

# Graduate Grading Method Options for Spring 2020

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Dear Graduate Students, Faculty, and Staff,

As we continue to pull together as a community to work through the uncertainty and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we remain unwavering and steadfast in our commitment to student academic success. We recognize current circumstances, including the shift to a remote and online learning environment, may present challenges. We are committed to delivering continuous and uninterrupted academic support, including the GSA writing advisor, PROMISE Success Seminars, and dissertation completion coaching, to ensure every student has the opportunity to be successful. In addition, to offer students maximum support and flexibility, we have made several adjustments to our Spring 2020 academic and enrollment policies, which are described below. **Most importantly, we have collaborated with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, Graduate Council, and graduate student leaders to make these important policy adjustments.**

The academic and enrollment policies detailed below will allow graduate students the opportunity to make the most informed decisions possible regarding their coursework, based on their individual circumstances, to ensure continued academic progress and degree completion. We hope that this flexibility will enable students to adjust to their new academic environment and focus on doing well in their coursework to successfully complete the Spring 2020 semester without the need to withdraw.

## **Last Day to Request Grading Method Change from Regular to Pass/Fail (P/F): Requests accepted through June 10**

Graduate students currently enrolled in a course under the regular grading method (A, B, C, D, or F, including +/- options) may request to have the grading method changed to Pass/Fail (P/F) by submitting a request to the Graduate School that is approved by both their faculty advisor and graduate program director (GPD). **Note:** Students are strongly encouraged to meet with their faculty advisor and GPD to discuss the various implications associated with changing the grading method to the Pass/Fail option, such as applicability to degree and accreditation requirements. Students are also encouraged to wait until after May 27, when Spring 2020 final grades are posted, before submitting a request to change the grading method to the Pass/Fail option.

## **Last Day to Withdraw from an Individual Course(s): Deadline changed from April 6 to June 10**

Students may withdraw from an individual course(s) via *myUMBC* self-service through May 12. After this date and through June 10, students may submit an [RT Help Ticket](#) to the Registrar's Office and the withdrawal will be processed administratively. **Note:** Students are strongly encouraged to confer with their faculty advisor and GPD before withdrawing from an individual course(s) to ensure they have exhausted all other options to successfully complete the semester. Students who are receiving financial aid or scholarships should also contact their [financial aid counselor](#) to determine any impact a "W" grade may have on their future financial aid. Students are also encouraged to wait until after May 27, when Spring 2020 final grades are posted, before making the decision to withdraw from an individual course(s).

### **Last Day for Complete Semester Withdrawals (Grade of “W”): Deadline changed from May 12 to June 10**

Students may withdraw from the entire semester via *myUMBC* self-service through May 12. After this date and through June 10, students may submit an [RT Help Ticket](#) to the Registrar’s Office and the semester withdrawal will be processed administratively. **Note:** Students are strongly encouraged to confer with their faculty advisor and GPD before withdrawing from the entire semester to ensure they have exhausted all other options to successfully complete the semester. Students who are receiving financial aid or scholarships should also contact their [financial aid counselor](#) to determine any impact a “W” grade may have on their future financial aid. Students are also encouraged to wait until after May 27, when Spring 2020 final grades are posted, before making the decision to withdraw from the entire semester.

**Additional Policy Options:** As students are seeking options for Spring 2020, we want to remind you of the following additional academic and enrollment policy options:

- **Incomplete (I) Grade Option:** If a student is passing a course but is unable to complete the coursework for reasons beyond the student’s control, the student may request to be granted an Incomplete grade. A grade of “I” may be granted at the discretion of the course instructor. Students should have a written agreement with the instructor that specifies the work remaining in the course and the timeline for completion. More information regarding the Incomplete grade option is available [here](#).
- **Requests for an Exception to Enrollment:** In rare and exceptional cases, students may submit a [Request for an Exception to Enrollment](#) for the last day to drop course(s), last day for term withdrawal, and last day to cancel enrollment.
- **Requests for an Exception to other Academic Policies:** Graduate students who are in need of an exception to other academic policies may submit a request to the Associate Dean of the Graduate School for consideration of the following: late-add petitions, petitions to waive graduation requirements, and petitions to mark previous course grades as non-applicable.

We have carefully weighed these adjustments to the academic and enrollment policies for Spring 2020 in order to ensure our graduate students are empowered to make the best decisions possible regarding their academic options and have every opportunity to be successful in their coursework. We realize that it is completely unprecedented for students to make decisions about course withdrawal or P/F grading *after* their final grade for the course is posted, but we believe these are extraordinary circumstances. Again, students are encouraged to confer with their faculty advisor and GPD to discuss options. If additional support is needed, or if students are unsure who to contact, the Graduate School is available to assist you at [gradprogressions@umbc.edu](mailto:gradprogressions@umbc.edu).

### **Special Instructions for Conduct of Master’s Thesis and Ph.D. Dissertation Defenses During the UMBC COVID-19 Closure**

This is a **REVISED** version of guidance that the Graduate School issued on March 16, 2020. While UMBC is in the status of mandatory remote operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, **the Graduate School authorizes that all final examination defenses for Master’s theses and Ph.D.**

**dissertations may take place remotely using synchronous electronic access technology.** In other words, students will be allowed to conduct fully virtual defenses for all committee members without express approval of the Associate Dean.

The Graduate School's Policy on Remote Participation of Committee Members requires that the student and all committee members must participate using a *synchronous* form of communication – meaning that the student and all committee members can see and hear each other. The student must also ensure that each remote participant has access to their thesis or dissertation and their presentation.

The Graduate School is making available **DocuSign forms for the Certification of Readiness to Defend forms for Master's and Ph.D. students.** These forms *must* be submitted no later than two weeks prior to the scheduled defense. *It is important to note that the student must initiate the form by filling out the needed information, including the names of all committee members.* Once this is done, the form will be sent to the committee signatories. After the last committee member signs the form, the form will be automatically routed to the Graduate School for processing. The DocuSign forms are available [here](#).

Following receipt of the completed DocuSign forms, the Graduate School will send a signable electronic (.pdf) version of the Dean's Representative packet to the Dean's Representative and the Graduate Program Coordinator. We are using Adobe Sign, which does not require special software or setup by the committee members. At the end of the examination, the Dean's Representative will complete the outcome section of the Exam Report and electronically sign the document. The Exam Report will automatically be sent by email to each committee member listed on the document. After all committee members have signed the Exam Report, it will automatically be routed to Patricia Windborn (Master's) or Nicole Mooney (Ph.D.). All committee members will receive a copy of the signed Exam Report as well. *There is no need to email the report or to send a paper copy to the Graduate School.*

Questions regarding defenses can be directed to Jeffrey Halverson, Associate Dean, at [jeffhalv@umbc.edu](mailto:jeffhalv@umbc.edu).

Regards,

*Philip Rous, Provost*

*Janet Rutledge, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School*