

### *Motion on an Equitable Grading Policy for the Spring of 2021*

**Purpose:** Given the continued and diverse challenging circumstances facing students this spring due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Student Government Association finds it of the utmost importance that the College renew the extended satisfactory/unsatisfactory grading option granted in the fall of 2020 for all courses, including those necessary for the fulfillment of major, minor, and distribution requirements.

Provided the fair reservations of faculty, the SGA recommends that this renewed extended S/U option be adjusted in the following manner:

1. All S/U declarations must require the consultation of an academic advisor. Students should be required to easily confirm that they have consulted with their advisor and understand how the grading option will affect their long-term plans.
  - a. The SGA understands that some students declared a course S/U when it was not in their best interest to do so. We hope that the counsel of an academic advisor will assist students in making a more informed decision when considering declaring a course S/U.
2. The deadline for the declaration of S/U should be extended from the traditional deadline of February 19th to the last day of classes, May 12th.
  - a. The SGA believes that students should be well informed regarding their personal need to declare S/U. This extended deadline will afford students the opportunity to reflect on their personal circumstances and adjust their plans accordingly.

The SGA further recommends that all academic departments give all due consideration to and meaningfully deliberate on the granting of major/minor requirement credit to those students who choose to elect an extended S/U grading option. It is the opinion of this body that the lack of an applicable extended S/U option towards major/minor departmental requirements remains a chief barrier to resolving the academic inequity brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**The What:** We strongly recommend that the College renew the fall of 2020's non-compulsory satisfactory/unsatisfactory grading option for students which extends to all major, minor, and distribution requirements. This option, if selected, should be made available to students up to the final day of classes.

**The How:** This recommendation will be communicated through a letter — included in the appendix of this motion — to the full faculty signed by the SGA. This letter of support would be included in the AAC's motion to the full faculty for consideration of the revised S/U policy. Departments will have to individually decide on their acceptance of S/U options for courses being counted for majors and minors. Colby offers departments significant levels of autonomy for determining major/minor policies and members of the AAC and the full faculty do not have jurisdiction over departmental policies.

**The Who:** The College will be responsible for implementing this policy, similarly to the fall of 2020. SGA representatives to the AAC have already advocated for an extension of the fall 2020

S/U policies for the spring semester. AAC members have voted to send a motion to the full faculty.

**Strengths and Importance:** Given the continued diverse and challenging circumstances confronting students in the spring of 2021, we believe it crucial that a grading policy be implemented which reflects the priority on equity which the College has consistently, and fairly, supported in the past.

**Possible Risk Areas:** Students may encounter trouble deciding whether to elect S/U. By giving students an extended option to elect S/U, some students may get a D or below and not get credit where they would have without S/U. Additionally, we do not yet fully know the long term effect of an S/U election on graduate programs, so there could be unexpected repercussions for students.

Students may also take advantage of the increased flexibility and declare S/U for a class because they do not want to receive a certain grade, as opposed to experiencing a significant impact from the pandemic.

#### **Questions Already Addressed:**

Q: Would a universal S/U system be a more equitable grading option for the spring of 2021?

A: While a universal S/U system would be the most equitable option for students, it is the position of this body that students deserve a level of flexibility and control over their final grades given their diverse range of circumstances.

Q: Why are we choosing this option over, say, extending the traditional period whereby students can elect to take their courses satisfactory/unsatisfactory?

A: While an extension of this period would be helpful, it would not fully address the central concerns of the SGA to preserve the equitable learning environment which should be available to all students. Many students, for example, will be taking many courses required for their major or minor. Because these courses would, in many departments, be unable to be taken for S/U, an extension would be of no help to them in regards to academic equity.

Q: What can the SGA do to actualize this policy more effectively?

A: The furthest extent of the SGA's authority lies in communicating student sentiment to the College. While the SGA cannot directly implement this policy, it can voice strong support which will be taken into consideration upon further deliberation by the faculty and College. The SGA can also play a key role in helping students make the best decisions around selecting the S/U grading option.

#### **Contact Information for questioning, clarification, or pre-meeting critiques:**

**Name & Year:** Josh Brause, Class of 2023 Co-President

**Email:** [jhbrau23@colby.edu](mailto:jhbrau23@colby.edu)

**Phone:** (203) 988-4748

**Favorable Hours to Meet:** Thursday, 1:00pm to 2:00pm

## **Appendix**

### **Letter to the Academic Affairs Committee, the faculty, and the College:**

**To:** Margaret McFadden, Provost and Dean of Faculty  
Russell Johnson, Associate Provost and Dean of Faculty  
All Faculty

**From:** Ashlee Guevara, SGA President  
Sam Rosenstein, SGA Vice President  
Joshua Brause, Class of 2023 Co-President

**Date:** March xx, 2021

**Subject:** Regarding an Equitable Grading Policy for the Spring of 2021

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The SGA further recommends that each academic department give all due consideration to and meaningfully deliberate on the granting of major/minor requirement credit to those students who choose to elect an extended S/U grading option. It is the opinion of this body that the lack of an applicable extended S/U option towards major/minor departmental requirements remains a chief barrier to resolving the academic inequity brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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will assist students in making a more informed decision when considering declaring a course S/U.

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On February 12th, 2021, the SGA collected survey responses from students asking “How did last semesters extended S/U policy affect you?” We have listed some of these overwhelmingly positive responses here for your consideration:

“Yes it helped me! Especially because of the weirdness with hybrid/online classes.”

“Yes! It helped so much, especially because the format of the classes changed a few times.”

“It definitely helped to relieve stress from the semester”

“Nope! The Government department wouldn’t relax their policies.”

“Yes! I had a very chaotic semester and being able to s/u classes made it less stressful!!”

“Yes! It gave me peace of mind in a turbulent semester and let me prioritize my course load”

“Yes. I really struggled with my mental health but the S/U policy was immensely helpful”

“YES! Things change moment by moment and this grading option helps account for uncertainties”

“Yes, Colby’s S/U policy alleviated the pressures of online/hybrid learning”

“Yes, it helped me prioritize my mental health when I went through quarantine after a loss”

“I didn’t take any classes pass fail but I would this semester if it was offered again”

“Yeah it helped me wait until I was further into the class to make a choice. Loved it”

“Last spring’s S/U policy helped me a lot and I hope that they could bring it back this spring”

“Absolutely necessary. 2/4 classes S/U, both of which were remote. Class setting > zoom.”

“Yes, it really helped! And even though my majors didn’t let me do it for those courses, it was still super helpful to have it for non-major courses, especially remote ones”

Thank you,

The Student Government Association of Colby College