions, which are not advantageous to students;

c) our **Registrar's Office**, who were tasked with processing a large volume of grade-related changes and dismissal decisions in a brief time window during end-of-semester holiday periods, adding stress to this critical staff.

With these factors in mind, SSC brings a proposal to extend, align, and standardize permanently the Pass-Fail and Withdraw deadlines.

This proposal was discussed and *unanimously* supported at the August 30, 2021 meeting by SSC, which includes faculty members from various Schools and Colleges, Mason Holland, (University Student Government, president), and individuals in staff positions throughout the university, including: Maureen Armstrong (Dean of Students Office), Karen Bresciano (Graduate School and Student Welfare Committee Chair), Erin Ciarimboli and colleagues (Enrichment Programs and Undergraduate Advising), Greg Bouquot (Registrar's Office), Jen Lease-Butts (Enrichment Programs), Ellen Tripp (Student-Athlete Success Program), Christine Wenzel (Center for Students with Disabilities), and Sarah Croucher (Director of Academic Policy). We also note that our proposal has no adverse impact on students' financial aid (per Suzanne Peters, Financial Aid).

Specifically, SSC proposes to permanently change the last date to Withdraw from a course from the end of the 9th week to the end of the 11th week of the semester; and in parallel, change the last date to put a course of Pass/Fail to the end of 11th week of the semester.

- ✓ **Rationale for convergent timing for Pass-Fail and Withdrawal dates** – Students should consider both Withdraw and P/F at the same time to determine how such grade-related decisions will affect their plan of study and progress toward graduation. Alignment of dates allows students to directly consider pros/cons of each option.

SSC acknowledges that moving back the Pass-Fail deadline from the 2nd to the 11th week is a change from the original intent of this grading option, which was primarily to allow students to take risks and explore topics without worry about low-grade impacts on GPA. The extended deadline allows for not only this original intent, but *also* for students to monitor their progress within a course and convert to Pass-Fail based on their changing circumstances. *NOTE: This proposal does not in any way change the **limitations** on which Pass-Fail can be applied, nor the **number** of courses to which Pass-Fail can be applied.*

Consistent with past practice, SSC's proposal limits the number of times that a student can make a Pass-Fail grade change. Specifically, students who convert a Pass-Fail and

then revert the course back to a graded basis cannot again convert the course back to Pass-Fail.

✓ **Rationale for the end of the 11th week of the semester for Pass-Fail and Withdrawal dates –**

- 1) **Students** – The end of the 11th week deadline should allow for students to have sufficient graded assessments to make an informed decision about whether a Withdraw or Pass-Fail is appropriate for the course. The end of the 11th week (vs. later in the semester) enables students to make these grade-related decisions and then focus on class completion and final assessments during the remainder of semester,
- 2) **Advisors** – The end of the 11th week deadline gives additional time for advisors to meet with and counsel students around impact of grade-related decisions (both Pass-Fail and Withdraw) on plan of study and progress toward graduation. The end of the 11th week (vs. later in the semester) allows advisors to have the important conversations around success at UConn and whether a leave of absence is appropriate. Additionally, this timing allows for the difficult dismissal decisions to be communicated to students.
- 3) **Registrar's Office** – The end of the 11th week deadline better enables workflow for the Registrar's Office.

✓ **Rationale for *not later than* the end of the 11th week for Pass-Fail and Withdrawal Dates**

SSC considered dates later than the end of the 11th week, and deemed that a later date would have similar non-optimal consequences that arose by later dates in Spring 2020, Fall 2020, and Spring 2021.

As noted above, these Pass-Fail and Withdrawal permanent changes to the By-Laws received unanimous support from SSC because this proposal is viewed as addressing student needs, as well as being consistent with supporting our advising staff and our Registrar's Office.

B. Current Relevant By-Laws

II.B.10 Academic Advising and Registration, Adding or Dropping Classes

II.E.3.b Pass-Fail Option

II.B.10 Academic Advising and Registration. Adding or Dropping Classes

Students may drop courses before the end of the tenth day of classes without transcript notations. After the tenth day of classes and through the ninth week of the semester, a student may drop one course for any reason with permission from the student's advisor. No

student is permitted to drop a course after the ninth week of classes or to drop more than one course after the first ten days of classes unless on the recommendation of the advisor, an exception is made by the dean or designee of the school or college in which the student is enrolled. Exceptions are made only for extenuating circumstances beyond the student's control. Poor academic performance is not considered a sufficient reason for dropping a course after the ninth week. Any course dropped after the first ten days of classes will receive a 'W' on the transcript. Exceptions to transcript notations can be made only by the Provost or designee.

II.E.3.b Pass-Fail Option.

A student who has earned at least 26 credits and is not on scholastic probation may elect a maximum of 12 credits to be distributed over not more than three courses, to be recorded as 'P' for Pass or 'F' for Fail on his or her permanent record. Courses taken Pass-Fail may only be used as electives; they may not be used to satisfy general education, school/college, major or minor requirements. Students who are selecting a course for the Pass-Fail option must do so within the first two weeks of the semester. Students who are removing a course from the Pass-Fail option must do so within the first nine weeks of the semester. For courses taught outside of the fall and spring semesters, these deadlines will be adjusted in a pro-rated fashion by the Registrar.

C. Proposal to Senate: Motion

The Scholastic Standards Committee proposes to amend the By-Laws, Rules and Regulation of the University Senate II.B.10 Academic Advising and Registration, II.E.3.b Pass-Fail Option

II.B.10 Academic Advising and Registration, Adding, ~~or Dropping~~, or Withdrawing from a Course

Students may ~~drop~~ Drop courses before the end of the tenth day of classes without transcript notations. After the tenth day of classes and through the ~~ninth~~ eleventh week of the semester, a student may ~~drop-Withdraw from~~ one course (for any reason) with permission from the student's advisor. ~~Students interested in Withdrawing from more than one course after the tenth day of classes or interested in Withdrawing from a course after the eleventh week of the semester require approval by the student's advisor and No student is permitted to drop a course after the ninth week of classes or to drop more than one course after the first ten days of classes unless on the recommendation of the advisor, an exception is made by the~~ ~~Dean or designee of the school or college in which the student is enrolled.~~ ~~Exceptions are made~~ Approvals are given only for extenuating circumstances beyond the student's control; ~~P~~poor academic performance is not ~~an extenuating circumstance considered a sufficient reason for dropping a course after the ninth week.~~ Any course ~~dropped-Withdrawn from~~ after the first ten days of classes will receive a 'W' on the transcript. Exceptions to transcript notations can be made only by the Provost or designee. For courses taught outside of the fall and spring semesters, these deadlines will be adjusted in a pro-rated fashion by the Registrar.

II.E.3.b Pass-Fail Option.

A student who has earned at least 26 credits and is not on scholastic probation may elect a maximum of 12 credits (not including credits on P/F recorded in spring 2020) to be distributed over not more than three courses, to be recorded as 'P' for Pass or 'F' for Fail on his or her permanent record. Courses taken Pass-Fail may only be used as electives; they may not be used to satisfy general education, school/college, major or minor requirements. Students who are selecting a course for the Pass-Fail option or want to convert a Pass-Fail back to a graded basis must do so ~~within the first two weeks~~ by the eleventh week of the semester. ~~Students who convert to a Pass-Fail and then revert the course back to a graded basis cannot again convert the course back to a Pass-Fail. Students who are removing a course from the Pass-Fail option must do so within the first nine weeks of the semester.~~ Students interested in putting a course on Pass-Fail after the eleventh week of the semester require approval by the student's advisor and by the Dean or designee of the school or college in which the student is enrolled. Approvals are given only for extenuating circumstances beyond the student's control; poor academic performance is not an extenuating circumstance. For courses taught outside of the fall and spring semesters, these deadlines will be adjusted in a pro-rated fashion by the Registrar.

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II.B.10 Academic Advising and Registration. Adding, Dropping or Withdrawing from a Course

Students may Drop courses before the end of the tenth day of classes without transcript notations. After the tenth day of classes and through the eleventh week of the semester, a student may Withdraw from one course (for any reason) with permission from the student's advisor. Students interested in Withdrawing from more than one course after the tenth day of classes or interested in Withdrawing from a course after the eleventh week of the semester require approval by the student's advisor and by the Dean or designee of the school or college in which the student is enrolled. Approvals are given only for extenuating circumstances beyond the student's control; poor academic performance is not an extenuating circumstance. Any course Withdrawn from after the first ten days of classes will receive a 'W' on the transcript. Exceptions to transcript notations can be made only by the Provost or designee. For courses taught outside of the fall and spring semesters, these deadlines will be adjusted in a pro-rated fashion by the Registrar.

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after the eleventh week of the semester require approval by the student's advisor and by the Dean or designee of the school or college in which the student is enrolled. Approvals are given only for extenuating circumstances beyond the student's control; poor academic performance is not an extenuating circumstance. For courses taught outside of the fall and spring semesters, these deadlines will be adjusted in a pro-rated fashion by the Registrar.