

## Pass/Fail Grading and Late Withdrawal Policy for Spring 2020

Sunday, 12 Apr 2020, at 10:46 PM

Dear Students,

In the past few weeks, we have received emails from students requesting that the University grant Pass/Fail grades for all courses in the Spring term. Some have provided detailed justifications for their requests, including examples of practices by other universities. We would like to thank all for your sharing, which is important for informing the University's decision making process.

After reviewing your inputs and the practices of both local and overseas universities, we deliberated extensively with the aim of upholding academic standards, while accommodating the needs of students facing hardship during this difficult time. We would like to inform you of our decision regarding a special policy for this term, as well as the underlying rationale.

1. Students may submit the following requests, before April 24, to the Associate Deans of the Schools (or Director of IPO) based on personal hardship they have encountered during this pandemic:
  - a. Withdraw from 1 or more courses to reduce the total course load.
  - b. Elect to receive Pass/Fail grades on all the remaining courses in the Spring term.
  - c. Special approval by discretion to receive Pass/Fail grades on select courses and maintain letter grades for other courses. Strong justification needs to be provided to show that 1a and 1b above do not address the hardship encountered.
2. Courses withdrawn will NOT be marked with a "W" on the transcript (unlike the usual withdrawal policies). However, tuition fees will not be refunded for courses with late withdrawal.
3. Students granted by the school to receive Pass/Fail grades for spring term courses should continue to complete assignments and exams. Instructors will apply the same standards of evaluation and assign letter grades to all students, but a Pass/Fail grade corresponding to letter grades will appear on the transcripts of students who are approved to receive Pass/Fail grades.
4. Note that a Pass grade will NOT affect the TGA and CGA calculations, but a grade of Fail will be computed in both.
5. While courses with a Pass grade may be used to fulfill various graduation requirements, it may have implications for major selection, eligibility for the Deans' list, and other academic matters. Please consult the UG Coordinator of your Department/Division or the Associate Dean of your School for details.

Unlike other universities that switched abruptly to online learning, HKUST started this semester by conveying a clear expectation to all faculty and students that Spring 2020 courses would be conducted in a real-time and interactive online mode. Courses that could not be delivered in this manner were canceled or postponed to future terms. Faculty have worked hard to make the real-time online classes effective for learning, as reflected by the positive student feedback on the interim survey conducted in early March. Although adapting exams and assessments has posed more challenges, faculty have made multiple and appropriate adjustments in designing assignments and online assessments. While no assessment can be bulletproof against potential cheating, instructors have implemented sufficient deterrent measures to make midterms and final assessments adequately fair. If administration of the online exam in a course is severely compromised, then special measures or alternative assessments will be introduced to address the need. For these reasons, we have concluded that on academic grounds, it is not well justified to automatically grant Pass/Fail grades in all courses.

At the same time, we understand that many students may have been severely affected physically, financially, or emotionally by the pandemic. We are sympathetic to students who may face more critical and urgent issues in their lives and do not want to be stressed further by course grades. Hence, we are supportive of their choice to receive Pass/Fail grades for courses this term, and offer the option of reducing their course load by late withdrawal. On the other hand, we are mindful that this one-time university policy might lead some to select courses to receive Pass/Fail grades in order to improve their CGA or TGA. Therefore, the university will only grant the Pass/Fail grading request to either *all or none* of the courses taken this term. For truly unique and exceptional situations where sufficient justification is provided, we will consider special appeals as indicated in 1c.

This unprecedented time calls for special consideration. We understand that no policy is perfect, but we will continue our best efforts to implement a policy that is relatively simple, fair and practical for accommodating the needs of our students.

We hope you are staying healthy, both physically and emotionally. Please do not hesitate to contact us for help during these challenging times.

Best,

Lionel NI, Provost

Roger CHENG, Associate Provost (Teaching & Learning)

Yang WANG, Dean of Science

Tim CHENG, Dean of Engineering

Kar Yan TAM, Dean of Business and Management

Kellee TSAI, Dean of Humanities and Social Science

King CHOW, Director of Interdisciplinary Programs Office cum Acting Dean of Students

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### **Pass/Fail Grading and Late Withdrawal Policy for Spring 2020**

Tuesday, April 14, 2020 1:26 PM

Dear Students,

To follow up with the recent email sent jointly by the Provost, Deans, IPO Director, and me, I would like to provide more details on the logistic arrangement to facilitate the submission of requests.

A simple webpage ([https://registry.ust.hk/2020Spring\\_WPF](https://registry.ust.hk/2020Spring_WPF)) will be ready in 2 days providing further details and links to online forms for you to submit requests, if needed, to your Associate Deans before 24 April. Please do **NOT** send emails directly to the Associate Deans who will have difficulties keeping track of many individual emails.

**Associate Deans, but NOT the course instructors, will review all requests AFTER April 24** and you will be notified about the results in the following week. Please think through your decision, and if needed consult your academic advisor/research supervisor, before making the requests, because there may be implications for your major selection, graduation requirement, honors classification, etc. For 1st year students, your school will inform you about the details of major selection separately.

I notice that there may be **some misunderstandings among students** about the policy and hence want to

clarify it here.

1. Please note that you are **NOT** restricted to pick one of the 3 types of requests (1a, 1b, and 1c) under point 1. You can choose to make more than one type of request listed there; in particular, valid choices are 1a only, 1b only, 1c only, 1a and 1b, 1a and 1c, or submit no request at all. For example, you may request to withdraw from 2 courses and to have all the remaining courses to receive P/F grades, (i.e. 1a and 1b). Clearly, option 1b and 1c are mutually exclusive since you may request to receive P/F grades for either all remaining courses (those were not withdrawn) (i.e. 1b), or just some, but not all courses (i.e. 1c).

2. Point 3 of the email stated that “Instructors will apply the same standards of evaluation and assign letter grades to all students, but a Pass/Fail grade corresponding to letter grades will appear on the transcripts of students who are approved to receive Pass/Fail grades.”. Hence, the number of students withdrawing from a course will not affect the grades of those remaining in the class.

While **you can expect that category 1a and category 1b requests are very likely to be granted**, category 1c requests for P/F grades on select courses will only be granted under very very special circumstances. In fact, we cannot even think of a reason why 1c can be justified, but are willing to listen, in the current unusual times, to see if there are “truly unique and exceptional situations” with clear justification.

I hope this clarifies the arrangement and please stay healthy.

Best,  
Roger Cheng  
Associate Provost (Teaching & Learning)