

Interdisciplinarity and the CR/NC Option

May 20, 2021

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The Problems

- Many students hesitate to risk their GPAs by exploring elective courses that interest them. UAlberta's grading system should not punish students for broadening their horizons.
- Interdisciplinary studies are a major focus of the rationale for academic restructuring, but so far, the academic restructuring discussion (e.g. at GFC) has not spent much time determining how to actually give students incentives and pathways to explore interdisciplinarity.
- A medical, mental health, or family emergency can force students to choose between dropping a class (delaying graduation and costing hundreds of dollars) or a low grade that will impact GPA and push graduate programs out of reach.

A Proven Solution

1. UBC's grading policy allows students to take a limited number of electives as [Credit/D/Fail](#). In other words, the final grade is F, D, or Cr, none of which is counted toward GPA.
 - Rationale: *"Encourage exploration of other subjects outside their program of study; Emphasize learning and academic exploration of the new and unfamiliar; Expose students to a broader-based curriculum."*
 - The choice (Cr/D/F or normal percentage grading) is locked in at the Add/Drop deadline. The choice can be changed anytime before the deadline, preventing mistakes that could affect graduation timeframes.
 - There is a mechanism to request a switch from Cr/D/F to normal grading after the Add/Drop deadline in certain circumstances (e.g. changing to a program that requires the course).
 - UBC clearly explains potential effects on program completion, awards, and graduate program admissions.
 - Students may register for a maximum of six credits' worth of Credit/D/Fail courses in any one semester (equivalent to two courses), and a maximum of 12 (four courses) across their degree.
 - This policy has been in place since 2009, not as a recent exceptional measure.
2. McGill's [Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory option](#) is comparable to UBC's Credit/D/Fail, without the intermediate D credit and with a similar rationale. Some points of interest:
 - *"You can add the S/U grading option until the end of the course change period (Add/Drop deadline). You may remove the S/U grading option until the "Withdrawal without refund" deadline."*

- As at UBC, the option is designed for electives. *“If you accidentally select the S/U option for a required course, you may be required to complete a substitute course approved by your advisor to fulfill your program requirements.”*
 - Students may choose this option for one elective course per term, and up to 10% of the total credits that their degree requires.
3. York’s [Pass/Fail option](#) is comparable to the options at UBC and McGill. Some points of interest:
 - Students can take up to 12 credits (equivalent to two courses) on the P/F grading option.
 - The deadline to opt into P/F courses is the last day to drop a course without receiving a grade, and the deadline to switch back to normal grading is the last day of classes. This allows students more flexibility and accommodation than at McGill or UBC.
 4. At the University of Toronto’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the [Credit/No Credit option](#) is comparable to the options at UBC, McGill, and York. Some points of interest:
 - An excellent explanation of the same core rationale: *“The CR/NCR option was created to encourage you to expand your possible course choices to areas where you think you have interest, but may not be confident about how well you will do. With the CR/NCR option, course results don’t impact your GPA. And if you find that you’re doing better in it than expected, you may still choose to remove the CR/NCR option providing you do so by the deadline to cancel the course without academic penalty.”*
 - A student can take up to two credits (courses) under the CR/NCR option.
 - *“Students taking a course on a CR/NCR basis will not be identified individually to the instructor teaching that course; they will be assessed in the same way as all other students in the course, i.e. will have the same assignments and tests and will be evaluated with the same expectations.”*
 - The deadline to add or remove the CR/NCR option is the last day to drop a course without an academic penalty. This is a less flexible option than at McGill or York.
 5. At Carleton, [emergency compassionate grading](#) took a similar form to the permanent programs listed above.
 - Students were permitted to designate one passing grade as SAT (satisfactory) in Fall 2020 and another in Winter 2021.
 - For emergency purposes, all F grades in both terms (except F grades due to academic integrity violations) were automatically marked as UNS (unsatisfactory). Apart from this element, though, Carleton’s emergency policy appears consistent with the permanent programs at UBC, McGill, York, and U of T.
 6. In late June 2021, the University of Calgary approved a [‘Credit Granted’ option](#), equivalent to the programs listed above. Students may select this option for up to three courses over their degree. Notably, students may choose to have a course marked as ‘CG’ until two weeks after the course ends, making other programs’ deadlines extremely restrictive by comparison.