



# Proposal for First Semester Pass/D/Fail

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## **I. The Proposal**

*This section contains the proposal for first semester Pass/D/Fail that was approved by CCSC on 4/7/2013 by a vote of 23-4-2. The two abstentions were from contributors of the proposal content.*

### **Resolution for First Semester Pass/D/Fail**

Columbia College Student Council

Proposed: 7 April 2012

Adopted: 7 April 2012

WHEREAS a rising awareness of stress in terms of student conversations and Opinion pieces in *The Spectator* has driven the Student Wellness Project, Active Minds, the Columbia Neuroscience Society, Nightline, Stressbusters, RAs, Alice!, CCSC, ESC, and GSSC, among others, to investigate ways to decrease stress on campus;

WHEREAS a student survey indicates that two-thirds of students are in favor of a first semester Pass/D/Fail policy and 86% believe such a policy would be successful in reducing stress;

WHEREAS many directors of undergraduate study are in support of working with students and administrators for stress reduction policies;

WHEREAS most undergraduate departments already allow one class with the grade of P be counted towards the major;

WHEREAS students often overcommit themselves and particularly sign up for more classes than they can reasonably complete the work for during their first two years at Columbia;

WHEREAS there is a culture of taking an average number of classes at Columbia that is higher than that at peer schools;

WHEREAS students enter Columbia with unequal preparation for college level work and could benefit from a period of adjustment to develop study and work habits;

WHEREAS a Pass/D/Fail policy would allow students to explore various departments during their first semester to determine their chief academic interests;

WHEREAS students often report feeling a lack of sense of community and support structures, leading to stress and feelings of alienation especially during their first semester;

WHEREAS incidents of cheating at Columbia are on the rise, and it would be beneficial to instill in students values of academic integrity and a reduced pressure to cheat during their first semester;

WHEREAS all of these ideals have been achieved in large part through covered grade policies with favorable reviews at MIT, Johns Hopkins, Swarthmore, Caltech, Brown University, and American University;

WHEREAS MIT has negotiated with graduate and professional schools to not realize first year “P” grades without harming with students’ admissions chances;

WHEREAS many peer schools have already enacted stress reduction policies and have begun conversations about enacting freshman Pass/Fail policies;

WHEREAS using a first semester Pass/D/Fail policy responsibly to adjust to Columbia is the responsibility of students and not administrators;

WHEREAS the Core curriculum is a distinguishing feature of Columbia College that intends to instill in students a sense of community, as well as skills and values that they will take with them throughout their life;

WHEREAS current research in line with New York education codes suggests that Columbia could increase the value of its 3 point classes to 4 points;

LET IT BE RESOLVED that the Columbia College Student Council supports the following changes to the registrar for Columbia College students:

1. All first semester classes with the exception of core classes be automatically taken Pass/D/Fail.
2. The “P” grades received during one’s first semester not be uncoverable but be published on students’ unofficial transcripts for personal review.
3. The “P” grades received during one’s first semester not be calculated into official GPAs but can be used under the students discretion when required for internship or scholarship applications.
4. The credit limit during registration be lowered from 22 points to 18 points for students during their first semester.

LET IT ALSO BE RESOLVED that Columbia College make arrangements with graduate schools and other professional schools to work within Columbia’s new first semester grading system.

Author: Steven Castellano, Academic Affairs Representative, CCSC

## II. History of the Proposal

*A history of how this proposal evolved into the form it is in today and its philosophical underpinnings, as told in narrative form by Steven Castellano, the 2012-2013 Academic Affairs Representative to CCSC.*

At the begging of my term last year, I did a lot of research on policies that students wanted to improve academic life at Columbia. In addition to a course waitlist and publicized finals data, as well as support for an Honor Code, students persistently were complaining about the change to introduce 8:40am classes starting in the 2012-2013 academic year. After repeatedly questioning whether or not a half hour would really make a difference for students and if they would actually have trouble adjusting to the change, I repeatedly got the same answer which was something along the lines of “that ‘extra’ half hour may be one of the three 30 minute naps I get all night.”

It soon became apparent that the 8:40am classes were indicative of a larger problem at Columbia: student stress. After allying myself with the Student Wellness Project and creating a subcommittee of the Columbia College Student Council and Engineering Student Council policy committees, a list of ideas were generated that could help alleviate stress on campus. This list was then expanded after talking to faculty members and deans, and it was presented to the general body of CCSC, ESC, and GSSC in November 2012. The list was then revised to include the following potential policy revisions to decrease student stress:

- Reduce credits needed to graduate
- Increase credits offered per class
- Decrease the credit limit per semester
- Receive credit for internships
- Institute a first semester Pass/Fail policy
- Force students to choose a maximum of one major
- Allow students to double count courses when double majoring
- Establish an official midterm week
- Receive a mandated “one extension per class” that can be used on any assignment throughout the semester
- Apply to receive a mandated extension if you have three “major” assignments or exams due in a 24 hour period.

After discussing these policies at length with the CCSC and ESC policy subcommittee and the executive boards of CCSC, ESC, and GSSC, we concluded that our most important priorities were instituting a first semester Pass/Fail policy, decreasing the credit limit per semester (or increasing the credit value of classes), and establishing a set midterm week. Dean Yatrakis then reviewed our list of ideas in December 2012 and suggested writing a proposal for first semester Pass/Fail after talking to more students and key faculty members. The corresponding student survey and faculty conversations can be found in sections VII and VIII of this report, and it should be noted that both the survey data and the faculty conversation influenced details behind the policy, such as maintaining

letter grades in Core and language classes. As these conversations occurred, the subcommittee of the CCSC and ESC policy committee also researched Pass/Fail policies at peer institutions and how they were perceived, which can be found in section III, V, and VI of the report. Section III specifically looks at first semester Pass/Fail policies, section V looks at general Pass/Fail policies at selected peer schools, and section VI hones in on the freshman Pass/Fail policy at MIT and how it is perceived. In addition, due to rising conversations about student stress both at Columbia and at peer institutions, research was done in section V on how peer schools are reacting to the rising stress prevalence on campus. Many of these schools have also looked into a first semester Pass/Fail policy.

Following these conversations and data collection, which occurred throughout much of the spring of 2013, the proposal found in section I was presented to the general body of CCSC. On 4/7/2013, the CCSC debated the policy and voted 23-4-2 to pass it. A *Spectator* article and Bwog post summarizing the meeting can be found, respectively, in the following links:

<http://www.columbiaspectator.com/2013/04/09/ccsc-calls-mandatory-passdfail-first-semester> and <http://bwog.com/2013/04/08/ccsc-light-but-significant/>. Still, note that neither is particularly comprehensive in explaining details and that, in my opinion, the *Spectator* article quotes me out of context when I was explaining that the number of credits taken by my peers in *Accelerated Physics* averaged around 18-20.

Though the room was initially heavily split on whether or not such a weighty policy should be passed during the CCSC policy meeting, many CCSC members were persuaded to support the policy after their concerns were addressed during a long question and answer period on the policy logistics and how it would address their specific concerns. For example, the exclusion of Core classes, including language classes, from covered grades prohibits first-years from shirking and thereby hindering their peers' learning in small discussion classes; instead, their work ethic in these seminars is expected to improve as other stressors are removed, thereby increasing the potential value that can be derived from them. The lowered credit limit during registration was also implemented to prevent students from taking advantage of the policy and being forced to benefit from a lighter semester than they may have otherwise taken. Additionally, concerns about students not working hard in general were countered by studies at MIT that prove most students are motivated to learn and develop productive habits, effectively treating the Pass/Fail policy like it does not exist when it comes to working but still knowing it does exist so as not to overstress themselves during their first year. We would similarly expect students to use the opportunity for first semester Pass/D/Fail responsibly, and though some schools do provide extra support to students whose unofficial transcripts indicate that they are struggling, we would still expect students to use their first semester to figure out what works and what does not work on their own. It is therefore my hope that dissenting faculty and students will similarly come to support the policy as they become more familiar with the details.

As reflected in my analysis of the survey data, it is also clear that while certain students would greatly benefit from this policy, others, such as those who were well prepared or who already took on a light course load first semester, would be marginally affected. It is therefore our goal to maximize the support for those who tend to alienate themselves under increasing academic stress while minimizing the impact on the latter group. Still, with regard to the former, many research studies – including the regular health survey distributed by Alice! – indicate that the number one way for students at Columbia and other colleges to relieve stress is to turn to peers for support, which is why we feel that this policy would not only reduce stress but would provide the grounds for students to create a supportive community for themselves during their first semester. After all, many students who end up taking semesters off to return home report a “lack of community” on campus that arises from a multitude of causes including pressure to sequester oneself in the library when stressed, which may only exacerbate the problem. I can also personally say that as a coordinator for the Columbia Urban Experience preorientation program, many of our first-years appreciate that they have a supportive, tight-knit community of friends that they can turn to before the stress from classes arrives in full swing.

It should also be noted that this movement also stems from research at Columbia on behalf of the Academic Integrity Task Force, which acknowledges that rising stress is part of the drive to cheat. Therefore, a first semester Pass/D/Fail policy has been suggested as one means to reduce student pressure to cheat, and it can hopefully also allow students to adopt values of integrity, exploration, and learning for learning’s sake that will stay with them throughout the remainder of their time at Columbia. Such values will ideally be promoted in new policies put forward by the Academic Integrity Task Force that seeks to change the campus culture through focusing heavily on changes during the transitional period of orientation and the first semester. A Pass/D/Fail policy can therefore complement the honor pledge, honor code, and conversations about ethics and integrity in shifting students’ priorities away from grades.

As an aside, the Student Wellness Project conducted a Wellness Summit earlier in the spring of 2013, where it gathered student leaders and administrators from all the wellness groups on campus, including Active Minds, Columbia Neuroscience Society, Alice!, Stressbusters, Columbia ResLife, and Nightline. One of the three changes to Columbia that they recommended for increasing wellness was first semester Pass/Fail. It is my understanding that this suggestion, as well as the other two suggestions to include campus wellness, will be submitted in the form of a letter to Dean Valentini who suggested this summit at some point in April 2013.

In the few hours since the news of the policy was publicized, I have received several emails from students, most of whom I do not know, thanking me and CCSC for instituting the policy. In this way, the response has already been similar to the response to my op-ed in the Spectator, which encouraged similar values: <http://www.columbiaspectator.com/2013/01/28/less-more>. The op-ed

eventually received 10,000 readers in the United States and 50,000 readers in China after it was translated into Chinese by Mengqi (Veronica) Zhai, which was surprising and almost absurd in how dramatically it demonstrated the prevalence of academic stress among college students throughout the United States and world.

It is therefore my hope that Columbia College adopts this policy, especially when considering that Columbia University is consistently ranked among the most stressful universities in the United States. In doing so, Columbia College would follow the precedent set by a few undergraduate and many graduate and professional schools towards shifting to Pass/Fail grading and hopefully setting a standard for more to follow.

Ultimately, I recommend that the major logistics behind implementing the policy be worked out soon, preferably over the spring and summer of 2013, so that the changes can be advertised throughout the 2013-2014 school year and implemented in the fall of 2014. I also recommend that the first semester Pass/D/Fail policy be expanded to the other undergraduate schools of Columbia University, whose students take many common classes with those of Columbia College students, if their councils are inclined to pass a similar policy.

### **III. Covered First Year Grading Policies at Peer Institutions**

*Current systems of Pass/Fail or alternative covered grading policies are explored.*

#### **JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY**

##### *Introduction to the Policy*

- According to the Undergraduate Student Handbook, “the letter grades earned by students in their first semester at the university are not reported on the transcript”
- Each course taken is given a grade of S (for Satisfactory) if the student gets above a C-, and U (for Unsatisfactory) if below a C-
- For Hopkins, the courses can be used to “satisfy requirements for the major, for distribution requirements and for the writing requirement”
- First semester grades are **not** included in a student’s GPA, and are not shown on the transcript
- Students that apply for transfer in the Spring can submit a request to the advising office to “uncover” their grades; this is usually in the form of submitting a request to the registrar with a permission letter from the Assistant Dean of Academic Advising (Dean Fry)
- For students that apply to scholarships, the academic advising office can contact the scholarship institution with a letter stating that the student has achieved the minimum requirements; if students can demonstrate that the scholarship is contingent upon the release of grades, Hopkins will “uncover” the grades



- Students get an “unofficial” copy of their transcript via JHU ISIS (Integrated Student Information System), similar to Columbia’s SSOL

### *History*

- Implemented since the 1970s to reduce stress and promote course exploration; has been a landmark policy since
- Came under fire in the Academic Council Meeting held on June 8, 2011; council approved the motion to “*eliminate the current covered grades policy for first semester freshmen effective July 1, 2014, thus freshmen entering in the fall of 2014 will be graded using the conventional grading methods that applies to all other students at that time*”
- Motion passing is predicated upon President Ron Daniel’s approval, though the debate is still lively and has not been resolved
- Controversy, according to the *Johns Hopkins News-Letter*, ultimately hinges upon “whether the program eases transition to college and encourages exploration, or facilitates partying and slacking. Additional concerns relate to the importance of introductory coursework as the basis for students’ later study”
- Has divided the student body but especially the faculty and administration. Steven David, Vice Dean for Undergraduate Education, supports it; William Conley, Dean of Enrollment and Academic Services, does not

### *Advantages and Disadvantages, according to JHU students*

#### Advantages:

1. Ease the adjustment to college: challenges living away from home, allocating/organizing time for classes, familiarizing self with the social scene at college; for international students, getting used to the exposure of foreign culture
2. Academic exploration: less pressure on students to apply themselves solely to keeping up their GPA. Even if student do not do well, they are incentivized to enroll in classes otherwise would not have considered in their field of study, according to many students interviewed for the JHU News-Letter
3. Recruitment: many students cited the covered grades policy as instrumental in their decision to attend Hopkins because gave them the opportunity to adjust take classes outside of their major.

#### Disadvantages

1. Cultivate bad habits from the get-go: students could “slack” and put off their responsibilities because there are no consequences to doing so
  - a. According to the Homewood Academic Council, the Freshman GPA is on average the lowest out of all undergraduates.
  - b. But some question whether this is because covered grades encourage bad study habits, because they encourage students to learn without stressing over graded assessments, or because there is

- a learning curve inherent to adjusting to college – the very reason why covered grades were introduced.
2. Course building: many freshman courses, especially in the math and science disciplines, are sequential; serve as a foundation for future courses and are built upon in the second semester. If it does incentivize bad habits, this will ultimately be reflected in poorer performance in higher level classes
  3. Discriminates against students that work hard their first semester: those that work hard and get good grades do not have the grades reflected in their university transcripts

## **MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

### *Introduction to the Policy*

- The MIT policy is in two parts. In the first term, all students take their classes as pass/no. If they receive the grade of A/B/C, their transcripts say "pass." If they receive a grade of D/F, the class doesn't appear on their transcript. In the second term, all students are graded on an A/B/C/no scale. This means that students will receive a grade of A, B, or C if they earn that grade, but if they receive D/F, the class doesn't appear on their transcript.
- Students cannot ever uncover the grades on their transcript, and no copy of the actual grades are kept on a server. HOWEVER, they, their advisor, and their major department receive a paper copy of their grades for advising purposes, but the grades will/can never appear on an official transcript. They're "forever sealed."
- MIT has a core curriculum, and there are no issues with students taking these classes without receiving a grade on their transcript. Specifically, the core includes introductory sciences and eight humanities classes, typically taken one per term.
- Stephen Pepper, a Staff Associate for Academic Performance at MIT, said he has not perceived any issues with the policy. He thinks it's a great way for students to adjust to the school, and it really isn't abused by them.
- Additionally, Stephen Pepper said that upperclassmen always recommend that freshmen "make good use of pass/no record" in order to become integrated into the MIT community.
- Stephen Pepper also said that there is absolutely no issue with students using pass/no and going on to med school. He said that up to a few years ago, there were med schools that still demanded to see ALL grades, but MIT has worked with them and they now will accept all pre-reqs taken during pass/no. It's not an issue for students.

### *History*

- The pass/no grading scale began in the 1990s, and around ten years ago, it underwent a review.

- Originally pass/no applied to both terms, but faculty found that students in the second term had significantly poorer grades. One reason for the lower grades was that students were taking more difficult classes by their second terms, but professors also reported that students wouldn't keep up with the work and were less active in classes during the second term because they were no longer in need of an adjustment period or no longer pressuring themselves as aggressively to adjust.
- The policy was accordingly revised in the 2002-2003 school year to be pass/no in the first term and A/B/C/no in the second, and this solution has worked out well for the school since it was passed.
- Reports conducted on the Pass/Fail policy at MIT are published regularly and can be found on the following link under Additional Reports: <http://web.mit.edu/committees/cup/work.html>.
- The most recent report in February 2010 reaffirmed the success of the policy but interestingly made restrictions that “No MIT office or individual should provide information directly to a graduate school, company, or any other third party concerning assigned hidden grades — by phone, in writing, or by transmitting the unofficial report of the student’s hidden grades” after faculty complained that students were sending hidden grades to medical schools. Faculty also encouraged administrators to work with the U.S. Department of Education to modify financial aid programs so that they do not compromise MIT’s grading policies.

## **CALIFORNIA INFORMATION OF TECHNOLOGY**

### *Introduction to the Policy*

- Freshmen are automatically on Pass/Fail for all the classes taken during their first two of three terms in their first year (Caltech operates on a trimester system).
- Students have shadow grade for the first two terms. Shadow grades are not shown on transcripts and are not counted towards GPA, but they are revealed to the students.
- After freshman year, students are allowed to Pass/Fail up to two elective classes per term, and in total they have 90 units (ten classes) of Pass/Fail to use during the four years.

### *History*

- According to Joe Kirschvink, Nico and Marilyn Van Wingen Professor of Geobiology at Caltech, all courses were taken for letter grades in the 1960s. However, a survey done by the Registrar revealed that most of the top students were transferring out. To avoid this negative publicity, it was decided that the entire first year would be P/F so it would not be apparent which students were leaving.
- In the 1990s shadow grades were used for the second term, and real grades were used for the third term. Shadow grades were seen as informative to students and useful for premedical students to report to

medical schools. However, there is a problem of professors and TAs not reporting shadow grades or reporting them hastily because they are unofficial. (Core Curriculum Steering Committee Meeting notes in 2007)

- In 1996, Caltech experimented with giving students letter grades in their third term of their first year, but the committee saw no statistical evidence of students working harder because of that change. Consequently, in 1997, they changed back to the previous policy of giving students no grades in their third term.
- Since then, the policy was reversed again so that students receive letter grades in their third term. The reasons for this change are unknown, but online discussion boards suggest it was to prevent students taking all three terms of general chemistry and organic chemistry simultaneously in their freshman year without any chemistry grades on record. Under the current policy, even students who take both courses simultaneously still receive letter grades in the third semester of each course.
- There was also a movement in 2007 to change Pass/Fail grading to pass/no record grading because students did not benefit from decreased stress and the ability to explore courses if they failed. The most recent update on the website of the Core Curriculum Steering Committee shows, however, that they have decided against Pass/No Record on the grounds that it was a dishonest reporting system.
- Currently, the steering committee considers the Pass/Fail system to be a great benefit to Caltech, particularly in allowing students from a variety of backgrounds, particularly in terms of level of scientific preparation, to adjust to Caltech collectively.

## **SWARTHMORE UNIVERSITY'**

### *Introduction to the Policy – “Shadow Grades”*

- According to the Student Life section of the Swarthmore website, the only officially recorded grades on the transcript during the first semester of the first year at Swarthmore are the “final grades of CR (credit) or NC (non-credit) classes”
- Despite this, Swarthmore students are still graded as usual in their classes; “[they] will receive written evaluations and usually grade equivalents from [their] instructors, copies of which will be shared with [their] academic advisors and placed in [their] files.” These grades are referred to as **“Shadow Grades.”**
- Though not explicitly on a student’s transcript, “shadow grades” matter both **internally** and **externally**: internally, they are evaluated when a Swarthmore student applies for a particular major or specialization; externally, students may need to uncover them (which is possible via an online process) to apply for specific internships or scholarships

- These grades will not be factored into the student's overall GPA, though "the Committee on Academic Requirements will check shadow grades to identify students who may be experiencing academic difficulty"
- "For introductory language yearlong courses, credit is not given for the first semester's work only, nor is credit given for the first semester if the student fails the second semester. In cases where credit is not earned for the second half of a yearlong course, the first semester is excluded from counting toward degree credit, although the registration and grade for the first semester remain on the permanent record.
- **"Such evaluations are not a part of the student's official grade record.** If available, letter-grade equivalents for first-semester first-year students may be provided to other institutions **only if requested by the student and absolutely required by the other institution.** Students should save their copies of these evaluations for their records."
- Generally, "for first-year students and sophomores, CR will be recorded for work that would earn a grade of straight D or higher. For juniors and seniors, that is, students in their fifth semester or later, the minimum equivalent letter grade for CR will be straight C."

## **AMERICAN UNIVERSITY**

### *Introduction to the Policy – "Freshman Forgiveness"*

First-year undergrads may request "Freshman Forgiveness" during their first two semesters at school for any two courses that resulted in a grade of C- or lower.

- "Freshman forgiveness" basically allows to re-take the course at the first possible opportunity, and bury the first grade while requiring the second grade to remain on the transcript
- Certain classes cannot be covered by "Freshman forgiveness." These seem to be limited to rare upper-class seminars that have short shelf-lives.

### *Major Pro and Con, according to American University students*

**Pro:** The policy is more flexible than an absolute pass-fail policy. It may be of relief for students aiming for grad school who need to do well in mandatory courses and want second chances, especially the ones who come from less rigorous schools and/or differing levels of preparedness..

**Con:** The value of re-taking courses will be questioned and possibly frowned upon by certain employers and "education purists."

## **BROWN UNIVERSITY**

### *Introduction to the Policy – "unlimited number of S/NC classes"*

- There is no explicit Pass/Fail policy specific to Freshman – the important take-home for Brown’s policy is that **every class can be taken for a “grade (G) or satisfactory/no credit (S/NC)”**
- “Given Brown’s unique grading system, it is difficult to compare a GPA calculated from a Brown transcript with ones from other schools. **Brown allows students to take an unlimited number of S/NC (Satisfactory/No Credit) and only records full-letter grades of A, B or C (without pluses or minuses). There is no grade of D and failing grades are not recorded**” – from the *Statement on Grade Point Average, College Curriculum Council, March 2004*
- “In addition to the two grade options at Brown, students may request a narrative evaluation of their performance from course instructors...Any student regularly enrolled in a course may request a Course Performance Report (CPR) and, at the instructor’s discretion, receive one. Instructors of mandatory S/NC courses are obliged to honor such requests”
- These CPRs can be submitted along with each student’s official transcript – “Course Performance Reports are not part of a student's official academic record or transcript, but a student may request that the University send one or more CPRs with their official transcripts. In such cases, students must provide the Registrar's Office with copies of the CPRs when submitting their transcript requests.”
- “No Credit is given when courses are not satisfactorily completed. Neither the notation No Credit nor the description of the course in which it is given are entered on the external transcript.”

### *History*

- Part and parcel of what Brown called the 1969 “New Curriculum,” which saw the elimination of GPA calculation
- “In 1969-70, the grading system of the university was changed so as to provide that a student may choose, for each course, to be graded on the basis of one of two options: A, B, C/No Credit or Satisfactory/No Credit. Accordingly, at that time, the University discontinued the compilation of grade point averages and class standings. The practice of naming students to a Dean’s list was also eliminated”
- “Beginning Semester 1, 1974-1975, an asterisk following a grade of **S** denoted that the choice of grade option for that course was not left up to the student but was restricted to S/NC by the instructor”
- According to the Brown Dean of the College website, “the founders of Brown’s open curriculum implemented the S/NC option to encourage students to sample all areas of the curriculum... most students agree that S/NC allows for exploration of a particular topic without the stress and pressure that a graded evaluation may impart”
- According to the Brown Daily Herald, there is debate going on about the advantages and disadvantages about the lack of a “pluses and minuses” system for grading. There has not been an active debate about changing how Brown students can essentially Pass/Fail every class.

## IV. Stress Reduction at Selected Peer Institutions

*Schools without First Year Pass/Fail systems also have been having conversations and policies related to the rise in stress. Many of these institutions have had students and faculty advocate for a first semester Pass/Fail system in these conversations.*

### UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

- The current P/F option was implemented principally to encourage students to explore classes beyond their comfort zones without academic repercussions.
- Opinion pieces have been pushing to extend the Pass/Fail deadlines.
- One particular op-ed suggests the implementation of first semester P/F: [http://www.thedp.com/article/2010/01/a\\_dennie\\_for\\_your\\_thoughts\\_a\\_djustment\\_without\\_the\\_anxiety](http://www.thedp.com/article/2010/01/a_dennie_for_your_thoughts_a_djustment_without_the_anxiety).
- Another op-ed attempts to remove the stigma against first year Pass/Fail: [http://www.thedp.com/article/2007/01/emily\\_garrett\\_a\\_passfail\\_policy\\_finally\\_makes\\_the\\_grade#comment6750](http://www.thedp.com/article/2007/01/emily_garrett_a_passfail_policy_finally_makes_the_grade#comment6750)

### CORNELL UNIVERSITY

- An S-U System (Satisfactory= C- or above/Unsatisfactory) was adopted to encourage student exploration. Students elect to enroll in a course S-U within the first 3 weeks of the term.
- Stress on campus
  - It is a noticeable aspect of student life
  - There is a famed report of 3 suicides in less than one month in 2010
    - installed nets under campus and city bridges
    - expanded clinical services, but expansion has not met student demand
- An op-ed was written in March 2009 in favor of first semester Pass/Fail: <http://cornellsun.com/section/opinion/content/2009/03/24/ensuring-path-success>. The author argued that such a system was expected to greatly alleviate academic pressure during a time of great social and academic adjustment.

### YALE UNIVERSITY

- In the past 2 years, Yale has seen increased conversations about student stress on campus, particularly in op-eds in the Yale Daily Herald, such as the following: <http://yaleherald.com/voices/op-eds/hang-with-me/>.
- Yale University hosted an Ivy League Wellness Conference this spring due to the prevalence of stress across all Ivy League schools.
- A Yale representative also visited Columbia University's Student Wellness Project after the conference. She wanted to use the Student Wellness Project as a model for new groups at Yale and was interested in following the Pass/Fail proposal at Columbia.

## **UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO**

- P/F grading is available for certain courses; student must receive permission from the instructor before final exams. One cannot uncover P grades, and cannot switch to a P once the grade has been received
  - There appears to be an incredibly present stress culture; very similar to Columbia, from the look of op-eds, such as the following: <http://chicagomaroon.com/2009/11/03/overthinking-stress/>.
- The student counseling invited students to free screening in 2009
- The Student Care Center organizes de-stress events, similar to Stressbusters at Columbia
- Conversation about first semester P/F
  - In 2011 - Chicago newspaper editorial board advocating mandatory first quarter P/F option: <http://chicagomaroon.com/2011/10/10/free-pass/>. They concluded: “At the end of the day, giving students a transition period during their first quarter will help keep them from doing severe damage to their future career and education plans; it would allow them, for the first time in a long while, to not worry about grades and just focus on overall well-being and learning for its own sake. This system would allow students to orient themselves both socially and academically within the undergraduate community.”
  - One student wrote a response letter against the proposal: <http://chicagomaroon.com/2011/10/17/letter-%E2%80%9Cfree-pass%E2%80%9D-insults-u-of-c-mission/> His argument that if you can’t handle the stress, you shouldn’t be at UChicago, only seemed to galvanize more support in favor of a first quarter P/F policy.

## **PRINCETON UNIVERSITY**

- Princeton currently has a two week break between the last day of the semester and finals to alleviate academic stress at the end of the semester.
- Princeton also has been recently having extensive discussions about the stress culture on campus; some students advocate lengthening the semester to spread out work, but administrators fear that doing so would force students to only take on more commitments when given more time.
- The editorial board supported a first semester Pass/Fail policy in 2009: <http://www.dailyprincetonian.com/2009/03/02/22927/>. They advocate branching out and eliminating inequities in high school preparation.

## **UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN**

- A strongly supported op-ed in 2011 stated why freshman year Pass/Fail is necessary: <http://www.michigandaily.com/opinion/viewpoint-freshman-year-passfail>.
- The thrust behind her argument was that “Between adjusting to living away from home, keeping up with class work, meeting dozens of new people and, on top of it all, maintaining a pretty respectable GPA, there



was no time for anything else. Needless to say, freshman year is a challenge — with so much to keep track of, it's difficult to juggle everything without losing your mind.”

- Additionally, many students agree that they will not stop caring about academics simply because of a Pass/Fail policy but that they will be able to engage their classes without thinking in a grade-oriented manner, attempting to eek out the minimum number of points to get an A.

### **HARVARD UNIVERSITY**

- One of the most popular curricular experiences at Harvard is the **Freshman Seminar Program**. This program brings together faculty and 15 or fewer first year students to work closely on a variety of selected topics in a variety of ways. The operating premise of each seminar is that a member of the faculty will address a particular subject with which he or she is personally involved and will involve the members of the seminar in its investigation. The Program attempts to free both the seminar leader and the students from the usual constraints associated with a regular course offering: the seminars are not letter-graded (taken Pass/Fail) and they do not have formal examinations.
- Harvard has also been involved in a few large cheating scandals in its recent history, which is suggestive of an underlying stress culture. Consequently, faculty and students are meeting to investigate the problem both from the angle of academic integrity and stress.

### **DARTMOUTH COLLEGE**

- A Dartmouth professor wrote an article suggesting Pass/Fail first semester be implemented: <http://www.brendan-nyhan.com/blog/2012/04/academic-reforms-a-four-part-proposal.html>. He cites grade inflation and student adjustment as constant problems for colleges and thinks that making the first semester Pass/Fail is key for academic reform.
- One quote: “The Pass/Fail semester helps students get excited about learning for learning's sake before worrying about grades, and it provides underprepared students with a chance to catch up before their performance is recorded on their permanent transcript. It's worth considering whether the practice should be adopted both here at Dartmouth and elsewhere in higher education.”

## V. Reactions to Pass/Fail at MIT: A Case Study

*Because MIT's current policy is the one we most closely hope to use as a model for the Columbia policy, extensive research was done to look at reactions to its system. Below are selected excerpts from reports and student feedback. They appear to be universally positive with regard to encouraging exploration and deemphasizing stress and potentially lowering suicide rates without extensively compromising study habits but instead providing a space to foster them. More importantly, students, faculty, and administrators feel that the values promoted by freshman Pass/Fail are instilled in the students and last throughout the remainder of their college experiences. Long quotations are taken from each primary source, but main points are bolded.*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF COMMITTEE OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM ([web.mit.edu/committees/cup/subcommittees/pnrap/part1.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/committees/cup/subcommittees/pnrap/part1.pdf)):

“The current system of Pass/No Record grading for freshmen provides for an effective transition from high school to the rigors of MIT.

**Any reduction in freshman academic effort is compensated for by various academic and non-academic benefits.** The credit limits should remain unchanged, even in the Spring, to assist in assessing the new grading system and to remove the temptation to freshmen to overload.”

### MIT ADMISSIONS BLOG

([http://mitadmissions.org/blogs/entry/first\\_term\\_freshman\\_year](http://mitadmissions.org/blogs/entry/first_term_freshman_year)):

“This is a really good system, for several important reasons.

- 1. MIT classes are harder than high school classes, and people tend to get lower grades first term at MIT than they've ever gotten in their lives.**
- 2. The system encourages first-term freshmen to have fun and explore life outside the classroom without being overly preoccupied with their grades.**
- 3. Freshmen can learn to manage their time wisely and find an appropriate balance between work and play without damaging their academic records.**

Pass/no record really helps MIT students quit stressing about grades, and as a result, freshmen often blow off work and run around and frolic even when they have stuff they "ought" to be doing. (Case in point: At 1 AM one night in November freshman year, I was studying for an 8.01x (physics) test which was to occur the next morning. My friend Akhil '05 MEng '06 IMed me and asked if I wanted to go explore campus. I said yes. **I ended up pulling an all-nighter the night before a test because I was having fun wandering around tunnels and basements and other such places. It was great.**)

My freshman year

**Freshman year at MIT was pretty difficult for me academically, since I didn't take AP Physics or AP Chem in high school. Everything was new and challenging, and the problem sets were hard... and I'd never learned to manage my time wisely in high school,** because I could just do all my homework during study hall the morning before it was due, when there even *was* homework in the first place. I skipped class a lot more frequently than I did in my upperclass years, because I hadn't figured out yet that I learn best from lectures... I also skipped class because physics was at 10 AM, and I stayed up until 4 somewhat frequently talking in the hallway with my new friends. Plus, I was still dating my high school sweetheart, and our relationship was going downhill pretty quickly, so I spent a lot of time fighting with him on the phone.

All of this stuff was not great for my academic life, as you might imagine.

I have to admit that I don't remember exactly how many tests I failed freshman year. I know it was at least three physics tests (two tests during term, plus the final), two calculus tests (one test during term, plus the final), and two chemistry tests (both during term). I ended up with a B+ in my HASS (9.00, intro to psychology), a C+ in 18.01 (single-variable calculus), a C in 5.111 (introductory chemistry), and a C- in 8.01x (physics). Passing in 8.01x was an overall average of 60; I had a final grade of 63.5.

And yet, my official transcript just says P for everything. ;) And that's the transcript that admissions committees saw when I applied to graduate school -- they had no idea that I passed freshman physics by the skin of my nose.

**I had a couple of friends who failed classes first semester, and they just re-took the classes second semester, no big deal."**

#### **ANOTHER MIT ADMISSIONS BLOG**

([http://mitadmissions.org/blogs/entry/expanding\\_on\\_pass\\_no\\_record](http://mitadmissions.org/blogs/entry/expanding_on_pass_no_record))

"Upperclassmen are really careful not to let the freshmen tools brag about their straight As. Nobody likes a tool, nobody likes to hear about your "Perfect GPA" when everybody knows full well that the only thing you got was a 0 GPA and less time to meet new people and hang out with friends.

**Don't get me wrong, I learned more than I've probably ever learned during my first semester here. It's not like you can get by without working, I spent many sleepless nights and early mornings fighting my way through problems sets and working harder than I've ever worked before, I just also spent a lot of time doing other things."**

#### **AN ADMISSIONS BLOG RESPONDING TO THE PREVIOUS BLOG**

([http://mitadmissions.org/blogs/entry/another\\_take\\_on\\_passnorecord](http://mitadmissions.org/blogs/entry/another_take_on_passnorecord)):

"Pass/no-record, in my opinion, isn't an announcement that you shouldn't worry about your grades, it's an opportunity for you to figure out what it is that you

want to worry about, what you want to get out of this place. Instead of just barreling ahead blindly on the momentum of high school, whether it was a culture of competition or perfection or a place of familiar but unchallenged values, I think what it does is it gives you some time to think, to try some different approaches, and if you happen to decide that academics is what you will put first, it erases any damage that may have been done.

**The biggest favor you can do for yourself is to treat pass/no-record as if it did not exist.** Blow it off just because you can, and you'll have wasted a rare opportunity in life at a trial run. Put your best foot forward and see how you measure up. Find out what works and what doesn't, grow a pair and learn some valuable self-assurance for the years to come. Because, like it or not, confidence matters. Confidence allows your knowledge to find its way into application. Confidence earns you respect among peers. Confidence can be everything.

The GIR's that you take on pass/no-record aren't freebies. They're classes upon which all other classes build. Juniors and seniors have the option to put a class on Pass-Fail, but oftentimes, they don't, because they are trying to avoid incentives to slack off and avoid the regret of a semester bent on learning nothing. Doing this with your foundational classes in physics/math is really not a good idea, unless you're sure you're going into an unrelated field. I never learned 8.022 all that well and it's come back to bite me more than once. In the quantum sequence, in astrophysics, in cosmology, in engineering, even, and that's why I'm taking 8.07 now

Freshmen. **Ask yourselves this: how seriously do I want to take my academics for the next 4 years?** How much do I want to learn? *What would I give up in order to achieve that goal?* Look, these aren't rhetorical questions, these are really important questions that need need need answers. Especially that last one. Everywhere you look, at MIT, are people who've answered that question differently. There were kids in my quantum class that would spend 12 hours--extra hours-- just figuring out all possible ways of solving a problem. You'll meet people like that, and you'll be amazed at just how much of a difference that kind of commitment makes. Being next to those people made me realize that when I made the initial choice of "this is what I am willing to give up", that wasn't a part of the picture. That was beyond what I was willing to sacrifice. And yeah, that meant that I will not be able to match their level of mastery of the subject until I've changed my priorities. And that's something I have to live with.

Of course, more doesn't always mean better. For some subjects, subjects that aren't pure science, academics is really only just an obstacle. It's a crappy way to learn a set of skills that will eventually go toward a trade and a career. Mostly, I hear this from engineers, consultants. If you are getting more out of work experience than academics, by all means recast your priorities. But don't let peer pressure be a part of that change. These people will be your suitemates, roommates, for a few years, and then they'll be gone; but what you pick up here, where you end up taking it... well, that's entirely up to you."

### **MIT'S "THE TECH" NEWSPAPER OP-ED**

(<http://tech.mit.edu/V116/N27/passnorecord.27c.html>)

"I am writing in response to Brett Altschul's column ["Freshman Year Policies Need Revision," May 14]. I am dismayed with Altschul's feelings about freshman year Pass/No Record, and I feel that his reasoning reflects what I consider to be the wrong attitude towards a university education. He complains of receiving no 'official recognition' for his hard work during freshman year, and is also worried that Pass/No Record encourages many students to not learn the basic concepts well enough.

I see no reason why the university is obliged to give recognition to us for being willing to work hard and learn. We should come to university to learn, which requires hard work. But what we learn or get out of our experience at university cannot be expressed in a grade. I am sorry that Altschul does not feel that he has anything to show for his hard work without a grade. Hard work has its own reward: knowledge. Why do we need any external recognition?

As for the idea that Pass/No Record encourages laziness in learning basic concepts, Altschul may be right. But if you are lazy freshman year and do not learn the necessary material, you will pay the price yourself. In the end, only you can be held responsible for your education. In university, you must take initiative if you wish to learn; the university provides the resources for you take advantage of.

**The primary reason for being at MIT is to learn. It is possible to learn without grades; in fact, worrying about grades and tooling for those extra few points can get in the way of learning.** So the Pass/No Record system is part of trying to get students into a mode of learning, as opposed to simply getting high grades. Also, without the pressure of grades, freshman are able to get more out of the university experience. There is a little more time for getting involved in activities, playing a sport, or even socializing. These dimensions of university life are just as important as the academic dimension, and are easily overlooked at MIT. The time spent getting involved freshman year often determines our interests and activities until we graduate. Without Pass/No Record, I feel that more people would be uninvolved, withdrawn, and unnecessarily stressed."

### **MIT ADMISSIONS WIKI**

([http://wiki.mitadmissions.org/Freshman\\_Pass\\_No\\_Record](http://wiki.mitadmissions.org/Freshman_Pass_No_Record)):

"Why does MIT launch freshman year with this unusual grading system? Because **it eases the transition to college, allows students to adapt to doing MIT-quality work, gives them flexibility to explore academic, research, and social opportunities at the Institute, and deemphasizes grade competitiveness while emphasizing learning for its own sake. These lessons stay with students throughout their years at MIT and are a big**

**part of the MIT culture.”**

#### **“THE TECH” NEWSPAPER REPORT**

(<http://tech.mit.edu/V128/N5/cupreport.html>):

“Freshman grades have improved since the change from pass/no record grading to A/B/C/no record grading in the spring term, according to a report released last month by the Committee on the Undergraduate Program. But sophomore grade point averages for both fall and spring terms have remained constant since the change.

While the 2008 CUP report says that the change to A/B/C/no record grading has reduced failing performance (D’s or F’s) for freshmen in both semesters (see graphic on page 11), the cause of the improvement is unclear.

Freshmen may be doing better because they anticipate spring term A/B/C/no record grading. The change may also be linked to other changes in the freshman experience — most notably, the requirement since fall 2001 that freshmen live in dormitories.

The change in grading policy not only affected students’ GPAs but also the classes freshmen took in the spring. **The 2000 CUP subcommittee found that freshmen were eager to take academic subjects for which they lacked qualifications**, in particular Thermodynamics & Kinetics (5.60), Structure & Interpretation of Computer Programs (6.001), Circuits & Electronics (6.002), and Mechanics and Materials I (2.001).

According to the 2008 report, fewer freshmen have enrolled in 6.002 and 5.60 since the change to A/B/C/no record. “It is the sense of the Chemistry faculty that the changes to freshman grading are the main reason that freshman enrollment in 5.60 has declined, and they view this as a largely positive change,” the report says.

Although fewer freshmen are taking some difficult courses, more students are choosing to leave behind their “freshman” status altogether; the number of students electing sophomore standing has increased dramatically since the change to A/B/C/no record grading. According to the report, between 15 and 26 students elected sophomore standing before the grading change; an average of 107 students elected sophomore standing after the change.”

#### **1986 “TECH” NEWS ARTICLE**

“Students emphasized the freshman year should act as a buffer period during which students adjust to the tougher competition and workload at MIT. The freshman year should ‘get everybody up to the same level [in science courses],’ said Timothy A. Steele ’89. **Students also feared that eliminating Pass/Fail would increase the dropout and suicide rates. One of the negative consequences of Pass/Fail is the temptation to put less effort into**

**classes, the group felt.** Some upperclassmen said they did not develop necessary study skills during freshman year. Others said they were able to meet people and participate in activities because they didn't have to do all the work a class requires.”

#### LETTER IN “THE TECH”

(<http://tech.mit.edu/V109/N10/geer.100.html>):

“I was a freshman the first year that Pass/Fail grading was used for freshmen. I came South to North, rural to urban, social isolation to compression, from licking the dew from rocks to drinking from a fire hose. **If it had not been for Pass/Fail, I would have drowned.**

It is a verity of governance that socially important policies have side effects, and that such side effects endanger those policies when the institutional memory of their birth begins to fade.”

#### “THE TECH” NEWS ARTICLE

(<http://tech.mit.edu/V109/N62/passfail.00n.html>):

“**The CFYP argued that second term pass/no-record should be eliminated because many freshmen used it to take extremely heavy loads, neglecting subjects that serve as the basis for later studies.** The committee noted that 45 percent of second-term freshmen took more than 55 units in a recent year while only 12 percent of sophomores did so.

But with an April vote nearing and the results of a referendum taken in mid-March indicating a **72 percent approval rating among students for second term pass/no-record.**

One, co-sponsored by Wyatt and Professor William T. Peake '51, called for even further restriction on Pass/Fail grading. It was narrowly defeated by a vote of 66-51 at the April 19 faculty meeting.”

#### CHAIR OF THE FACULTY REPORT

(<http://web.mit.edu/annualreports/pres08/2008.19.00.pdf>):

“In 2007–2008, the Committee on the Undergraduate Program (CUP) concluded its review of changes to Pass/No Record grading and the sophomore exploratory subject experiment and recommended a permanent flexible grading option for sophomores. **An ad hoc subcommittee evaluated these initiatives and concluded that the change to A/B/C/No Record in the spring term had helped the transition of students from high school to MIT. It also found that the sophomore exploratory subject option had provided students with a valuable means of exploring courses in and outside their majors.** Based on these findings, CUP recommended that the exploratory subject option be made permanently available; the MIT Faculty approved this



proposal at its April meeting.”

## **VI. Standard Pass/Fail Grading Policy at Selected Peer Institutions**

*An investigation of Pass/Fail policies at other schools, which are currently similar to those at Columbia. A look at sample policies at peer schools may be useful in generating innovating ideas for expanding our Pass/D/Fail policy, especially when it comes to first semester Pass/D/Fail.*

### **HARVARD**

#### *Introduction to the Policy*

- Purpose: foster intellectual exploration
- Method: two options
  1. PA/FL (Pass/Fail)
    - a. Pass: grades A to D-
    - b. certain courses may be taken PA/FL with the instructor’s permission
    - c. governs independent study grading
  2. SAT/UNS (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory)
    - a. Satisfactory: grades A to C-; unsatisfactory is below a C-, and is considered a failing grade
    - b. certain courses are **required** to be taken SAT/UNS
      - i. junior and senior “tutorials” in subjects ranging from applied math to English to Spanish
      - ii. certain freshmen seminars
    - c. House Seminars can be taken as SAT/UNS if the instructor so chooses and the Committee on Freshman Seminars approves
- Stipulations:
  - Freshmen can’t enroll in both freshman seminar and another non-graded course in the same semester
  - Students can elect to take ANY course PA/FL with the instructor’s permission
    - can uncover the grade up to the 5<sup>th</sup> week of the new semester
  - Can apply to concentration (major) requirements with instructor’s permission
  - Freshmen, sophomores, and juniors must take at least 3 letter-graded courses per semester; seniors must take 2

#### *Regulation of Student Workload*

- students enroll in 4 half-courses per semester
- those who want to enroll in more than 5 half-courses need approval of their resident deans



- **freshmen** who want to enroll in more than **4 half-courses** must gain approval from freshmen dean
- need administrative board approval to take more than 6 half-courses

### *History*

- Students rallied for PA/FL option beginning in 1965; Dean Ford approved the plan in December, 1967 after Committee on Educational Policy formally approved it on Nov. 22, 1967 (10 in favor, none opposed)
- Motive for adoption:
  - Speculation that Harvard's decision was spurred by Yale's switch to four grading categories: fail, pass, high pass, and honors, the week earlier
  - Others believe faculty approved it because of the demonstrated student support for the option
- Idea stemmed from a student desire for a "free fifth course" – taken PA/FL and thus without academic repercussions (1966/67)
  - Idea was rejected because it was thought that it would put pressure on students to increase their course-load; rejection was controversial at the time (the policy was close to adoption before it was rejected)
- Harvard Policy Committee convinced faculty members of merit in fourth-course PA/FL option

### *Reactions*

- Aftermath:
  - 1 year after its adoption, 1/4 students selected to take on of their courses PA/FL
  - evidence that students were enrolling in courses beyond their field of comfort
- Current conflicts from the change
  - Faculty feels pressured against declaring their course be taken for-grade only; some professors set quotas on the number of students who can take their course PA/FL
  - Conflict over whether to permit students into classes who intend to take the course for credit or not
- Key quotes:
  - David Riesman '31, Henry Ford II Professor of Social Science: "Most students here take too many courses. **They chop their emotional energies into too many little bits.** We should be encouraging students to play from weakness instead of strength, but the system here puts pressure on the student not to extend himself in areas where he's awkward because he fears not doing brilliantly."
  - The proposal has "great symbolic significance," he [James S. Ackerman, professor of Fine Arts] said, because it was initiated by students, and Faculty denial "would show that we don't have much

faith in them--that we think they would use the added freedom to loaf."

## **DARTMOUTH**

### *Introduction to the Policies*

- **Two policies: NRO** (Non-Recording Option) and **CT/NC** (Credit/Non-Credit)
- **Max. enrollment of 8 CT & NR classes for B.A.** (4 terms per academic year, 3 classes per term)
- **NRO:** implemented 1973

### 1. NRO (Non-Recording Option)

- Purpose: enables intellectual exploration without repercussions
- Method: Student selects a letter grade to be used as the minimum acceptable grade – anything above this minimum would appear on his transcript. If he earns less than this minimum grade but higher than an E (grading is on A-E scale), an NRO appears on his transcript and the grade won't be factored into his GPA.
- Stipulations:
  - Students are only permitted one NRO grade per term and only 3 on their final transcripts
  - Not permitted for:
    - first year seminars
    - language courses
    - off-campus courses
    - major requirements; can be used for pre-reqs for the major
  - NRO cannot be uncovered, even if it's needed to apply to grad school
    - option must be selected within the first 15 days of the term
    - can effectively get out of it by changing the minimum grade allowable to a D
  - instructors don't know which students are using the NRO option
  - out of bounds courses for 2013:  
[http://www.dartmouth.edu/~reg/201303\\_nro.html](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~reg/201303_nro.html)

### 2. Credit/No Credit Courses

- Purpose: Intended for classes that are ill-suited for traditional letter grading
- Method: set by the department; students cannot elect to take a class for CT/NC
  - students receive an NC if they don't satisfy the instructor's requirements as announced at the term's opening
- Stipulations:
  - Can be applied to major requirements

- not factored into the GPA, but grad. schools may recalculate the student's GPA if he/she received a NC grade
- Classes with Policy: astronomy, math, physics

### *Current Usage and Reactions*

- many departments, including government, econ, and art history do not offer the NRO option at the introductory level or at all, thus precluding intellectual exploration, the policy's supposed purpose
- 18% enrolled students take courses on NRO; 40% students who use the NRO receive NRs on their transcripts
  - limit is most often set at A- or B+
  - used most often by upperclassmen
- because the policy is specific to Dartmouth, it's regarded suspiciously by employers who assume the covered grade is a C or below
- efforts made recently to expand the NRO options and extend the deadline for taking a course for NR, but were never fulfilled

## **PRINCETON**

### *Introduction to the Policy*

- Purpose: encourage intellectual exploration
- Method: students elect P/D/F option between 7th-9th week of classes
  - can rescind the choice by the 9<sup>th</sup> week, but it will still count as one of the 4 P/D/F classes taken
- Stipulations
  - can't be applied for major courses; instructor can mark his course for letter-grade only
  - can't be uncovered, but instructor can place note in student's file for recommendation letters
  - instructor doesn't know which students are taking the class P/D/F
  - 1 per term only
  - max. of 4 courses of the credits necessary to graduate; if students take more than the req. credits they can take more P/D/F classes

### *Evolution/Reactions*

- originally the adoption period began 5<sup>th</sup> week – switched in 2009 to 7<sup>th</sup> to ensure students work the majority of the semester
- 4 course limit prohibits intellectual exploration; unnecessary to have a limit at all because more than four Ps would look poor on a transcript
- students have no incentive to work hard in the class because they won't be able to uncover a grade if they do well

### *History*

- First Implemented: May, 1965
  - originally only P/F, not P/D/F; one class per term, 4 per student

- several different options for grading at the time; popularity declined a decade after its passage to only 8% (from 22%)
- number of courses offering P/F option decreased when professors saw a decline in student exertion (1988) – same concern today that students don't exert themselves when they can't uncover their grades

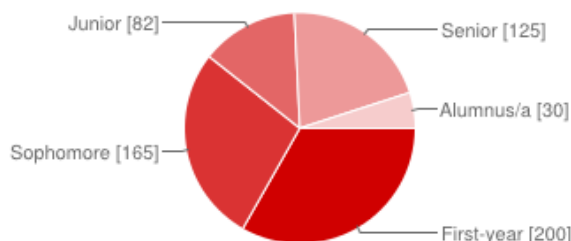
## VII. Student Survey

*604 students responded to a voluntary survey that was put out in the weekly class emails sent by CCSC presidents.*

### SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

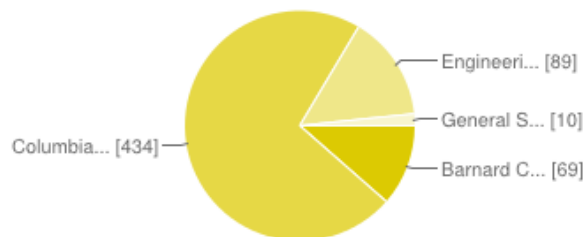
Class year and school of survey respondents are shown. There were no statistically significant differences in response percentages across school or year.

What class year are you?



First-year	200	33%
Sophomore	165	27%
Junior	82	14%
Senior	125	21%
Alumnus/a	30	5%

What school do you attend?

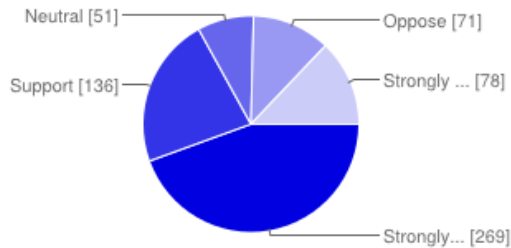


Barnard College	69	11%
Columbia College	434	72%
Engineering and Applied Sciences	89	15%
General Studies	10	2%

## **SURVEY DATA**

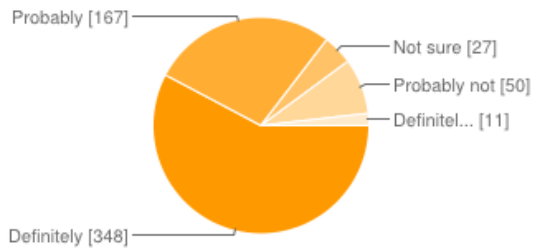
Survey questions and responses are shown.

**To what extent do you support the above proposal?**



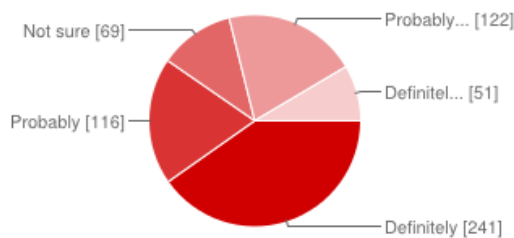
Strongly support	269	44%
Support	136	22%
Neutral	51	8%
Oppose	71	12%
Strongly oppose	78	13%

**Do you believe a first semester pass/fail policy would reduce the stress of first-year students?**



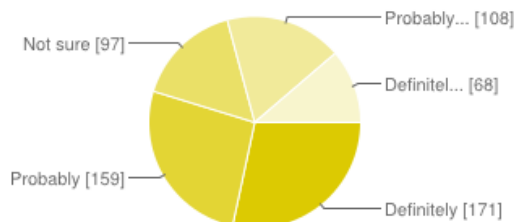
Definitely	348	58%
Probably	167	28%
Not sure	27	4%
Probably not	50	8%
Definitely not	11	2%

**If the policy were in place, would you have been more adventurous in your class choices first-year?**



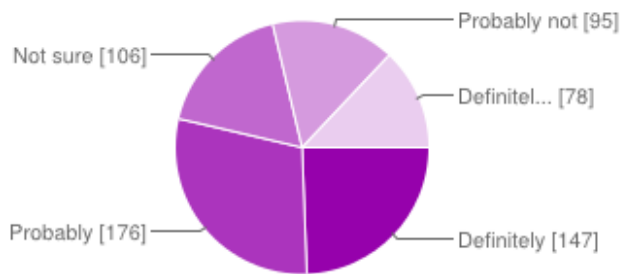
Definitely	241	40%
Probably	116	19%
Not sure	69	12%
Probably not	122	20%
Definitely not	51	9%

**If the policy were in place, would you dedicate an appropriate amount of time to each of your classes?**



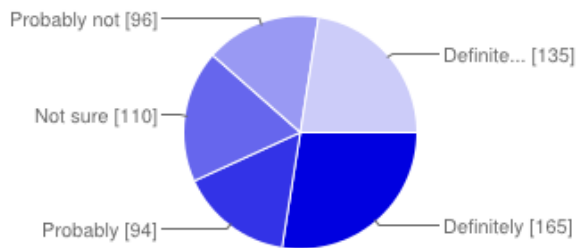
Definitely	171	28%
Probably	159	26%
Not sure	97	16%
Probably not	108	18%
Definitely not	68	11%

Would you have been prepared for the rigor of second semester freshmen year and beyond with a first semester pass/fail policy in place?



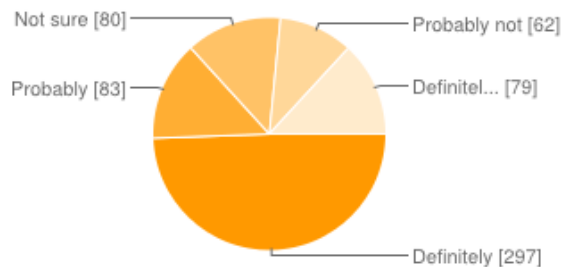
Definitely	147	24%
Probably	176	29%
Not sure	106	18%
Probably not	95	16%
Definitely not	78	13%

Do you believe core classes should be included in a proposed first semester pass/fail?



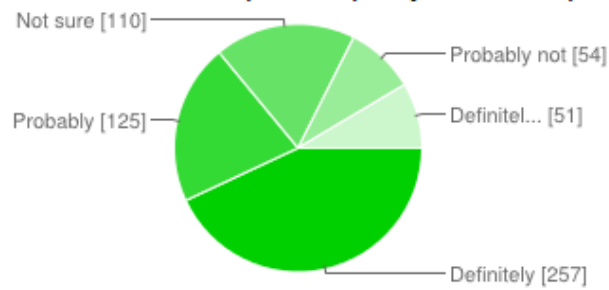
Definitely	165	28%
Probably	94	16%
Not sure	110	18%
Probably not	96	16%
Definitely not	135	23%

Do you think grades should be uncoverable?



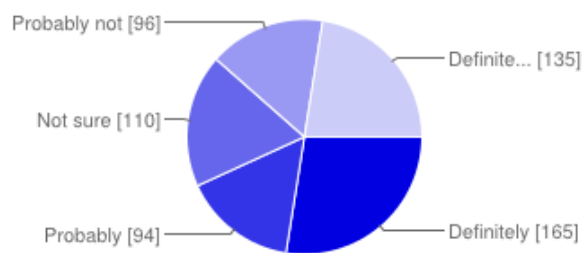
Definitely	297	49%
Probably	83	14%
Not sure	80	13%
Probably not	62	10%
Definitely not	79	13%

**Would a first semester pass/fail policy reduce the pressure to cheat in your classes?**



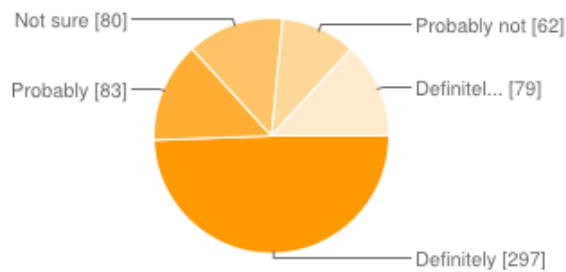
Definitely	257	43%
Probably	125	21%
Not sure	110	18%
Probably not	54	9%
Definitely not	51	9%

**Do you believe core classes should be included in a proposed first semester pass/fail?**



Definitely	165	28%
Probably	94	16%
Not sure	110	18%
Probably not	96	16%
Definitely not	135	23%

**Do you think grades should be uncoverable?**



Definitely	297	49%
Probably	83	14%
Not sure	80	13%
Probably not	62	10%
Definitely not	79	13%

## **SURVEY COMMENTS**

Roughly 200 comments were received. The following is a representative sample.

- I honestly think its fair for Columbia to give students the chance to get use to such a rough transition, and allow them to place their physical and mental health first for at least a little while. Columbia is a rough environment and we should be allowed to become accustomed to the course loads.
- I think this would be extraordinarily problematic for pre-med students. Even if the grades were uncoverable later on, pre-med students would then feel further ostracized from their more relaxed peers. I feel this policy also encourages an "I don't care" attitude around freshman year classes. If I knew everything would be Pass/Fail my first semester freshman year, I would not have used my time constructively--nor would I have learned how to budget my time
- Let students see how poorly/well they WOULD have done give the way they worked first semester and adjust their work habits for second semester. Don't let them uncover it because everyone will only uncover A's. Don't make Core classes Pass/Fail because the 1/9 of students who do the reading will no longer do the reading.
- As a first-generation college student, the hardest part of coming to Columbia was the culture shock.[...]I don't believe that this proposal would necessarily reduce the stress or seriousness with which first-year students regard academics, but it would absolutely help to alleviate the potential regret that results from differential college preparation throughout the student body. I favor this proposal as a way to level the playing field and give every student a fair chance to "do college right," without regret.as long as there is a way to make sure students are working hard then I think it is great
- I personally think this is a terrible idea.From my personal experience, Lit Hum was the hardest class I took first semester freshmen year, and the lowest grade I ended up getting, so I think that Core classes should be included in the policy. Additionally, 3 out of the 4 classes I took first semester freshmen year were core classes, so if core classes weren't included, the policy would not have had made a difference for me. It also just follows logically, I believe at least, that if P/F classes for a major are included, then the Core should also be included.\
- The grades should definitely be uncoverable. As the policy stands now, it is a means to providing an incentive to still do well in the classes. Seems like a great idea.



- Limiting the number of classes First-Years can take would be much more effective. If we are trying to change the campus culture, just allowing new students a free pass is not the best way to go.
- This policy would not allow students to be prepared for their future semesters at Columbia, they would not do any of their work because they wouldn't care, and they would spend more time drinking and partying. I think that this is a very bad idea.
- I'm from Colorado, and my town was the exact opposite of New York. I suffered from extreme culture shock, and it definitely had major negative impacts on my grades. Having my first semester introductory classes be Pass/Fail would have allowed me to allocate more time to adjusting to my new surroundings without my GPA suffering.
- I don't understand why we don't already have this policy. Freshman year at ANY college is incredibly stressful, and in an environment like Columbia where stress is just bred and spread constantly, it becomes nearly unbearable. I know if my first semester was all P/F, I'd have had a much smoother transition to college life. I fully support this idea.
- I want to know what employers and organizations that award fellowships (e.g. Truman, Rhodes, Marshall Trusts and Foundations) think about this. If this weakens Columbia's standing, then this isn't worth it. If it doesn't, then I support this policy.
- My first semester was horrible. I didn't understand anything about this school's fucking bureaucracy, and it screwed me over academically.
- This is an abysmal idea. We are one of the best institutions in the country. Things are going to be stressful and, while it's important to contemplate and implement ways to reduce this stress, this is going way too far. People need to work hard and competition is a part of university life. If people are failing in their classes, work harder. The idea is great, but the fact of the matter is that college is hard no matter what.
- If first semester P/F classes are uncoverable, that defeats the purpose: freshman would still be stressed because P/F classes are generally assumed to be poor grades. That said, I think students should be required to uncover first semester grades in their major upon declaration (assuming they took classes in their major during their first semester).
- I transferred here from one of the schools listed above, and liked the Pass/Fail policy, however, it definitely had its pros and cons. It did make my freshman year much less stressful than it could have been, but from what I've seen, it also causes students to care much less about their

courses. I also think that some of the other schools that use such a policy have harsher academic and or more specialized social settings that really require significant time and effort to get used to in comparison to those of Columbia.

- This is a terrible idea. It makes first-years less competitive when applying for internships and scholarships, because they are competing with everyone, including upperclassmen, not just other Columbia first-years. I would have been extremely upset if this had been in place when I was a freshman and I was not allowed to distinguish myself academically.
- I would imagine students would put off a number of core classes to take advantage of the first semester Pass/Fail only to have difficulty slotting them in later.
- If a person wants to transfer out of Columbia, this policy would block that person from being able to. Other colleges take into strong consideration freshman year grades, and having "pass" as all of one's grades would not be convincing.
- Freshmen generally take introduction classes during their freshman year, which are easier than upper level classes. Good grades in those classes can serve as a cushion for harder classes.
- The solution, in my opinion, to widespread cheating, is stricter enforcement and harsher punishments for cheating rather than lower the academic standard of all of our classes. P/f classes would likely not even lower the amount of cheating, especially if uncovering is an option, given the competitive nature of Columbia students.
- I didn't figure out my major until my junior year, because I was too scared to take any classes, unsure how I would do right out of high school. Instead, I took core classes like music hum and I didn't engage in school until I was a junior.
- The fact remains that while "learning for the sake of learning" is a hugely admirable ideal, students do tend to learn more in the process of striving for a grade, especially in classes that are based on empirical rights and wrongs.
- This policy would've greatly allowed me to relieve a lot of the pressure i felt to compromise my health for sake of fulfilling the obligations of a "college student" (which I didn't yet know), which, ultimately and contrary to my aims, forced me to drop out of a class late because I was worried about my grade and have to take below the minimum amount of credits.

- Having this policy in place as an assurance that my adjustment period wouldn't be conflated with a feeling of inadequacy / laziness would have been a lot healthier for my mental disposition.
- This is a terrible idea. Adjustment can't be formal in nature; it must be substantial. There is no replacement for the pressure placed on freshman to adapt. That stress is a tool that we all learn to deal with, or, in fact, utilize to make us stronger people. This campus-wide crusade against stress and personal challenges is counter-productive.
- THANK YOU FOR THIS INITIATIVE. I wish it could have been the case for me. At the end of the my first semester, I was extremely burnt out, and ended leaving on medical leave for the Spring semester. This matter is serious.
- We learn the ideals taught in the Core for our enrichment as a person and our society as a whole, not for the grade. These classes are largely strenuous and conflict with our pursuit of our first major, let alone anyone in a more requirement-heavy major attempting to learn something new. Making them pass-fail would have made me attempt to learn it for the sake of learning it, not memorizing a bunch of useless facts and ideas to be forgotten.
- Cores classes are often neglected by students in favor of classes for their majors or classes seen as "more important." By making all classes \*except\* core classes Pass/Fail, the school might encourage students to spend more time on their core classes, which in turn would become a habit that likely would continue into second semester and beyond. Since Columbia's core is so distinctive and since this would likely improve the quality of discussions in the classroom, I think this would be a good idea.
- It sucks as a freshmen because people from the outside (ie employers) will find it questionable why some of my grades were so low without necessarily taking into account that high school and college is a bit of a gap, it's a new culture, new schedule, new type of studying/learning, etc.
- I think first-year first term is not overly stressful as long as you plan right, and it only gets harder from there, so there's no reason to pad the issue with Pass/Fail for one term.
- This is a wonderful idea. Especially for Columbia University that sits in the overstimulation of Manhattan. Students who are new to the academic pace of university, living away from home in a dormitory, AND being a young adult in Manhattan deserve a semester to regain their bearings before diving back into academic life. Columbia has enough stress already for the following 3.5 years.

- I think the stressful culture at Columbia, and what is initially overwhelming to most freshman, is the encouragement by peers to take 18+ credits per semester. I do not think this change will be all that effective, as many Columbia freshman come from academically rigorous backgrounds. This measure, in my opinion, would only delay the inevitable stress created by the stress-crazy social culture of Columbia.
- It wouldn't keep students from taking the first semester seriously because if a student supposedly fails all the classes first semester they would have to pay another semester to graduate and be academically behind their peers that did take the first semester seriously
- It's college, no one actually needs a whole semester to adjust. There are enough joke classes already, there's no need to make an entire semester a joke and a waste of time.
- I don't think the policy would alleviate any stress. Rather, it would just delay the stress until later when it'll be even worse.
- I'm a big advocate of this idea, and it's encouraging that practical steps are being taken to improve student mental health.

### **SURVEY REFLECTION**

The survey data suggests that the suggested policy is strongly supported by the students and would be successful in accomplishing many of its goals. While the comments include mixed support and criticism, it seems that the difference lies in whether or not the student had a smooth or difficult transition to Columbia. Moreover, some criticism is concerned with internship or medical school applications and other logistics that the current proposal aims to alleviate, so we in this way hope to greatly benefit the “over-stressed” populations while not significantly impacting the “well-adjusted” ones.

Perhaps the largest concern comes from 63% of students wanting grades to be uncoverable. While implementing an uncoverable grade policy does remove the problem of students being unmotivated to put significant effort into their classes, it also eliminates much of the stress resulting from early competition and goes against our ideal of promoting strong moral values, building supportive communities, and learning for the sake of learning towards the beginning of college. It also promotes grade inflation rather than grade deflation and fosters the idea of university hand-holding that was criticized by some commenters. To elaborate on these points, it seems that many students – or at least those who have a smooth transition to Columbia – perform the best in their first semester, so making first semester grades Pass/D/Fail could actually help to slightly counteract grade inflation among most students while not severely damaging the grades of those who need a semester to adjust. With regard to university hand-

holding, it is my belief that a first semester Pass/D/Fail policy would send the message that the “Columbia bureaucracy” cares about their stress and wants to provide them with a period of adjustment but is leaving the students with the additional responsibility of using the opportunity sensibly, not letting them just boost their GPAs with the grades of their most successful classes. As long as advisors convey this message to students, I do not think many will complain about greater long-term stress after first semester, especially if students are able to see their covered grades.

It is also my belief that core classes not be graded Pass/D/Fail because of the split opinions by students. Since the core attempts to engender values and skills that will be useful to students throughout their four years and since the core is what makes Columbia stand apart from peer institutions, the increased focus on core classes that may result from grades is not problematic. Students also will be prevented from slacking in *all* classes as a result of this policy, and the quality of core discussions should improve as more students read the books. At the same time, grading standards in the core are often not devastating, but they may rise with their valorization through this policy.

## **VIII. Faculty Feedback**

*Several faculty members were solicited for feedback by Steven Castellano, including all Directors of Undergraduate Study. Conversations or email correspondence is summarized below, and conversations are listed in the order in which they occurred.*

### **JULIE CRAWFORD, COMMITTEE ON INSTRUCTION**

Julie Crawford recommended that any proposal submitted to the COI include feedback from the Director of Undergraduate Study (DUS) for each large department to see the logistical hurdles that would need to be overcome within each department. For English and Comparative Literature, of which she is the DUS, Professor Crawford explained that one course could already be taken Pass/D/Fail and counted towards the major, so there are no obstructions there. She also recommended that any proposal explain how we reached the resolution that was passed, as well as why, which is currently seen in section II of this proposal. Finally, Professor Crawford said that the COI would take seriously any proposal brought to its attention but may reach alternative solutions.

### **SUSAN PEDERSEN, EDUCATION POLICY AND PLANNING COMMITTEE**

Susan Pedersen initially was resistant to the policy and cited serious inequity for students depending on whether or not they were taking University Writing and Frontiers of Science during their first semester. When the idea of making Core classes still count for a letter grade was then brought to her attention, she claimed that the policy we were suggesting was quite reasonable. She particularly said

that if students were encouraged to also take on fewer classes than would fill the current 22 credit limit, “we would be talking 5 classes, 3 of which are pass/fail,” which she believed to be a practical yet effective change.

#### **JACK SNYDER, EDUCATION POLICY AND PLANNING COMMITTEE**

Professor Snyder, who is currently on leave for the academic year, essentially redirected me to Susan Pederson by email. He cited her research on making 3 point classes worth 4 points towards the graduation requirement in promoting the goal of stress reduction and “more thorough work in fewer courses.”

#### **NICOLE WALLACK, DIRECTOR OF THE UNDERGRADUATE WRITING PROGRAM**

Though the discussion with Professor Wallack occurred early on before the details of the proposal were fleshed-out, Professor Wallack focused on the challenges that the proposal would bring, primarily a decreased desire to do work. She reaffirmed that as a result, she would not recommend University Writing be offered Pass/D/Fail, but she would be okay with other classes being taken Pass/D/Fail under a first semester Pass/D/Fail system. Professor Wallack made a point of saying that she was not opposed to the proposal outright, but she did express that she would recommend that a list of courses be made that could not be taken Pass/D/Fail in the first semester, including her upper-level seminar. I neglected to ask was whether or not she faced problems if and when students take the seminar Pass/D/Fail under the current system that allows all students to take one class Pass/D/Fail per semester. Professor Wallack also questioned whether significant numbers of faculty would actually support the policy. Instead, she suggested increasing the number of writing fellows as a means of stress reduction. However, this idea unfortunately did not gain much support from students inside or outside of CCSC.

#### **GARETH WILLIAMS, OUTGOING CHAIR OF LITERATURE HUMANITIES**

Professor Williams supported the first semester Pass/D/Fail policy in general and recommended that it be enacted for Literature Humanities. He said that many students do experience high levels of stress from Literature Humanities, so they can still benefit from the policy. At the same time, Professor Williams claimed that the policy would temper grade inflation due to the very high percentage of A's and B's that are given in Literature Humanities. In such a way, covering the grades would prevent a GPA boost while reducing stress. A confusing point was that Professor Williams also advocated for the grades being uncoverable. He believed that students should be able to reveal certain grades on their transcripts if desired; however, doing so would exacerbate the grade inflation problem, both in Literature Humanities and more generally. Professor Williams then told me speak with Christia Mercer for follow-up.

## **CHRISTIA MERCER, INCOMING CHAIR OF LITERATURE HUMANITIES**

Professor Mercer, who is on leave this year, said by email “I really like the idea of restricting numbers of classes and making first semester Pass/D/Fail.” She also said that for years she has advocated for students taking fewer classes to help students with stress while improving the quality of classes and reducing the classroom space problem. Professor Mercer agreed that grade inflation was a problem in Literature Humanities, but she agreed with me that students would be less motivated to read and participate if the class were offered Pass/D/Fail. Though at first she advocated incorporating Literature Humanities in the Pass/D/Fail policy but having tiers modeled off of law schools such as “High Pass” and “Low Pass” or a higher cutoff for a “P” that would be around a B, she said in subsequent emails that such policies would be “too complicated,” not to mention more punitive and possibly stressful. Accordingly, Professor Mercer recommended that we go with the initial plan of having Literature Humanities be graded but address grade inflation through some other means in the future.

## **DIRECTORS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDY**

The following is a table of the Directors of Undergraduate Study (DUS) that were contacted. Their feedback was solicited in order to determine both their feelings on a first semester Pass/D/Fail policy and to comment on how its implementation would impact their departments/majors. The table is sorted in reverse alphabetical order by department. Cells with “not applicable” in the comment section apply to professors who did not reply to my initial email and a reminder email sent two weeks later.

Department	Major	Name	Comments
political science and human rights	political science & human rights	Professor Nathan	Inclines to be opposed because he is unsure how many courses the policy would affect and what a transcript and GPA would look like but “defer[s] to the academic deans”. Both political science and human rights also allow one course to be taken P/D/F and still count towards the major or concentration.
psychology	psychology	Professor Putnam	Mainly responded to clarify details on the proposal.
religion	religion	Professor Bender	Supports a lower credit limit, both to reduce stress and to promote creativity, intelligence, and engagement inside and outside the classes one is signed up for. Accepts the first course for a P but would want to make sure students are not “gaming the system.”
Slavic Languages	Slavic	Professor Timberlake	Feel that students put in minimal work when taking classes P/D/F and accordingly hinder the progress of other students because they are not able to function as well. Supports a lower credit limit.*

sociology	sociology	Professor Barkey	Strongly supports lowering the credit limit so students don't take on as much, as well as having advising work more closely with students. Supports a policy to allow students to have a pass/fail course in sociology but would need a departmental discussion to formally do so.
statistics	statistics	Professor Rabinowitz	Supports stress reduction, claiming that "students arrive after the grueling college admissions process terribly tightly wound, and it takes at least a semester and often longer to reach some version of normalcy." Expressed concerns over students being able to get into graduate schools but excitement at "increasing exploration," "easing tension," and decreasing "gratuitous multiple majors". Interested in adopting the department to make certain requirements into prerequisites to fit the first semester P/D/F policy.
sustainable development	sustainable development	Professor Smerdon	Supports lowering stress and particularly supports removing the "no double counting" requirement to encourage students to do so. Referred me to Ruth DeFries.
sustainable development	sustainable development	Professor DeFries	Supports lowering the number of courses taken per semester but prefers removing the "no double counting" rule. Does not want foundational courses in the major to be P/D/F, so are hesitant about the proposal due to logistics and not its intent. However, they have an introductory one credit course that is "essentially pass/fail" but with "letter grades based on attendance and participation." (This confused me, but suggested that this course could be easily switched to P/D/F though doing so to other introductory courses would meet resistance).
urban studies	urban studies	Professor Davidson	Not applicable.
Visual Arts	Visual Arts	Professor Biggers	Not applicable.
women's and gender studies	women's and gender studies	Professor Nelson	Simply stated by email that a vote would need to be taken to allow the first class to be taken P/D/F without commenting on her personal feelings towards the first semester P/D/F policy.
physics	physics	Professor Dodd	Is most interested in hearing more from students in the major and getting their perspectives. Feels that students are often prepared for their first semester of physics from high school but that the material gets more difficult in the second semester.
philosophy	philosophy	Professor Albert	Not applicable.
music	music	Professor Frisch	(I missed a meeting with him due to illness)
Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies	Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies	Professor Busch	"Broadly in favor" of the initiative but has yet to follow-up after meeting with the department.



mathematics	mathematics	Prof. Panagiota Daskalopoulos	Supports the first year P/D/F policy but would not recommend that any course in math automatically be counted towards the major if taken P/D/F. This is so mainly to prevent students from taking upper-level electives P/D/F and counting them towards the major without taking other ones. As it stands, students can enter wherever they want on the calculus sequence anyway, thus allowing all students to enter the sequence where they please, taking the first course P/D/F without problems (at least according to my understanding).
Latin American and Iberian Cultures	Hispanic Studies	Prof. Jesús Rodríguez-Velasco	Redirected me to Professor Alberto Medina who has yet to reply.
Latin American and Caribbean Studies	Latin American and Caribbean Studies	Prof. Pablo Piccato	(I missed a meeting with him due to illness, but in email he said that these are “very good initiatives”)
Italian	Italian Literature and Italian Culture Studies	Prof. Maria Luisa Gozzi	Cited it as a crucial issue to be addressed with full faculty.
history	history	Prof. Richard Billows	Not applicable.
Germanic Languages	German Literature and Cultural History	Prof. Tobias Wilke	Agrees with counteracting stress that undergraduates experience during college but is unsure of his feelings on first semester P/D/F. Regardless, most students do not start taking classes in the department until their third or fourth semester after finishing a language sequence, so he believes such a policy would not affect courses in his department.*
French and Romance Philology & French and Francophone Studies	French & French and Francophone Studies	Prof. Sylvie Lefèvre	Not applicable.
film studies	film studies	Prof. Annette Insdorf	Supports first semester P/D/F and a lower credit limit. However, “until now” all classes in the major required letter grades, so would be open to allowing students to choose their preferences of grade or P/D/F for the intro class.
English and Comparative Literature	English and Comparative Literature	Prof. Julie Crawford	See previous on page 38.
education	education	Prof. Lee Anne Bell	Not applicable.
Ecology, Evolution, and Environmental Biology	environmental biology and evolutionary biology	Prof. Matthew Palmer	Supports the initiative for first semester P/D/F. Notes that many students start his major with math and science classes from other departments, but is “on board with first semester P/F grades as their major advisor.”
East Asian Languages and Cultures	East Asian Studies	Prof. Theodore Hughes	Almost all students do not take EALAC courses until after major courses so a first semester P/D/F policy would likely “not have that much effect.”

earth and environmental studies	earth and environmental studies	Prof. Terry Plank	Supports the first semester P/D/F policy. Allows one P/D/F course taken early on to count for the major. Has mixed views about lowering the credit limit because she supports reducing stress but does not want to restrict the ambitious student.
economics	economics	Prof. Susan Elmes	Supports lowering the credit limit. Supports the pass/fail policy but has questions regarding implementation. Though the department allows Calc I and Introductory Econ to be taken P/D/F currently, many students skip either or both of these courses using AP credits, in which case the department would not Calc III (the only other math course in the major) or Intermediate Macro to be taken P/D/F.
drama and theatre arts	drama and theatre arts	Prof. Patricia D. Denison	Not applicable.
dance	dance	Prof. Lynn Garafola	Supports reducing stress but believes that dance classes are not stressful due to the nature of the work. Also finds that students are more often in attendance and more attentive in technique classes offered for a letter grade. Supports reducing the credit limit and eliminating surplus majors.
creative writing	creative writing	Prof. Stacey D'Erasmio	Not applicable. Said in Bwog "people then had so much less work compared to students now" in reference to stress.
computer science	computer science	Dr. Adam Cannon	Replied on 12 March saying he would solicit his department for feedback for two weeks but has not replied since.
comparative literature and society	comparative literature and society	Prof. Joseph R. Slaughter	Not applicable
Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race	Ethnicity and Race Studies	Prof. Frances Negron	Not applicable.
Classics & ancient studies	Classics & ancient studies	Prof. Joseph Howley	Expressed that the first semester is pivotal in developing abilities that should not be compromised; found no support when suggesting the idea at a faculty meeting but fully supports the ideas of keeping students from overburdening themselves.*
chemistry	chemistry	Prof. Laura Kaufman	Mentioned logistical concerns resulting from three chemistry tracks. Professors in the department had mixed feelings, which she boiled down to 3 pros and 3 cons. Pros: a lower stress transition, recruiting students with a less solid science background to chemistry, and learning better when focusing on the material and not the tests or being weeded out. Cons: students working less hard, stress being pushed to later semesters, and potential disrupting effects on the curve that will matter for graded students (engineers and postbacs).

biology	biology	Prof. Mowshowitz	Strong advocate for stress reduction policies and building supportive communities among students. Supports lowering the credit limit and implementing first semester pass/fail but notes that biology is taken in the sophomore year, so it would most effect classes from other departments that count for the biology major.
astronomy	astronomy	Prof. Mary E. Putman	Allows the first course in the major to be taken P/D/F as students explore departments. Likes the idea of fewer grades as a result of a first semester P/D/F policy but does worry about decreased effort. Hopes to reduce stress and believes that the key to solving stress-related problems is fostering communities, particularly study groups, which may result from such a P/D/F policy or may instead need to result from community building in dorms.
Art History and Archaeology	Art History and Archaeology	Prof. Matt McKelway (CC bulletin incorrectly lists Zoe Strother as the DUS)	Believes college should be stressful but only to an extent. Supports lowering the credit limit but does not support first semester P/D/F because of rampant grade inflation. While he has seen a student almost fail chemistry and then graduate PBK after adjusting, this is further evidence that one or two Ds in one's first semester is not all that bad.
archaeology	archaeology	Prof. Zoë Crossland	Not applicable.
anthropology	anthropology	Prof. Claudio Lomnitz	Supports a decreased credit limit. Is skeptical about first semester P/D/F but wants to meet with full faculty to hear thoughts.
American Studies	American Studies	Prof. Andrew Delbanco	Not applicable.
African-American Studies	African-American Studies	Prof. Josef Sorett	Not applicable.
African Studies	African Studies	Prof. Rhiannon Stephens	Supports reducing stress and reducing the credit limit. Is hesitant about allowing courses in the major to be taken P/D/F but claims it is very unlikely for students to take a course in the major during the first semester anyway. Says that they would be willing to allow a course to be taken P/D/F on a case-by-case basis if students were to take a major course in their first semester, but Major Debates in African Studies should be taken for a grade.

\*Directors of Undergraduate Study in language departments were especially critical of the policy, generally because language classes are small seminars that build on each other and because collective participation is important. However, since language classes are part of the Core, they would not be offered Pass/Fail for essentially the same reasons as why other Core classes are offered Pass/Fail, allaying such concerns.

It should be noted that first, most faculty support this proposal. Second, among the faculty who were skeptical about the policy, some had ideological concerns and others had logistical concerns. Often, the logistical concerns come down to one or two classes that the department did not want to offer Pass/D/Fail. Thus,

in my opinion, such problems can be resolved by elevating the class to 2000 level or, if need be, discouraging new students from taking them if they plan on eventually majoring in the department. Alternatively, perhaps giving access of unofficial grades to departmental advisors may help resolve the circumstance. Still, these suggestions are rather simplistic, and I do not know if they will be viewed favorably and see that they will likely not work in certain departments, such as economics.