

## Pass/Fail Grading Student FAQ for J-Term and Spring 2021

- **Why does my Grade Point Average (GPA) matter?** GPA is a commonly used way to summarize your college academic performance in a single number. Internally, it affects your academic standing (e.g., whether or not you are on Academic Probation), your ability to graduate, your eligibility for the Dean's List and other academic honors, and your eligibility for the President's Scholarship. Externally, GPA is a very important metric by which graduate schools, medical schools, law schools, and other postgraduate or professional programs evaluate your application.
- **Can I still get letter grades?** Yes! Letter grades are the default, and pass/fail grades are optional except in courses that were already designated pass/fail.
- **What is a "pass" grade?** Faculty will assign letter grades to students in all courses that were not originally designated pass/fail. Any student with a D or higher who has requested pass/fail grades for that course will be assigned a "P" for Pass by the Registrar, which is the grade that will ultimately be recorded on the student's transcript.
- **Can I take any course pass/fail?** Almost any course. You will be advised by the Nursing and Athletic Training programs that, due to external accreditation requirements, you should not take certain courses pass/fail, including some prerequisite courses. If you have questions about whether you can take a particular course for a pass/fail grade and still remain eligible for Nursing or Athletic Training, check with your academic advisor and/or the director of the program. For example, if you are a first-year student considering a Nursing major, you should reach out to Nursing to ask if there are prerequisite courses you should definitely take for a letter grade instead of a pass/fail.
- **If I want a pass/fail grade in one course, do I need to take all my courses pass/fail in that term?** No. You may request pass/fail grades for one course, for four courses or anywhere in between. A pass/fail grade request for one course does not affect your other courses.
- **Does a pass grade still meet my major, minor, and Gen Ed requirements?** With the exception noted above (for Nursing and Athletic Training), a pass grade will meet all requirements, including for majors, minors, and general education courses. Since some programs/majors ordinarily require a particular letter grade in courses to advance to the next course in the sequence, it may be more or less advisable to request a Pass/Fail grade in certain courses. For example, for some courses, you may advance in the major with a "Pass" but not with a "D." On the other hand, some programs may advise you that it is not a good idea to take a "Pass" and advance to the next course if your "Pass" grade would have been a very low grade. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that you reach out to your academic advisor and/or the relevant program director or department chair with questions about whether to request Pass/Fail grades in particular courses.

- **When do I need to decide whether or not to request pass/fail grades for a course?** For J-Term 2021, students need to request pass/fail grades by 4:00 pm on the final day of classes (Tuesday, January 26, 2021). For Spring 2021, students need to request pass/fail grades by 4:00 pm on the final day of classes (Thursday, May 6, 2021).
- **What if I change my mind?** You can change your mind about pass/fail vs. letter grades up until 4:00 pm on the final day of classes (Tuesday, January 26, 2021 for J-Term and Thursday, May 6, for Spring 2021). If you do change your mind before the deadline, simply submit a new form. The most recent form will be the **only** one considered valid by the Registrar, **so be sure to list any and all courses for which you are requesting pass/fail grades.** For example, if you submit a form to take CHE-141 for a letter grade on May 1, then submit a form to take BIO-102 for a letter grade on May 6, the May 6th form will be the document that stands in the College records. If you would like CHE-141 to maintain a letter grade, then the May 6th submission should contain both the listing of CHE-141 and BIO-102. If you decide after you submit a request that you don't want any grades listed as pass/fail, you should submit a new form with no courses listed.
- **How does pass/fail impact my grade point average?** Your GPA is a simple average of all the grades you've received (with the exception of repeated courses, which work a little differently), where letter grades are assigned the following number values:

| Letter Grade | Number Value |
|--------------|--------------|
| A            | 4.0          |
| A-           | 3.66         |
| B+           | 3.33         |
| B            | 3.0          |
| B-           | 2.66         |
| C+           | 2.33         |
| C            | 2.0          |
| C-           | 1.66         |
| D+           | 1.33         |
| D            | 1.0          |
| F            | 0            |

So, a student who has taken four classes and received As in each of them would have a GPA of 4.0. A student who has received two As, a B, and a C would have a GPA of 3.25  $([4.0 + 4.0 + 3.0 + 2.0] / 4)$ .

If you fail a course, your GPA is negatively affected because a zero is entered into the average of all your grades, bringing the average down. This happens with a failed course whether you took it for a letter or pass/fail. In other words, taking a course pass/fail will negatively impact your GPA if you fail the course. However, a pass grade appears on your transcript but is not figured into your grade point average at all.

For example, Student X has a GPA of 2.7 coming into the Spring 2021 semester. If Student X receives all “Pass” grades in Spring 2021, their GPA would remain at 2.7. Whether or not this benefits Student X’s GPA depends on what letter grades Student X would have received if they hadn’t opted for Pass/Fail grades. If Student X failed one course (whether they requested a Pass/Fail grade in that course or not) and received Pass grades in three other courses, their GPA would decrease. (Since GPA is an average, the amount of decrease depends on how many courses Student X has taken altogether). If Student X requests “Pass” grades in courses where their letter grades were higher than their current GPA (like two A’s and two B’s), their GPA will stay at 2.7 when it could have increased by taking the letter grades.

- **What are some reasons to opt for a pass/fail grade instead of a letter grade?** The pass/fail grade option is offered to help give students options for protecting their academic record in a time of unprecedented stress, hardship, and exacerbated inequities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If you have struggled to perform adequately in a course because of fallout from the pandemic and are receiving a lower grade (for example, a D or C-), you may want to consider requesting a pass/fail grade in that course to protect your grade point average. We strongly recommend reaching out to your academic advisor for guidance on how to decide whether or not to take a course pass/fail.
- **Why not just take everything pass/fail?** While your grade point average is important, there are many additional reasons you may not want to take courses pass/fail. Here are some of them:
  - Consider what motivates you best in making your decisions. You may find yourself more motivated to do your best work in a course if you decide early for yourself that you will take a letter grade.
  - Tuition benefits from the Veterans Administration (VA) may not apply to courses taken pass/fail. Students who receive these benefits and have questions about pass/fail should reach out to the Financial Aid office for assistance.
  - Some external (non-Gustavus) scholarships or other forms of financial aid may have restrictions on taking courses pass/fail. Students should contact the Financial Aid Office for clarification on their financial aid restrictions.
  - If you are trying to raise your GPA in order to graduate, be removed from Academic Probation, or gain admission to a competitive program like Nursing, Athletic Training, or Education, you should be cautious about taking pass grades as they will not improve your GPA.
  - Some graduate or professional programs require that some undergraduate courses be taken for a letter grade, and we cannot be certain how any graduate programs will perceive ongoing pass/fail grades on your transcript. While pass/fail grading options were extremely common across higher education

institutions in Spring 2020 (the first semester affected by COVID-19), far fewer institutions appear to be offering this option as the pandemic proceeds. It is advisable to talk with your academic advisor and/or the directors of graduate programs about the effect of continuing pass grades on your transcript after Spring 2020.

- **Can I take a course pass/fail if I'm repeating it?** Yes. A pass grade will replace a previous F in the course. However, if you passed the course before with a letter but are taking it again in hopes of improving your grade, it is advisable to take the course for a letter grade and try to get a higher grade than you received the first time.
- **Will my professors know if I requested a pass/fail grade in their course?** No, your professors will not be able to see who requested pass/fail grades before final grades are submitted. Professors should not ask you this question, and if they do, you should not feel obligated to answer. If a professor happens to have access to your transcript (for example, a professor in your major), they will eventually be able to see if a pass grade or a letter grade shows up on your transcript.
- **Does my GPA affect my Gustavus scholarships?** Only the President's Scholarship is affected by GPA. It requires a 3.25 cumulative GPA at the start of the junior year. If a student fails to meet this GPA requirement, the President's Scholarship will be replaced with the highest Dean's Scholarship that would have been awarded to them. Students should make sure they are making Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) as defined by the Financial Aid Office.
- **Where/how can I request a pass/fail grade for my courses?** [This link](#) will take you to the pass/fail grade request form. Please note that the link is the same for J-Term and for Spring 2021, so requests for Spring 2021 need to be made after J-Term has ended.