

CENTRAL COUNCIL OF THE STUDENT ASSEMBLY

RESOLUTION

Tuesday, March 24, 2020

Due to the unfortunate turn of events that resulted from COVID-19, a meeting will be held on Monday, March 30th to discuss how Hamilton will proceed with the grading scale. Acknowledging the anxiety this might cause the student body, the Assembly recommended the following to the Dean of Faculty.

To whom it may concern,

We hope all is well with you and your families during this pandemic.

As you are certainly aware, many students are anxious about what the future of their academic semester will entail as we transition to remote learning. We recognize and very much appreciate all the work members of Hamilton's faculty, staff, and administration have dedicated and will continue to dedicate to easing the student body into this transition. Perhaps the most controversial of decisions still on the table relates to potential changes in the assignment of grades. While we recognize that these decisions must ultimately be made by the faculty and administration, we believe it is necessary to consider student voices as input in this discussion.

The Assembly has spent the past week speaking with individuals in the student body and collecting personal testimonials from all. We can strongly conclude that maintaining the current grading system is the least favored option among the student body as it would pose great challenges, especially for Hamilton's most vulnerable students.

Below is a selection of testimonials which echo the views and concerns commonly shared by students:

- "When students are given the option to opt into grading, it will disproportionately benefit those with a stable home situation during this crisis. An entire semester's worth of grades can give a considerable GPA boost. This boost could mean the difference between getting jobs or not, getting into grad school or not, etc. Students with tumultuous home lives, unstable financial situations, parents who lost a lot of money in the market, and even those who are struggling to put a roof over their head will likely opt for the pass fail option. Imagine those same two students had the same grades going into this semester. The one who opts in due to having a safe living situation will likely be able to boost their GPA while the at risk student will not."
- "I'm a fan of the opt-in/opt-out policy. I think it gives students optimal flexibility. Flexibility should be the ultimate goal here because everyone's circumstances are vastly different. The other two hardline approaches will run into so many issues... some students need grades for senior year programs or grad school, STEM classes will be so much harder online, other students don't have the materials/resources they need to succeed. A policy that accommodates every need is clearly the way to go."



CENTRAL COUNCIL OF THE STUDENT ASSEMBLY

RESOLUTION

Tuesday, March 24, 2020

- “Given that the effectiveness of the online learning platform remains unknown, students should take each class for a letter grade, and then have the option to go credit/no credit at the end of the semester”
- “Wesleyan has optional pass/fail and they have until the last day of online classes to decide which classes they want to switch to p/f which I think is very ideal so you can base your decision off of how well you performed!”
- “Online learning is so new and unpredictable that I think people should have the option to not be penalized until they’ve gotten to experience it.”
- “Making all classes credit/no credit would be unacceptable; such a decision would effectively punish students who had success in the first half of the semester because of the coronavirus”
- “I put so much effort into my classes and I really want this semester to contribute to my GPA. This is my best semester and I would be really sad for that not to mean anything at the end of all this”
- “I am Pre-med and I personally need a letter grade for medical school.”
- “To apply to PA and Med school you need GPA’s in your science classes and they don’t accept pass/fail for any prerequisites so I’m concerned that I would have to take 2 of these classes again”
- “Either choose to have all your classes show up or you choose to have all of them pass/fail, half measures just might allow people to cheat the system”
- “To maintain our [current system for] grad[ing] with normal grading practices it would require even more work [on part of the students]. I think if we move to optional pass/fail and not mandatory pass/fail the professors need to recognize that they need to grade different and easier because we will not have access to the same resources as we do on campus or grading the same as before is just hurting all students”

Some solutions implemented by peer institutions have caught the attention of the student body. As these ideas circulate, members of the community have reached out to ask whether they might be tried at Hamilton. We would encourage the faculty to review policies implemented by Vassar College, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Wesleyan University.

Some other questions raised during various discussions follow:

- For the opt-in option: Would there be any limitations as to how many classes a student may choose to pass/fail? Could students choose how many classes they’d want to opt into pass/fail?
- Can Hamilton College communicate with postgraduate opportunities, alerting them of the school’s change in academic policy with either a statement attached to this year’s transcripts or some other form?
- How will these changes impact department academic honors?
- Will all classes this semester intended to fulfill major requirements still count toward those requirements?
- Will classes that students have already switched to credit/no-credit still count as such if they decide for a graded transcript?



CENTRAL COUNCIL OF THE STUDENT ASSEMBLY

RESOLUTION

Tuesday, March 24, 2020

- How will the faculty's decisions account for students in domestic and international study-abroad programs? Will they still be accredited?

The Assembly and the student body at large would greatly appreciate if the faculty could take the time to respond to any of these questions for which an answer is already available. Any information you can provide would be certain to alleviate the aforementioned stress, especially as we return to classes in this new format. **Moreover, we feel it is necessary that the administration updates us with the rationale for their decision when it is made final.**

Though we have received feedback advocating for a myriad of different policies, the majority of student respondents would prefer to have the individual option to either keep their graded transcript or convert to pass/fail. We want to reiterate that very few students have advocated for keeping the grades the way they are, as this policy would clearly alienate students who do not have the resources to match their prior on-campus academic capabilities. Given these unfortunate circumstances that plague our community,

Hamilton cannot control the residential/ academic environments of the Hamilton curriculum this semester. It is very important that equal-academic-opportunity is met while equitable-opportunity cannot. Some students have advocated for a mandatory pass/fail system, arguing that those who are most vulnerable and have to choose the pass/fail option will have trouble applying for postgraduate/graduate school and will be deferred to more privileged individuals who were able to improve or maintain their grades from home during the pandemic. However, this policy would have many negative consequences as well. Students relying on AP credit to graduate or gain extra credits would be unable to receive such credit if mandated to go pass/fail. Furthermore, the work of high-achieving students who excelled throughout the first 8 weeks of the semester would not be reflected on their transcripts. Their peers, some worry, would be getting a free pass for not working to their best ability. Lastly, if pass/fail is made mandatory, the quality of academic work may be negatively impacted.

Hamilton College's mission statement describes our school as a "residential academic community" where students learn to "engage issues ethically and creatively." In the present unusual circumstances, we cannot continue to function as a residential campus, but it is important that we continue to apply creative solutions in seeking equal academic opportunities. **We, as an Assembly, find that an option to choose a pass/fail or graded transcript at the end of the semester, though flawed, is the best option for the majority of the student body this semester.** We wish you the best of luck with the upcoming faculty meeting on the 30th.

In solidarity,



CENTRAL COUNCIL OF THE STUDENT ASSEMBLY
RESOLUTION
Tuesday, March 24, 2020

Hamilton College Student Assembly

