

Resolution on Establishing College-wide Limits to the Use of Credit/No Credit Toward Undergraduate Degree Completion

Introduction

In the 2020-21 Academic Year (AY), the Executive Committee (EC) received feedback from faculty who requested that the Academic Policies and Practices Committee (APPC) deliberate about drafting a resolution to establish a college-wide policy on the use of the Credit/No Credit (CR/NC) grading system. In spring 2021, APPC presented a resolution, which was rejected by the Faculty Senate. In the subsequent months, APPC discussed the concerns raised by faculty and staff. After discussing the issue amongst ourselves, as well as with colleagues in our departments, it seemed that many faculty supported a college-wide limitation on the use of CR/NC, even though it was not voiced in Faculty Senate. In the 2021-2022 AY, APPC, with support from the EC, sent out a brief survey to Faculty Senators about the views of their respective departments concerning the amount of credits earned from the CR/NC option they thought was appropriate to allow toward students' degree completion. Nine senators responded to the survey, the majority (six) of whom indicated that 16 credits (or four courses) was an appropriate number. (One respondent indicated that 12 was a better number; and two recommended a number higher than 16. Most also indicated that the current policy deadline of 7 weeks was an appropriate period of time in which students may select the CR/NC option.)

During the presentation of the first draft of the resolution to the Faculty Senate, it was noted by one senator that the 16 credit option was "arbitrary." However, any number of credits chosen could be labeled "arbitrary," as there is no algorithm used to arrive at an acceptable number. This number was decided upon once again after thorough discussion as well as review of the policies of other SUNY colleges (see below). Essentially, it was determined, through the democratic methods available to us, that limiting the use of CR/NC to three courses was too restrictive, but that allowing more than 16—except in cases in which the CR/NC option is used to grade students in courses required for a major—was not restrictive enough, especially considering that most other SUNY colleges that have policies restricting the use of CR/NC limit this option to four courses. Moreover, because general education requirements, proficiency requirements, and all program required courses in most departments do not allow the use of CR/NC to complete those requirements, we believe the policy proposed here is quite reasonable. Of particular concern to APPC is the potential problem that could arise for students who select the CR/NC option for several courses during their undergraduate studies, decide in their senior year that they wanted to pursue graduate school, and then have difficulty getting accepted into good programs due to the large amounts of "CR" grades on their transcript. As stated in our first presentation to the Faculty Senate, moreover, we (and many other faculty we have spoken with) believe that excessive use of the CR/NC option may hinder students from developing the intellectual resiliency skills they will need to succeed in their professional endeavors post-graduation (though this is not an issue unique to OW).

For these reasons, in addition to others, we offer the following resolution to establish restrictions on the use of CR/NC college-wide:

The resolution

Whereas there is currently no specified limit on the number of Credit/No Credit (CR/NC) courses that can be used toward students' undergraduate degrees at SUNY College at Old Westbury (OW); and

Whereas other SUNY-affiliated colleges have set limits to the number of credits that can be fulfilled by a CR/NC option, typically allowing no more than four courses for which this option is selected to be counted towards an undergraduate degree,¹ and limiting this option to one course per semester²; and

Whereas other SUNY colleges emphasize that the CR/NC grading option is intended to “encourage juniors and seniors to enroll in challenging courses outside their major or minor, adding breadth to their academic work while not incurring the penalty of a low grade”³; and,

Whereas providing a (limited) degree of academic flexibility to students to help them overcome barriers to degree completion is consistent with the social justice mission of the college, considering OW students disproportionately face socio-structural challenges; and

Whereas it is also imperative that OW maintains high academic standards to facilitate the intellectual and professional growth of its students and prepare them for the next stage of their academic or professional lives—also consistent with its social justice mission; and

Whereas it is imperative that OW further develops its reputation as an academically rigorous institution; and

Whereas excessive use of the CR/NC option may impede the ability of professional staff to evaluate the relative progress made by students on academic probation or returning from suspension; and

Whereas excessive use of the CR/NC option may undermine students' likelihood of enrolling into good post-graduate programs later on⁴; and

Whereas a small number of undergraduate programs contain one required course in which students are evaluated using a CR/NC grading system; and

¹ For example, see the policies of SUNY at New Paltz (https://www.newpaltz.edu/ugc/policies/policies_su.html); and SUNY at Cortland (<https://www2.cortland.edu/offices/srrs/forms-and-pdfs/passnocredit.pdf>)

² See, for example, the SUNY-Stony Brook policy: https://www.stonybrook.edu/sb/bulletin/current/policiesandregulations/records_registration/grading_system.php. The same policy applies at SUNY-New Paltz and SUNY-Cortland (among others).

³ This statement is quoted from the SUNY-Cortland website: <https://www2.cortland.edu/offices/srrs/forms-and-pdfs/passnocredit.pdf>

⁴ As indicated in the SUNY-Stony Brook policy, “Post graduate and professional schools require that prerequisite courses be taken for a letter grade and many can interpret NC grades as being equivalent to a grade of F, and a grade of P as equivalent to a D.”

Whereas most faculty senators who responded to the survey administered by APPC on this issue, with the consensus of their departments, indicated that 16 credits allocated toward a degree from courses for which students select to be evaluated on the basis of the CR/NC grading system, was sufficient;

Be it resolved, that SUNY College at Old Westbury limit the number of credits that can count towards a student's degree from courses for which the CR/NC option is selected to 16; that no more than 8 credits earned from CR/NC courses can count towards degree completion per one academic year, and no more than 4 credits may be earned through the CR/NC option per semester; yet,

Be it resolved that, in cases where an academic program evaluates students' senior theses, capstone project, or other program requirement on a CR/NC basis, students in these programs only will be allowed to earn a total of 20 credits toward their degrees from courses in which the CR/NC option is selected; and

Be it also resolved that Schools and Departments have flexibility to establish additional restrictions on the selection of the CR/NC option among students in their programs; and

Be it resolved that students be strongly encouraged to consult with an advisor from their School or Department before selecting CR/NC for any course; and, finally,

Be it resolved that the aforementioned college-wide restriction on the use of CR/NC only apply to students who enroll at OW for the first time in Fall 2022 or later.

Sponsored by

Academic Policies and Practices Committee

May 5, 2022