

Dear all:

These are definitely unprecedented times. The inconveniences of social distancing have left us without many of the things that bring us happiness - sporting competitions, theatre, concerts, and just hanging out with friends. We miss disc golf, coffee in the library, standing in line for sandwiches at Stacks, in person involvement with student organizations, community organizations, and having a great deal of independence.

We want to start by expressing our appreciation for how very much our students value their education and experience in our courses and on our campus. Your anticipation of spring term, your willingness to take risks and to employ critical thinking skills, and your sheer love of learning, give us the courage to rebuild our courses for an entire term so that all students can stay on track for "More in Four." We've had students volunteer to assist professors with moving course content and management online, emails of support, a "share and care" google doc set up by KCSSR for members of our community to offer assistance and post needs, and more. In turn, it has been our pleasure to connect with advisees and students from our classes as they've returned home, to check in on them, and to assess what specific challenges they may have for spring term.

We also value your concerns about the faculty decision to adopt CR/NC for spring term. In this letter we try to address the primary concerns presented in two separate letters received from KCSSR and another group of students (not organizational). We believe those concerns to be:

- Student inclusion in major decisions impacting their education
- Graduate and professional schools review of CR/NC grades for spring 2020

Specific challenges were also raised and we have attempted to address them in a follow-up FAQ that we will continue to update as additional questions and concerns arise.

- Impact on financial aid/merit scholarships of CR/NC grades for spring 2020
- International students and home institution review of CR/NC grades for spring 2020
- Desire to boost GPA with spring term 2020 letter grades
- Students coming back from long term SA will have full year of no letter grades

After the College made the decision to do distance learning for the entire spring term (on Monday, March 16) there was a meeting of all Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) representatives, the Chair of Educational Policies Committee, the Chair of the Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC), the Chair of the Academic Standards Committee, the Provost, Associate Provost, Assistant Provost, and the Registrar to discuss implications of the new mode of teaching and learning for our classes in spring term. One topic that was discussed was alternative grading for spring term. At that time, the Faculty Executive Committee requested a small task force to look at possible options for grade reporting for spring term 2020 given the highly unprecedented learning landscape we were entering.

The task force consisted of FEC Representative Enid Valle, TLC Chair Alyce Brady, the Registrar Nicole Kragt, the Director of Financial Aid Becca Murphy, Assistant Provost Eric Barth, Associate Provost Laura Furge, and Provost Danette Johnson. Section 5 of the Kalamazoo College By-Laws gives Faculty the responsibility and authority to "determine the nature of the system to be used in grading students in courses" as well as participation in "fostering an inclusive learning environment centered on student intellectual and

personal development.” Neither the administration nor students have governing responsibility over grading policies.

Some points of consideration for the task force were:

- Faculty and students are entering a teaching space that may largely be foreign to most of them and will likely require a great deal of adaptations along the way.
- Faculty and students will be working in highly variable learning and teaching environments, including variable access to technology, responsibilities to family (children out of school and trying to continue schooling at home, daycares closed, caring for older parents, sharing working from home spaces with partners and spouses, etc.); access to spaces conducive to best learning outcomes; managing own self-care in case of covid-19 illness; and even basic necessities such as food and safe, supportive places for shelter.
- The faculty want to support our community through a difficult time by looking at ways to decrease anxiety and yet provide structure and continued learning that is at the heart of our mission to lead in a complex, increasingly diverse world.

With these principles in mind, the Task Force researched and debated many scenarios and in the end brought four options to all the faculty for discussion. These included exempting some kinds of classes for CR/NC and letting students opt-in to CR/NC in various ways. Faculty comments were rich with examples from what they have heard from their advisees, majors, and students in their courses during the final exam period, and discussed how each option would affect the overall student body in classroom settings. Based on those inputs, the faculty then voted with a strong endorsement of CR/NC for all courses, all faculty, and all students for spring term, though not all faculty were in agreement with this approach.

One of the reasons that faculty voted in favor of a CR/NC approach was because our term had not yet started and we will be in session with distance learning for much longer than many other schools. Most other institutions are on semesters and had the advantage of having as much as two-thirds of their spring term completed before moving to distance learning. Many semester institutions had ~4 weeks left in their spring term when they moved to distance learning. In those situations, students already had ~9 weeks of in-class instruction, time to understand expectations for the course, get to know the professor, build relationships with classmates, etc. Further, they only had to navigate a few extra weeks of uncertainty while we have as many as ten weeks with economic, personal and public health, and educational environment concerns. There remains too much uncertainty about the future and faculty wanted to provide maximum flexibility to confront those challenges.

With regards to concerns about graduate and professional school admissions criteria, faculty were initially quite concerned about this issue, as well, which is why we assigned an interdisciplinary task force to look into many of the very issues about which students feel anxious. That task force committee had researched the rapidly changing attitudes about post-graduate programs and concluded that, in this period of time, CR/NC will be the norm, whether it is opt-in or required.

The faculty is confident that graduate schools understand the unique circumstances this term caused for higher education everywhere. For instance, policies for admission to

graduate programs (including medical school and law school) in the US are changing rapidly ([Harvard has already announced](#) it will accept CR/NC courses required for their medical school admissions, for instance). Our sincere belief is that Harvard's response about leniency with CR/NC grades will become standard practice the world over regarding Spring 2020 grades. Many schools have not yet released new policies because they are focusing now on the immediate needs of their students and faculty who are also entering distance learning for the first time, and implementing their own CR/NC policies for spring 2020.

Furthermore, grades are only one portion of graduate school admissions and employer considerations, and one term of grades makes up only a small fraction of a GPA. CR/NC will neither increase nor decrease grades for any student, and will not advantage or disadvantage students with greater resources to cope in this environment. Your K professors are able to provide assessment of your trajectory and ability that is far more nuanced than GPA. Your professors will be knowledgeable about your maturity and the unique talents you each will bring to the classrooms in Spring 2020 while also understanding and having compassion for students that will not be able to reach their full potential in spring. Letters of recommendation from faculty who know you personally and have seen your academic, personal, and intellectual growth will provide much greater insights into who you are and how you will likely do in your next steps after K.

Finally, K is a close knit and small community. We all know each other from classes, extra- and co-curricular organizations, athletic teams, informal time in the coffee shop, Hicks, the Intercultural Center, or the library Learning Commons, and more. We have shared experiences, shared friends, and shared pursuit of learning here. We urge students to consider ways of supporting each other during this time, fostering academic inquiry/integrity, and just being a friend.

On Behalf of the Faculty,
Binney Girdler, Chair FEC and representative from STEM Division
Christine Hahn, Vice-Chair FEC and At-Large Representative
Beau Bothwell, FEC representative from Untenured Faculty
Sarah Lindley, FEC representative from the Fine Arts Division
Mark Murphy, FEC representative from Athletics and PE Division
Taylor Petrey, FEC representative from the Humanities Division
Chuck Stull, FEC representative from Social Sciences Division
Enid Valle, FEC representative from the Language Division
Laura Furge, Associate Provost
Danette Ifert Johnson, Provost