

From: [Office of the Provost](#)
To: Guidance on Changes to Academic Policies and Procedures for Spring 2020 for Lawrence and KU Edwards Campus
Date: Monday, March 30, 2020 4:14:56 PM

Guidance Regarding Changes to Academic Policies and Procedures for KU Lawrence and KU Edwards as a Result of COVID-19 Response

Dear Colleagues,

In my wildest dreams, I could never have imagined that in my first two weeks as provost and executive vice chancellor at KU, we would announce an extension of spring break as we quickly move all courses online as a result of a global pandemic. I'm also sure you never imagined in your wildest dreams that, at mid-semester, you would redesign your courses with a less-than two-week turnaround, and then teach and work from home.

Yet, here we are, and as I've said in other contexts, if I have to be going through COVID-19, there is no place I'd rather be than at KU. Daily I am amazed and impressed by, and so greatly appreciative of, the spirit of service to our students, the willingness to innovate, the sense of stewardship to the university, and the love of community that I see from every Jayhawk I meet.

I'm mindful of the irony that exists in the fact that, as KU's new provost, I have stepped into an unprecedented situation, when I haven't yet been able to learn all of the precedents upon which KU's academic enterprise is built. Please know that I'm learning as quickly as I can, and be heartened that I am surrounded by excellent teachers.

I want to assure you that leaders across KU are listening and are aware of how the COVID-19 outbreak affects a variety of aspects of academic work. There have been many teams of people hard at work to identify the challenges you face, the changes that need to be made to precedent, and the considerations of

how best to make these changes. The purpose of this message is to inform you about temporary changes to academic policies and procedures. These impermanent adjustments are designed to provide our students, faculty, and staff with some relief to the challenges you face as we shift learning, teaching, research and service in response to COVID-19.

This message offers guidance on:

1. Target deadlines for annual evaluations of academic personnel
2. Target deadlines for post-tenure review
3. Tenure clocks for pre-tenure faculty
4. Sabbatical disruptions
5. End-of-semester student surveys of teaching
6. Timeline for students to withdraw from classes
7. Spring 2020 grading policy

The principles and priorities that have grounded the conversations of university senior leadership, vice provosts, and deans in developing this guidance are:

- Maintain university precedent until there is a clear reason or indication that it will not be possible to do so.
- To the greatest extent possible, provide care for our students and do not in any way further jeopardize students' progress toward completion of programs.
- Give faculty due consideration for the challenges they are experiencing in teaching courses, and the interruption to research and service.
- Recognize the additional burdens that staff must carry to provide continuity of programs and services in these unprecedented conditions.
- To the greatest extent possible, maintain quality of programs and services.
- Ensure administrative and technical capacity to deliver on changes in process and service at scale for an uncertain length of time.
- Consider the financial impact of changes as a result of COVID-19.

University Counsel has determined the proper authority to institute these changes is vested in KU's Executive Policy Group, per the University's Emergency Management Plan, as follows:

The Executive Policy Group “provide[s] executive leadership to the University during emergencies in which the academic and research programs are interrupted, or normal business cannot be conducted.” The Executive Policy Group is charged with various responsibilities, including coordination of all policy matters; issuing directives regarding the overall status of the University campus, programs and operations; and to “approve emergency policy statements, orders and notices to support and manage the University’s Emergency Response and Recovery Operations.”

1. Target deadlines for annual evaluations of academic personnel

The target deadline for 2019 annual evaluations of academic personnel has been pushed back from March 30 and has been moved to **May 1**.

2. Target deadlines for post-tenure review

Target deadline for current-cycle post-tenure review reports has been pushed back to **May 22**.

3. Tenure clocks for pre-tenured faculty

- **A one-year extension to tenure clocks will be granted to pre-tenured faculty**, but faculty wishing to go through the review process during their already scheduled mandatory review year beginning fall 2020 and later may choose to do so. We expect the Kansas Board of Regents to clarify in mid-April whether such an extension would impact the number of extensions currently allowed by KBOR policy. Clarification on the policy and our process will follow.
- **Progress-toward-tenure reviews** scheduled for the 2020-2021 academic year or later will be extended by one year for the current cohort of pre-tenure faculty, but faculty may go through PTTR as scheduled if they wish.
- **Post-tenure reviews will continue as scheduled**, and evaluation committees are directed to take COVID-19 disruptions into account.

4. Sabbatical disruptions

For those currently on sabbatical: we hope you are able to complete your work as planned, but if not, consult with your chair or dean to adjust your plans as needed to forward your research goals.

2020-2021 sabbaticals: We hope that faculty can continue to take their sabbaticals as planned. If you decide to make a significant change to your plans due to COVID-19 disruption (changes to the focus of plan, location, timing, or because you choose to decline entirely and reapply next year), please notify and obtain approval from your chair or dean and forward this information to facultydev@ku.edu by **April 26**. We realize that conditions may continue to change after this date, affecting sabbatical plans. Please communicate any changes to your chair or dean and we will address them on a case-by-case basis.

5. End-of-semester student surveys of teaching

The disruption caused by COVID-19, the challenges for instructors of shifting to online teaching mid-semester, and students' understandable dissatisfaction with such changes, the resulting move to online courses may result in lower than normal scores on end-of-semester student surveys. This situation requires recognition that instructors new to this delivery mode cannot be expected to equal their face-to-face classroom capabilities.

At the same time we acknowledge the anxiety of instructors about how this semester's surveys will be used in faculty evaluations, we must also recognize that students are experiencing disruptions as well, and they need to be able to give voice to their experiences. Therefore, we remain dedicated to collecting information for continuous improvement, and we believe that gathering student perceptions of teaching is essential, especially in this exceptional semester. The data from Spring 2020 end-of-semester surveys should be used as informational and developmental in any subsequent evaluations using the data. At the same time, it is important to remember that multiple sources of information are required to evaluate our work as teachers. [CTE's Benchmark Framework](#) helps highlight these sources.

Surveys will proceed as usual for courses in pre-existing online programs. For all other courses, a brief online survey will be administered centrally instead of traditional evaluations. This survey will be developed by a task force of faculty representatives from across campus, mindful of the varied circumstances and unforeseen challenges that have no doubt affected teaching this semester.

6. **Timeline for students to withdraw from classes**

During the spring 2020 semester, Period 2 (please see the Registrar's [official academic calendar](#)) will be extended through May 4, 2020, which will be the last day to withdraw from a class. Period 3 will run from May 5, 2020, through the last day of classes for the semester. Period 2 and 3 dates will be modified for short courses still in progress.

7. **Spring 2020 grading policy**

The rapid spread of COVID-19 has created significant hardships for most segments of our university community.

The immediate result of COVID-19 is that all of us, most clearly our students, graduate teaching assistants, faculty, advisors, as well as other staff who support instruction, are facing pressures and challenges that did not exist before the move to online classes and the closure of schools and businesses. As noted by Law School Dean Stephen Mazza, some Jayhawks now have child care responsibilities, responsibilities to care for ill and vulnerable family members, financial insecurity, mental and physical health concerns, and others stressors that prevent them from doing their work, or participating in course work and exam preparation as they did in the past. We are all struggling to adapt to such rapid and radical changes in the way we provide education and engage with each other in the instructional environment. These equity concerns are magnified by the recognition that some of the hardships that will interfere with academic performance are related to socio-economic status and gender. It is heartening to see the solidarity and compassion that is being shown by all as we collectively face hardships brought about by external forces and not of our making.

This disruption requires that we re-evaluate our approaches to grading with a common awareness of various perspectives.

Student perspectives:

- a) the fundamental measure of a student's academic accomplishment is the course grade;
- b) a course grade is transcribed as permanent record of a student's career at the University of Kansas;
- c) academic opportunities and financial aid are tied to grades for several groups of students, such as students planning post-graduate careers, international students, and student athletes, and these students may be adversely impacted by changes in grading policy;
- d) students have been adversely affected by the shift from on-campus to online courses mid-semester and may have been without

necessary course materials or technology support; and

- e) there are general hardships put upon students by societal changes caused by COVID-19.

Faculty perspectives:

- a) the affordances and practices of evaluation and grading in many cases are significantly different for on-campus and online environments;
- b) there was a lack of time for some faculty to master the knowledge and skills required to shift evaluation strategies to best fit grading in online courses; and
- c) concerns exist regarding the loss of practice and feedback activities necessary to provide the nuanced evaluative interactions required for letter-scaled grading.

Staff and Administrative perspectives:

- a) there is a burden and administrative challenge associated with completely restructuring the grading system for each course mid-semester,
- b) confusion is caused by the conversion of previously-assigned grades, and
- c) additional variability comes from changing policies at such a late date in the semester.

I believe it is our responsibility as faculty and mentors to be as empathetic and accommodating as possible as a result of these extraordinary circumstances.

It is absolutely essential that the grading policy adopted by KU at this time does not further damage the ability of our students to make progress toward completion of their degree program. Nor should we take any action that may negatively impact any student's ability to complete licensure requirements or graduate program requirements. Therefore, and especially in licensure courses in some fields, any student who is considering requesting a change to Credit/No Credit is strongly encouraged to receive approval by an academic advisor or associate dean before making this change. Further, it is important to note that, if the CR/NC is not currently permitted by a school or program for a licensure course, it will not be permitted as part of this policy. As a first principle, in recognition of the potential negative impact to students' transcripts when graded CR/NC, faculty should make every possible adjustment and accommodation so as to provide students with final course grades. Please consider reaching out to faculty mentors and to the Center for

Teaching Excellence, or CODL to seek guidance for how to conduct evaluations, prior to converting grades according to the option below.

a) U.S.R.R. Article II, Section 2. The Grading System

<http://policy.ku.edu/governance/USRR> will be modified for the spring 2020 semester, as follows

2.2.8.1 - For spring 2020 term, courses that currently use letter grades will continue to use letter grades. However, students may individually opt to receive grades of credit/no credit through the Enroll and Pay System. All requests for credit/no credit grading option must be submitted in Enroll and Pay no later than 11:59 p.m., April 17 (or two weeks after the system is available). Students may select to change one or all of their classes in which they are enrolled.

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Undergraduate students: Consult with an academic advisor before electing credit/no credit. Advisors should record notes in Jayhawk GPS that they consulted with the student.

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Graduate students: Work with an advisor to submit changes to course grading options.

2.2.8.6 - Students should consult with the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships and their advisor *before* changing grading options for their course(s).

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Undergraduate students: Courses taken during the spring 2020 semester for credit/no credit, that are satisfactorily completed, can count toward a student's undergraduate major requirements. Courses graded credit/no credit do not count in computing grade point average. When a student changes academic programs, any satisfactorily completed credits accumulated during the spring 2020 will be accepted by the new KU department. Departments must recognize the extraordinary and unprecedented nature of spring 2020 term.

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Graduate students: Courses graded credit/no credit may be taken in a graduate program if the course is not needed to fulfill hours toward the satisfaction of requirements. No course graded credit/no credit can count

toward the satisfaction of the requirements for a graduate degree or a graduate certificate, except in the School of Law.

2.2.8.7 - Students will choose to receive either the letter grade recorded by the instructor OR a CR/NC designation by the deadline. Faculty will grade students as usual during the semester, and submit the letter grade (A-F, I) to the University Registrar following the standard submission process.

- b) Through the Dean, the entire faculty of the College or school may petition the Provost to convert grading for all Spring 2020 courses as outlined in U.S.R.R. Article II, Section 2.2.10, with the exception of the strikethrough sentence: “When it would not be appropriate to grade a course according to the grading system established above, the College or school may authorize the use of grades S and U in designated courses. ~~A course to be graded S or U shall be identified prior to the beginning of the course in the Schedule of Classes.~~ Approval to offer a course with the S and U grading system precludes the use of grades A, B, C, D, or F. The grade of S shall indicate the student did satisfactory work and these hours will count toward graduation. The U grade shall indicate the student's work was unsatisfactory and these hours will not count toward graduation. Grades of S and U will not count in computing the grade point average.

In addition, for the spring 2020 term, in the case when academic units (other than the Law School) move to S/U grading, any student will have the opportunity to request an exception in order to receive an assigned grade.

Faculty, the past few weeks have required you to be both agile and mindful of the myriad challenges facing our community. I hope that through this guidance we have resolved questions and provided some relief during these uncertain times. It is designed with care and consideration for our students, respect for our faculty and staff, commitment to our academic mission, and stewardship of the university.

Thank you for all you do for the University of Kansas, for our students, and for our community.

Respectfully,

Barbara

Barbara A. Bichelmeyer, Ph.D.
Provost & Executive Vice Chancellor

