

Portland State University Faculty Senate Motion

Extend Emergency P/NP Guidelines for Spring 2021

Background, rationale, and preliminary discussions

Senate approved emergency Pass/ No-Pass guidelines in April 2020 in response to disruption caused by the COVID pandemic. The emergency guidelines have been in place for Spring 2020, Summer 2020, and Fall 2020. Senate voted in October to extend the guidelines through Winter 2021 as well.

Considerable debate about the guidelines has occurred in Senate as well as among administration and students. Arguments in favor of maintaining the emergency guidelines: students have suffered multiple disruptions to their education in the recent past, including social and economic issues related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, wildfires and toxic smoke in Oregon, unrest related to ongoing protests against racism and discrimination, and a bitterly contested presidential election. Many students have lost jobs and are home-schooling their children. Relaxed P/NP standards allow students flexibility to continue their education despite the adversity they face.

Arguments against maintaining the emergency guidelines: Some programs (e.g., Architecture, Engineering) require a higher level of competence than a mere 'pass' for courses. Some professional schools face accreditation issues due to the current P/NP options. The College of Education has licensure issues to consider; P/NP won't help a student toward a teaching license. Students who need to repeat courses find (sometimes to their surprise) that the P/NP course will not erase the earlier D/F grade. Advisors encounter a great burden, especially when students need coursework from a wide range of areas for their degrees, and one of the courses may be offered P/NP but won't count in the other spot if taken P/NP. More generally, if, within the COVID guidelines, students take pre-requisite courses with minimum effort, they may in the future find that they are not prepared for subsequent higher-level courses. Students can now graduate with Latin Honors having taken very few courses for a letter grade. Although graduate and professional schools will understand the uniqueness of 2020 when evaluating transcripts, the continued long-term extension of the emergency P/NP guidelines erodes the quality of a PSU degree.

Most other institutions have returned to their pre-COVID guidelines and handle requests for leniency through their usual appeals processes.

The pre-COVID guidelines are the product of extensive thought and planning and went through the curricular process. The emergency guidelines arose quickly during a time of adversity. If the Senate wishes to reconsider the P/NP requirements permanently, it should do so in a holistic fashion to address the detriments noted above, and a separate motion can be brought forward to initiate that process.

Motion presented by the Faculty Senate Steering Committee

The Senate moves to extend the emergency Pass/ No-Pass Guidelines instituted in Spring 2020 through the end of Spring term 2021.

Presented to the Senate on December 7, 2020

Approved/ Denied by the Senate on _____