



COLUMBIA COLLEGE

OFFICE OF THE DEAN

Spring 2020

To colleagues in institutions of higher education and related organizations:

We wish to put into context the grades that will appear on the transcript of every student enrolled in Columbia College of Columbia University in Spring 2020.

The COVID-19 outbreak has disrupted the social fabric of many parts of the world since it first emerged in the fall of 2019. The first known case of the virus in New York City was confirmed on March 1, 2020, and the numbers of cases of illness escalated exponentially over the next several weeks. By March 8, the leadership of Columbia University had banned nonessential congregations, and on March 10, the President of Columbia University announced that all class meetings would move to a fully online platform. Next, students were asked to leave campus on short notice, the University's spring break was extended, and all residents of the New York City region were mandated to stay at home by the governor of our state. When classes resumed online on March 26 after spring break, instructors and students had to adjust very quickly to a learning environment that is fully online and asynchronous.

Given the level of uncertainty that students and faculty face in their personal circumstances, the inequities present in our current academic environment, and the unfamiliarity that many have with online learning, the decision was made that all courses at Columbia University in the Spring 2020 semester will be assessed solely on a pass/fail basis, with no exceptions. On March 20, the President of Columbia University wrote to all faculty, students, and staff of the university to confirm that "with respect to courses, working with each of your schools, we have decided that all classes this semester will be graded pass/fail. This, of course, does not reflect a reduction in expectations, but rather an acknowledgment of the severe complications of this unusual moment."

We want to ensure that other institutions and organizations understand clearly that all faculty members of Columbia University are required to give our undergraduate students a final grade of either "pass" or "fail" for Spring 2020 courses. A "pass" will indicate satisfactory performance and full course credit, and a "fail" will indicate unsatisfactory performance and no course credit. It is not possible for faculty to assign any other course grade to a student enrolled in Columbia College this semester, and students cannot request a letter grade instead of a "pass."

The schools at Columbia University are accepting a grade of "pass" for fulfillment of degree requirements which, under normal circumstances, might require a letter grade. We therefore expect that a grade of "pass" will also be accepted in the same way by graduate schools, professional schools, home institutions of visiting students, fellowship or scholarship organizations, and any other institution or organization that requires a review of our students' transcripts. We believe that our colleagues will be appreciative of, and sympathetic to, our current local and global crisis and will hold all currently enrolled students harmless for the extraordinary difficulties with which we are struggling.

Representatives of Columbia College would be happy to talk with representatives of any school or organization who would like further clarification of this statement. We thank you all for your understanding and your collegiality.

Sincerely,

James J. Valentini

Dean of Columbia College and Vice President of Undergraduate Education