

Text from the email sent on behalf of the Senate Council on March 14, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

The Senate Council met for four hours in a special session on Friday, March 13 to discuss academic policy matters related to our current unprecedented situation. We applaud UK's efforts to help us all help our students to continue their education with as little disruption as possible. We all need to take necessary precautions to stay healthy, while working hard to maintain student success, academic freedom and the well-being of all members of our university community.

While also ensuring the integrity of the education we provide to our students, the Senate Council strongly urges faculty to be flexible. We are expecting students to continue with their education in the face of an unsettling worldwide event, and we would like to support their continued academic endeavors as much as possible.

The Senate Council understands that department chairs and faculties of record have had to quickly modify delivery methods for courses and may have to modify program requirements, in particular with regard to students planning to graduate in May or August of this year. These delivery modality and program changes are **temporary**. When this urgent situation has passed, department chairs and faculties of record must return to normal course delivery methods and program requirements.

For your information, here is a list of the actions and policy alterations identified by the Senate Council in the March 13 meeting. Each item is explained in detail further down in this email.

1. **Senate related information** will be available on the [University Senate website](#), and through email communication, as necessary.
2. The last date to **withdraw from a course** governed by the University Calendar has been moved to **the last day of classes for the Spring 2020 semester (currently 11:59 pm on May 1, 2020 EDT)**.
3. The last date to **elect Pass/Fail status** for an undergraduate course has been moved to **the last day of classes for Spring 2020 semester (currently 11:59 pm on May 1, 2020 EDT)**. Furthermore, for the Spring 2020 semester, freshmen and those students on academic probation will be permitted to elect Pass/Fail status for a course. No course for which a student elects Pass/Fail status in the Spring 2020 semester will count against the maximum of four courses, which may typically be taken by a student during their undergraduate career at UK.
4. Faculty will need to **change their syllabi** to accommodate this unprecedented situation. Faculty must communicate to their students directly, and in as timely a manner as possible, any changes they make. Syllabi may only be changed prospectively – grades and course requirements that have already occurred may not be changed.
5. The current Senate Rule regarding **excused absences**, which gives faculty significant leeway to determine what counts as “excused” remains in place. The Senate Council urges faculty to use compassion and common sense as they evaluate absences in this unprecedented situation.

6. Our accrediting body has indicated **we may not permit graduation with fewer than the minimum number of credit hours** for a degree. Faculty are urged to use their existing authority to assist graduating students to the extent of their ability.
7. The **Senate Council will meet** during its regular meeting times **via Zoom** through April 3. Zoom information will be posted on the Senate website.

These were the items explicitly discussed and voted on in yesterday's meeting. We know many additional questions and unanticipated situations will arise in the coming weeks. Some of these items apply primarily or only to undergraduate students (and not graduate or professional students), or to programs that follow the University Calendar (and not to the Colleges of Dentistry, Law, Medicine, or Pharmacy). The Senate Council encourages faculty in those programs to reach out with any questions about what policies apply to them. Please contact the Senate Council office with any questions, and we will work hard to address them quickly.

Thank you very much for all you do for our campus community and for your dedication in the face of this unprecedented emergency. Please take care of yourselves and your loved ones.

Sincerely,

Senate Council:
Jennifer Bird-Pollan, Chair
DeShana Collett, Vice-Chair
Francisco Andrade
Lee Blonder
Gail Brion
Susan Cantrell
Richard Charnigo
Aaron Cramer
Bob Grossman
Gregg Hall
Michael Hamilton
Conner Richardson
Bilal Shaikh
Allison Soult
Leslie Vincent

Detailed explanations of the rules and policies identified in the above numbered list:

- We recognize that many of the questions answered in this email pertain to undergraduate students. We also recognize the need to address concerns regarding graduate and professional students. If you have concerns about problems that graduate and professional students may face, please let the Senate Council Office know. The Senate Council will be deliberating on these issues in the coming days and weeks.

- Individuals with questions about how to maintain research projects and other research-related matters, please contact [Vice President for Research Lisa Cassis](#).
- Please note that with the exception of one abstention for one vote, all of the final votes taken by the Senate Council on Friday, March 13, were unanimous, after lengthy and detailed discussions. Also participating in Friday's meeting were representatives of the Council of Associate Deans of Undergraduate Education, the office of the Academic Ombud, the Registrar's office, the Senate Committee on Distance Learning and e-Learning, UK Online, CELT, the Office of Strategic Planning and Institutional Effectiveness (OSPIE) and Student and Academic Life. Their input was invaluable as we discussed the best path forward, and what intended and unintended consequences could result from the Senate Council's actions.

1. HOW WILL YOU SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT SENATE-RELATED ACTIVITIES AND DECISIONS?

We will be developing mechanisms to share this information as broadly and on as many platforms as are feasible. The exact format of the platforms is yet to be determined – many areas on campus are providing resources and we want to ensure we do not duplicate work done by others.

For now, you are welcome to share this information with staff and faculty colleagues. I will be working with SGA President Michael Hamilton in the coming days to draft a communication to students, which will be sent to students upon their return from Spring Break.

2. IF A STUDENT DOES NOT WANT TO FINISH A COURSE, WILL THEY BE ABLE TO WITHDRAW?

Yes. The Senate Council has approved a change to the University Academic Calendar so that the last day to withdraw from a class in the Spring 2020 semester will now be the last day of class, currently scheduled for May 1, 2020, at 11:59 pm EDT.

A number of factors contributed to this decision to extend the deadline. Students may encounter difficulties throughout the semester as a result of this unprecedented situation. In addition, many students who do not return to campus during the two weeks of alternate delivery may not have access to reliable internet or the physical hardware that would be necessary to complete their studies remotely. Some students may struggle to concentrate on their studies even if the hardware and signal are available. We have decided to give students as much flexibility as possible and remove as much anxiety as possible regarding concerns that extenuating circumstances will negatively affect their academic performance.

This decision applies to students in programs that follow the University Calendar. The Colleges of Dentistry, Law, Medicine, and Pharmacy, which operate under their own calendars, may wish to consider taking similar actions. Requests for calendar changes should be sent to the Senate Council office.

3. WILL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS BE ALLOWED TO CHANGE THEIR GRADING OPTION FROM A LETTER GRADE TO A PASS/FAIL (P/F) OPTION?

Yes. The Senate Council voted to allow any undergraduate student enrolled in the Spring 2020 semester to change their grading option from a letter grade to P/F as long as the change is made by May 1, 2020, at 11:59 pm EDT.

Although the normal deadline to change a course's grading option from a letter grade to P/F has already passed, the Senate Council was again concerned that the unusual circumstances of this semester could significantly affect a student's performance in a course. Extending this deadline gives undergraduate students a significant window in which to decide whether or not to elect P/F status.

3.A ARE ALL OF THE RULES REGARDING P/F STATUS STILL IN EFFECT?

Some are and some are not. Aside from the exceptions and explicit guidance listed below, the rules regarding P/F courses (found in Senate Rule 5.1.4) remain intact.

- a. Primarily for undergraduate students who are expected to graduate in May or August 2020, Directors of Undergraduate Studies (DUSs) and associate deans are encouraged to use the discretion already afforded to them under their college rules to consider allowing a course taken on a P/F basis to count towards a major requirement or a college requirement.

The Senate Council strongly recommends that DUSs and associate deans consult with the faculties of record for the relevant degree program prior to making these decisions.

- b. For Spring 2020, the Senate Council voted to waive the rule that prohibits freshmen from taking P/F classes. This means that, for Spring 2020, freshmen may utilize the P/F grading option.
- c. For Spring 2020, the Senate Council voted to waive the restriction that prohibits students on academic probation from taking P/F classes. This means that, for Spring 2020, students on academic probation may utilize the P/F grading option.
- d. Regarding the number of P/F courses a student can take during their undergraduate career, the Senate Council voted not to count any course taken with a P/F grading option during the Spring 2020 semester towards the maximum of four courses that students are usually permitted to take during their academic career at UK. This means that any P/F courses taken in Spring 2020 will not count towards the total undergraduate maximum of four.

4. CAN FACULTY CHANGE THEIR SYLLABI IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SEMESTER TO ACCOMMODATE ISSUES THAT ARISE?

Yes, within reason.

All faculty are authorized to change syllabi in response to the extraordinary situation we are facing this semester. However, if any changes are made, they must be communicated to students as soon as possible. In addition, changes can only be made moving forward, and may not affect portions of the semester or grades that have already been completed.

5. HAS THE DEFINITION OF AN "EXCUSED ABSENCE" CHANGED?

No. The current Senate Rules give Instructors of Record great discretion with regard to what they may accept as an excuse. We strongly encourage faculty to consider the severity of this unprecedented situation and remain flexible with student excuses. As long as courses remain in distance delivery format, students may have difficulty contacting their Instructors, because of problems with hardware, software, cell signals, or internet. Furthermore, because current medical guidance indicates that individuals who suspect they may be ill should call before going in person to seek medical assistance, we urge faculty to consider accepting [Tier 1 level excuses](#), even in courses in which documentation indicating a student has been seen by a medical provider is typically required.

6. WILL STUDENTS BE ALLOWED TO GRADUATE WITH FEWER THAN THE CURRENT MINIMUM NUMBER OF REQUIRED CREDIT HOURS?

No. Guidance from our accrediting body (SACSCOC) has made clear that minimum credit hour requirements continue to apply.

We understand that some students were enrolled in Spring Break courses that have now been cancelled. If those students expected to graduate in May or August 2020, they should seek out the individuals on campus who are already authorized to approve course substitutions for students. **Prior to officially approving a substitution, it will be very important to run a degree audit in myGPS to ensure that the outcome the student is seeking has been achieved.**

There are generally three categories of requirements that undergraduate students must complete – (1) requirements for their major, (2) requirements for their college (if any), and (2) UK Core requirements. Requirements for graduate and professional students will depend on their program.

- (1) Directors of undergraduate studies (DUSs) and graduate studies (DGSs) are typically empowered by their faculties of record to approve substitutions for major requirements on a case-by-case basis and we encourage these individuals to consider carefully what substitutions will be acceptable, while ensuring the integrity of the degree remains intact. (If your unit does not delegate this authority to a DGS/DUS, then the individual who normally is authorized to make these decisions is also empowered to make substitutions in this instance.)
- (2) Typically a college's dean or associate dean is similarly empowered the by the college's faculty body to approve course substitutions to help students meet college-level requirements. As with individuals in the DUS and DGS roles, deans' offices are encouraged to consider carefully which substitutions are acceptable.
- (3) The Senate Council briefly discussed the anticipated need for substitutions for UK Core courses and will seek input from the UK Core Committee regarding these decisions.

The Senate Council urges faculty, at this time, to limit these substitutions to students who may not be able to graduate in May or August if a substitution is not made.

7. WILL THE SENATE COUNCIL CONTINUE TO MEET THROUGH APRIL 3?

Yes. We expect to hold weekly Senate Council meetings; members and guests will be able to participate via Zoom. Zoom information for these meetings will be available on the University Senate website. As the current plan contemplates resuming normal classroom activities beginning April 6, we currently plan

to resume normal Senate Council meetings beginning on that date. Should that information change, we will prepare alternate Senate and Senate Council plans.

Jennifer Bird-Pollan
Senate Council Chair
Robert G. Lawson Professor of Law
University of Kentucky
jbirdpollan@uky.edu
Senate Council Office: 859.218.4014
College of Law Office: 859.257.3325