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## [Econ-assoc] Spring semester

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To: econ\_faculty@columbia.edu

Hi All

By now, you should have all seen the email from Bollinger regarding major decisions that affect all classes and students for the remainder of the semester. A summary is included at the end of this email. Before that, I wanted to share with you some advice/resources.

1) You should contact your class either by email or Zoom before your class "meets" to discuss your expectations for the remainder of the semester. You should include information on any changes to the syllabus, assignments and exams, the mode of instruction (live Zoom lectures, pre-recorded material etc), and how student work will be evaluated in order earn a P. Please be explicit with the students on all points. You may contact them regarding these changes at any time (ie you may do so on M,T or W if you wish - you are only prohibited from doing lectures or giving assignments on those days).

2) If you are planning on holding live Zoom lectures then you should record these lectures and make them available for all students. It is unreasonable to expect that all students will be able to attend the live lecture. If you need assistance with Zoom, contact CTL. Their webpage is <https://ctl.columbia.edu/>

3) The folks in Frontiers of Science created a survey for their students to collect information on the students current location, access to wifi, access to a study space etc. If you have a big class you might wish to do the same. The Quiz feature in Courseworks can be used to create a survey to collect student information. You can see their survey at [https://nyu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_cuVj9KAa5iK25RH](https://nyu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cuVj9KAa5iK25RH) . Do not give the link to the students - the Frontiers faculty do not need information on your students. The link is for you to see the types of questions that they are asking.

4) Although students will only be earning P/F grades, this does not mean that the semester is over. The Provost Office explicitly states that some version of our classes must continue to "meet" and there must be some expectation that students do some class related work for the remainder of the semester. The exact nature of your classes and that work is up to you.

5) Some students will be upset with the change to mandatory P/F grades (I have received several emails) Below (after the policy summary ) I have copied part of the email sent by Dean Valentini to the undergraduates regarding this change. In the email you will note that the policy change was discussed both by the COI and the Directors of Undergrad Studies. I was a participant in the conversation and strongly supported the policy. The rational for my support is well summarized in Valentini's email.

Good luck and I hope everyone is well

susan

Summary of policy changes

- Classes are suspended for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Classes should not be held, assignments should not be due, and exams should not be given on those days. Optional office hours or other check-in conversations with students can take place, but formal instruction should be delayed until Thursday. Some of you have asked about holding classes during the period of Monday through Wednesday and recording them to share later, or polling students to see if they would voluntarily meet during the period of Monday through Wednesday, but this is not permitted.
- The end of the academic year remains the same; no additional time will be added. So as we adjust course content to an online environment, we will need to adjust that content to account for days of suspended classes, as well as our need to include materials and assignments that lend themselves to an asynchronous online environment.
- The Provost Office has stressed that, given these extraordinary circumstances, we have the flexibility to alter our expectations of contact hours and workload hours, as long as we fulfill the overall expected course hours and that we have achieved reasonable learning goals in our courses. We

must complete all courses, even if we can do so only by changing the learning goals for a class radically. In other words, we have to determine what learning looks like in the time of a global pandemic so that we are serving our students as well as possible while adjusting our shared expectations of what constitutes reasonable content and a reasonable timeline.

- The mandatory pass/fail grading system has been mandated by the President and Provost Offices for every school in the university. So this is not the optional pass/d/fail system that we have in place in the undergraduate schools under normal conditions. Faculty will have only the pass or fail grading options for all students at the end of the semester, and students will not be able to opt in or out of this system. As with so many of our circumstances which no longer resemble anything we're used to, we will need to develop new definitions for our assessment criteria as well-- i.e., to decide what constitutes a "pass" and a "fail". Faculty are still encouraged to give evaluative feedback on student work and to acknowledge student progress, and you can assure students who continue to excel in your classes that you will have ways beyond their transcripts to convey their academic achievement (e.g., letters of recommendation). The schools are also prepared to communicate with any organization that might typically review transcripts of our students -- e.g., schools of business, law, or medicine; graduate programs; fellowships -- to make sure that the content of a "pass" is understood in light of current events and the university's response.
- Curricular requirements for undergraduate students that usually require a letter grade -- e.g., major or concentration requirements, Core Curriculum requirements -- may be fulfilled with grades of "P" if taken this semester.

#### Valentini Email to Students explaining the P/F Policy

The President has also confirmed that all courses offered this semester will be uniformly graded on a pass/fail basis. Please note that this grading system is not an extension of the usual pass/d/fail policy that our undergraduates know; all faculty will be evaluating students solely with either a pass or a fail. I want to share more detail about the basis for this decision, so that as a community of learners, we can collectively embrace this approach as we move forward together.

At a special meeting called this week to consider questions of grading in our new environment, Columbia College - General Studies Committee on Instruction considered a variety of options before coming to a majority consensus that a mandatory pass/fail system was by far the best option. This recommendation was then shared broadly with faculty for their feedback, and again there was strong support among the Directors of Undergraduate Studies and many of their faculty colleagues for a mandatory pass/fail system. This support for mandatory pass/fail grading was offered while the President was deciding on a course of action for the University.

The faculty members who endorsed this decision stressed that our normal system of evaluating student work and assigning letter grades is predicated on the assumption that our students have equal access to the normal methods of instruction and the supporting structure of a residential college environment. Those shared conditions no longer exist, and many faculty feel that they cannot fairly judge student work when there is still so much we need to learn about the online environment in which we teach and about the personal circumstances of the students whom we teach. We must therefore create a new set of shared conditions that must apply to us all as a community.

I want to share here some of the most important points that were raised in the many discussions that we have had this week:

- With the activity of this last week, and the majority of our undergraduates now off campus, some students are now in locations and situations in which they do not have adequate resources (e.g., computer equipment, internet bandwidth, books, study space) to participate as actively as they can when on campus. Many students are also now located in different time zones, which could make it difficult or impossible to participate fully in classes that are still being held during their normal meeting times.
- Students and faculty can no longer be assumed to have equal access to course materials — whether texts on reserve, laboratory spaces, art works displayed on classroom A/V equipment, live performances in class or in NYC, or library materials; and academic support in the form of office hours, tutoring, study groups, and an immersive academic experience are also altered in this new world.
- Students will be experiencing varying social conditions in terms of their access to medical care, housing, food, social support, and familial challenges that may impact their ability to fully engage in

their studies. For students who already were living in precarious conditions, it is expected the COVID-19 crisis will only exacerbate this situation.

In sum, our students and faculty are currently experiencing a psychological and social burden brought on by abrupt moves off campus into disparate environments, a complete change in academic structure, and a global pandemic that continues to spread quickly and to disrupt all aspects of our lives. It takes time to adjust to this new reality, and I believe, also requires a new set of shared conditions for our entire academic community. It is for this reason that the Columbia College - General Studies Committee on Instruction advocated for a delay in the resumption of classes after spring break, so that we have time to support our community in the drastic adjustments that they are making.

**Given the level of uncertainty that students and faculty are facing in their personal circumstances, the inequities that they are encountering in their academic environment, and the unfamiliarity that many have with online learning, Columbia strongly feels that the academic community would best be served if all courses are evaluated on a pass/fail basis, with no exceptions. While some students and faculty may feel that the usual awarding of letter grades would be desirable for individual reasons, the imperative in this time of global crisis is to do what is best for the entire academic community so that the playing field is leveled for all. Students who have been performing well cannot know whether they will experience a negative impact of this global pandemic during the next several weeks, and students who are not able to engage with their academics fully because of this global pandemic should not be penalized.**

Courses in which a "P" is earned this semester will still fulfill requirements for general education requirements (e.g., the Core Curriculum) and requirements for a major or concentration or other program of study. Student transcripts that show Spring 2020 will also have a clear notation that clarifies to any audience that all courses in the term were graded solely on a pass/fail basis. This means that we will provide context of this semester to medical schools, law schools, business schools, other graduate schools, and any other organizations who require the review of a transcript, and we believe that, especially given the global nature of this pandemic, they will be appreciative of and sympathetic to this context. If you have questions or concerns, please reach out to your advisers to further discuss this change.

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