Proposal to Create an Opportunity for Students to Count Some Courses Graded with a P in Pass/No Pass Grading Basis Toward Foundational Disciplines

To: Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences Faculty

From: Weinberg College Curricular Policies Committee

The Weinberg College Curricular Policies Committee submits the following proposal to the Weinberg College faculty for approval in Fall 2023, when the new Weinberg College Degree Requirements will launch, including the new Foundational Disciplines.

Our current first-year students are the first of four cohorts (at least) who will come to Northwestern having had a high school experience disrupted by the pandemic. As we know, this disruption was more extreme and traumatic for our students who come from under-resourced high schools; Already this year we have data from fall 2021 and winter 2022 showing that these students have earned more Ds and Fs than the general population and dropped more courses.

We have evidence from the quarters where students only earned Pass/No Pass (Spring 2020) and from how the CR/NC option was used last year that this kind of flexibility really benefits students who are struggling.

We propose the following modest change to the Weinberg College Pass/No Pass policy as one of several tools we can use to build up resilience and to help all students make progress toward their degree every quarter, most especially those most vulnerable to the educational effects of the pandemic.

A change in the university’s Pass/No Pass deadline makes this a useful tool for resilience throughout a quarter:

The deadline to switch to Pass/No pass already has been moved to later in the term, encouraging greater use of that option as a student manages their quarter. This was a pandemic mitigation that will be a permanent change, making the Pass/No Pass option a more useful tool for successful completion of a quarter.

The proposed modest change creates an opportunity for students to count some courses in which they received a Pass toward the Foundational Disciplines requirement. This will help keep students on track in three scenarios:

A student is doing poorly but stays in the class to earn a D (the minimum grade needed to earn a Foundational Discipline credit for the course) instead of dropping or withdrawing. The student
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Attachment 2

earns a P, fulfills the Foundational Discipline, and is spared the significant harm a D does to the GPA.

A student is doing poorly, doesn’t drop or withdraw, and earns an F. The student earns an N and is spared the huge harm an F does to the GPA.

Of course, this new option continues to enable students to push out of their comfort zones in choosing courses that fulfill the requirement because toward the end of the quarter they can flip to a P if they think they are not doing well enough.

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Current Weinberg College policy regarding how grades of P may count in a Weinberg degree:

No more than 1 course a quarter and 6 courses of the 45 required to graduate may be taken under the P/N option. Courses used to satisfy first-year seminar, distribution, foreign language, major, or minor requirements may not be taken P/N. No more than one-fifth of the total courses taken at Northwestern and offered for graduation may have grades of P or D.

Proposed policy:

Up to two units of Northwestern credit may be applied towards Foundational Discipline requirements with a grade of Pass. This is parallel to the way in which AP credit and Study Abroad credit may count.

Current restraints on grades of Pass remaining in place:

- Courses used to satisfy first-year seminars, advanced expression, language requirement, overlays, major, or minor requirements may not be taken P/N.
- Students may use a maximum of two grades of P toward Foundational Disciplines.
- Students must fulfill one of the two Foundational Discipline requirements in each of the six areas with a course taken at Northwestern for a quality grade. This means that for each area, students may use up to one AP credit, Study Abroad credit, or grade of Pass.
- Students admitted as transfer students may apply appropriate coursework taken at prior institutions towards foundational disciplines and may fulfill a foundational discipline area entirely with transferred units or a combination of a transfer unit and a unit taken at Northwestern for a quality grade, grade of P, AP credit, or study abroad unit (subject to the limitations for each of these categories). Students admitted as first-year students may not apply post-matriculation non-study abroad transfer credit toward foundational disciplines.
- A student may take only one course per quarter as Pass/No Pass.
- No more than six grades of P may count toward the 45 courses required for a Weinberg degree.
• No more than one-fifth of the total courses taken at North-western and offered for graduation may have grades of P or D.
• Faculty and departments maintain control over the grading type for a course in CAESAR: Quality grades (A-F only) or Student Option (Pass/No Pass permitted).

Respectfully submitted,

Curricular Policies Committee

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