Pass/Fail

Proposal from EPC, 7 February 2018

EPC proposes to allow students to change a class from graded to pass/fail at any time up to week 10 of the semester. That is, we propose to make the pass/fail date the same for all undergraduates. Currently, first-years may change to pass/fail as late as week 10, but other undergraduates must decide by week 5 (same as the drop–without–record date). As this rule is in the Bulletin, a faculty vote is required.

Existing Bulletin language (p. 17):

All decisions with respect to the pass-fail option must be made within the first five weeks of any term for sophomores, juniors, and seniors, and within the first ten weeks of any term for first-year students. After five weeks (ten weeks for first-year students), the student must complete a course under the grading system then in force or withdraw from the course.

Proposed new language:

All decisions with respect to the pass-fail option must be made within the first ten weeks of any term. After ten weeks, the student must complete a course under the grading system then in force or withdraw from the course.

Rationale:

EPC discussed this at some length, and the final vote was not unanimous.

We wondered whether the policy might encourage students to try to manipulate their GPAs, as we've all seen students who opt for pass/fail rather than getting a bad grade — and we've all seen students for whom "bad grade" means a B+. As one committee member put it, we've set up a system in which GPAs seem to matter a great deal, but then "we cuss students out if they care about it." Some members feared that the present proposal, and students' interest in higher grades, might eventually lead to a policy like Brown's, in which if you get a grade lower than C-, the course simply disappears from your transcript as if you'd never attempted it. But we rejected this idea: that could increase time to graduation, since those Ds would no longer carry credit. And what about making the entire first semester pass/fail, as for example MIT does? This is great for encouraging students to take risks, less useful for students who want to transfer, or who might be applying to graduate programs.

It was also suggested that week 5 is already a generous deadline; students should realize almost immediately whether a course is going to be hard. We eventually decided, though, that, in many courses, the breakthrough may come in week 7 or 8, as a student learns how to learn in the way the course requires, and learns how to manage the semester's workload. If we can keep the students in class until then, they are likely to benefit, even if they do decide to choose pass/fail.

Finally, a recent change to government policy means international students are required not merely to attempt a minimum full-time load (3 Tufts Credits or 12 SHUs), but to be enrolled in those classes through the whole semester. Giving them more time to choose pass/fail might help them.

On balance, then, EPC passed the proposal.

Note that we do not intend to change the rules about which courses, or how many courses, may be taken pass/fail.
EPC proposes to translate one last line of the *Bulletin* into semester-hour terms: the number of summer classes a matriculated undergraduate may transfer from another school. As this rule is in the *Bulletin*, a faculty vote is required.

Existing *Bulletin* language (p. 35):

Students attending summer schools (other than Tufts Summer Session) are normally allowed to transfer no more than three credits earned in one summer, nor more than a cumulative total of five credits toward a Tufts degree.

Proposed new language:

Students attending summer schools (other than Tufts Summer Session) are normally allowed to transfer no more than 12 semester hours earned in one summer, nor more than a cumulative total of 20 semester hours toward a Tufts degree.

Rationale:

This is just a translation of the existing rule. Since most courses at most schools, like most of our own courses, are either 3 or 4 SHUs, three courses at another school will generally be between 9 and 12 SHUs, and five will be between 15 and 20. This rule should have been fixed along with the rest of the *Bulletin* last year, but it was inadvertently omitted.