Title: Spring 2021 Modalities & Concerns - Recommendations for the Faculty Senate

Based on the discussions during the Senate meeting on 12/11/2020, the senate executive committee invites comments from the Stockton faculty community. We have created five themes to organize faculty comments - please navigate through the outline on the left menu. Should there be additional themes, please add them as "Title" so they show up on the outline for easy access. The Senate executive committee will collate the comments and present a report for our next meeting on January 29, 2020. The deadline for posting comments below is January 15, 2020. You may choose to identify yourself or keep it anonymous - no names will be identified in the aggregated document.

1. **Pass/No Credit Concerns**

Please add your comments here
I believe that late withdraw options are better than Pass/No credit options. Many of my students in Spring 2020 passed my W-2 course without W-2 skills (this is a G-course and I think that it is more common for these courses to be considered by students [and many faculty] as less than important). The same with program competencies; they may have the credentials, but may not be competent. While pass/no credit was the best option for spring 2020, I believe withdrawal is better from this moment forward.

There has been a lot of talk about students in crisis this fall, and for good reason. First Years Studies has seen students with a lot of different kinds of struggles, and flexibility in various forms has been seen as welcome. In this case, the possibility to offer pass/fail as an additional option might well have been useful for many instructors, and is something that I believe is worth re-considering in the spring.

The late withdrawal deadline helped a lot of students in the Fall, but there were certain students who, for any number of reasons, did not withdraw and should have—a P/NC would have helped those students. Consider the students who took a gamble and did not withdraw because they believed they could raise their grade higher, but were not able to—those students also deserve a safeguard. I think of it in terms of redundancies: in uncertain times, students deal with a lot of hard choices with rapidly changing factors. Having one safeguard is good, but more than one can be a safety net for more students. A late withdrawal deadline is not the same as a Pass/No Credit option where students can decide, after final grades, what they want to do with their final grade. Both options help students, but for potentially different reasons. So, that is why, I believe, both should be an available option for students. I also believe we can implement P/NC like we did in the Spring where certain programs framed P/NC differently depending on the course or program needs.

The Admin has made very clear that the standards for education should remain the same, despite the pandemic. They're holding us to that, and I think they should hold the students to that as

well. The Pass/No Credit offers students, particularly in program competencies, to get through the class with lower educational standards. While I do think we need to be accommodating for student hardships, I think this may actually hurt students more than it would help them in the end. This is particularly true if the students need the skills for one class to do well in future classes. The late withdrawal deadline (or even withdrawal *after* the final grade is provided) would still allow for the accommodation of students' hardships, but wouldn't lower the educational standards of the institution.

^I have multiple thoughts on this, but overwhelmingly if this is going to be an option it needs to be an option students know about from the beginning. I would actually urge, instead, the option to withdraw even after receiving a final grade.

We already have a pass/no credit option which could be expanded by a little to benefit more students, and then that change could be permanent. Additionally, are students made aware of this option in the first place? Regardless of whether this changes or not, additional communication needs to go out to students about what their options are. There was not adequate communication last semester either, and this is part of the problem for students who need to exercise pass/no credit whether it remains the same or is improved.

If Pass/No Credit is to be offered again, please let programs reserve the right to designate core courses that currently require a C grade to count towards graduation as letter grade only or no P/NC allowed. After spring 2020 I had a number of students "Pass" lower level core courses who were completely unprepared for and overwhelmed by upper level courses because they did not have the required skills but earned D-, D, D+, or C- grades and therefore the Pass.
Further, if students are going to use the Pass/No Credit option, can they decide that early in the semester so we can grade them using Pass/No Credit approaches throughout the semester.

I am not in favor of Pass/No Credit for courses required for a major and specifically core courses or other key program/cognate courses. For all the reasons that people have specified above, Late Withdrawal is preferable. Students with a "P" on their transcript from fall, 2020 forward not only may lack skills/knowledge necessary for higher classes, but may also be reducing their chances of getting into graduate programs or gaining jobs that have specific course/grade requirements (yes, those exist for students in my program). Certain types of graduate programs announced that they would accept "P" for spring 2020, but have not made the same statement for fall and beyond. If we allow students to take a "P" we may just be taking their money for a course that does them no good and may actually harm them further on in their academic career or post-graduation.

I am not in favor of Pass/No Credit for the spring. I teach in a major that requires C or above to pass, the P/NC pushed lots of students through core courses and allowed them to proceed in the

major when they were not at all prepared for the next set of classes. Additionally, once the P/NC decision was announced, I noted a marked change in students' attitudes and motivation, as they all knew they could get D- grades and not have any consequences for that.

I'm in support of a P/NC option for students, and I'd like to respond to some of the comments above:

- First, the P/NC option being proposed here is different than the P/NC option offered to students in a regular, non-pandemic semester. I believe the option being discussed is what was offered in Spring 2020: students are able to opt into Pass or No Credit *after* viewing their final grades. Presumably, the kind of student who would benefit from this safeguard would not benefit from the regular P/NC policy or late withdrawal deadline. So, to claim that we already have a P/NC option for students is not exactly accurate in this context.
- Second, the rollout of the policy could take into account program needs. If a program believes students should not progress in a course sequence with P grades, then that should be incorporated into the policy. But the P/NC option should not be dismissed wholesale based on a couple programs with specialized needs, especially when those circumstances can be accounted for in the rollout of the policy fairly easily (it certainly was last Spring).
- Third, students should be informed of the P/NC option and be able to make a well-informed decision themselves. Our role as faculty is to advise students—same would work here. If a P grade *might* harm their grad school or job prospects, then the student should be informed of that possibility and make the determination themselves.
- Fourth, grades are a construct. Grade structures are not determinant of academic standards—faculty decide academic standards in their course designs. If you're worried a student is shooting for D- to earn a P, then adjust your course design so a D- grade still demonstrates proficiency in the course content.
- Fifth, we need to also remember that we're in a crisis. It's been 11 months and the crisis is *worse than it was when it started, far far worse*. Concessions need to be made by faculty. We need to provide as many safeguards for students as possible so that they are able to learn and to know that they can opt out, easily, at any time with very minimal consequences for their future success.

2. **Late Withdrawal Date Concerns**
Please add your comments here

To echo what I wrote above, in these trying times flexibility seems humane and sensible. So, while the late withdrawal does cause some issues, it's also an option that might be sensible and fair for students who face crises during the semester -- especially the latter stages of the semester.

The late withdrawal deadline definitely helped students who missed the first deadline, and it helped me advise students about their options with more time to respond to students' assignments. But if we implement a late withdrawal deadline in Spring, we need to make students aware of the change much earlier. Certain students who withdrew in the first deadline might have benefitted from more time. Whatever decisions are made about students' grade options should be made clear in the first half of the semester so both (a) students can plan ahead and (b) faculty can offer better advice to students.

^ I agree - this is a good way to accommodate student hardship, but it should be implemented *before* the normal withdrawal deadline so students can make a more fully informed decision.

^I agree with the comments above--I think we should implement a later withdrawal deadline right away for spring 2021, as the stressor students are dealing with from the pandemic will remain.

^I also agree with the comments above. Late Withdrawal, implemented immediately, is preferable to P/NC which truly gives no indication of a student's ability to continue on to higher level courses or their knowledge of the topic. (Not that grades are perfect indicators, but that is another discussion that is bigger than Stockton and is why many programs have implemented portfolios….but portfolios, depending on discipline, may have no meaning or be ignored by future employers or grad schools where GPA can be critical.)

Yes to late withdrawal date at any time; see also the grade replacement policy as I think that goes hand-in-hand with withdrawal. Withdrawal will not be not as important if students can retake a class and replace their grades.

I think the late withdrawal policy is acceptable and preferable to grade replacement or pass/no credit options

I am not in favor of this, as our current withdrawal deadline is more than generous and later than most of our sister schools. As someone who teaches both grad and undergrad, I am wondering if we could at least keep the original deadline for grad, as the late deadline is going to disrupt group projects.

*I agree with the sentiment expressed immediately above, but for both grad and undergrad courses. I understand how beneficial late withdrawal (even past final grade assignment) is for the student who is experiencing hardships. However, we should also balance this with students who are working with said individuals on group projects and other assignments that require collaboration. In my courses, this wrecks havoc.

3. Mid-semester Transition to Online Concerns

Please add your comments here:
- My comments are about the university's plan for COVID-19 testing before and during the spring 21 semester. The idea of only testing individuals with symptoms who elect to report it is problematic and, in my view, unacceptable: up to " ==40-to-50% of people who==

. Medical experts say asymptomatic spread clearly is contributing to fall spikes of COVID-19" ([link](#) to the site).

- To those who like to point to how 'imperfect' or 'unreliable' tests are--an individual may test negative simply because the levels are too low to be detected by a test; or that tests aren't 100% reliable--my response is that these are reasons for more broad-based & regular (weekly) testing (not less). This is especially true for a school like Stockton with a large number of commuters. Faculty, Staff, students who want or choose to be on campus need to know--they need to know the *positivity rate* (% of people tested who are positive) in addition to the raw number of positive cases each week.
- My final point for more broad-based and regular testing has to do with the availability of a vaccine. While I am obviously excited that there is a vaccine (especially for front line health workers), I am also concerned how some people may interpret this. I certainly hope that I am very wrong about this. However, I fear that some people may interpret the availability of a vaccine as reason or an excuse to let their guards down or disregard things like masks or social-distancing.
- If testing is not mandatory, what is the purpose of any testing? Are vaccines mandatory? How do we know if people don't get vaccinated?
- I would NOT transition to anything mid semester. I simply won't do it. I am not prepping for 2 drastically different teaching modalities.

The transition mid-semester is terrible for everyone. If we're going to have this as an option, which we may very well require, there should be a clear standard for when and why it may occur so that faculty teaching in-person/hybrid can anticipate a change, if need be.

^The shift was very disruptive to my on-campus students. Not only were they moving, which was stressful, but many then lost the wifi/computers they'd been using on campus, OR had to quit and then find and start a new job, OR then had new family responsibilities. I don't know that we can do much about it, except to recognize how disruptive it is.

The mid semester transition was disruptive to students and faculty with limited advance notice. In the health programs some courses must take place on campus due to accrediting body requirements that teaching and assessment of hands on skills must be done face to face.

The midpoint transition is disruptive especially for the courses that were set up to stay hybrid. This choice was not made lightly. The curricular development for the hybrid v.s. online is a particularly troublesome amount of work and renders some courses ineffective (otherwise it would have transitioned to the online modality already)

I don't believe there should be any sort of in-person classes until all persons, including students, are vaccinated. Hopefully that is before the Fall term begins.

The mid-semester transition saved me from my mistake in trying to teach in-person and students on Zoom (at one point almost half of my class was in quarantine) at the same time. Moving to all online was a relief even though II had assumed we'd be online after Thanksgiving, so I had taken that into account when re-organizing my course. I don't want to force students to come to campus if they are not comfortable doing so. Despite feeling that my courses are better in person, I don't think I want to be in a classroom with students either given how January is going. I have a family member who is a student here, and was living on campus. They (and all of our family) were very happy with how Stockton dealt with housing, food, etc. for students on campus and, from their perspective, they were happy with the transition (and a bit relieved). The transition was hard on most faculty (particularly those teaching labs), but I found that most of my students were relieved, as well.

4. Role of Center of Teaching & learning Design in Syllabus Redesigning

The Center of Teaching and Learning Design are a rich resource and we are fortunate to have it. However, this resource is pull not push. I am not for mandates and respect academic freedom but the reality is that many have not met the moment with the needed technological updates to their courses, while others are creating full home studios and investing considerable time and money on their teaching craft. Baseline best practices and standards could be implemented and measured. The inequities are unfair to faculty and students teaching in this new environment.

CTLD is a Blackboard center at best, and I say this with utmost respect for the staff who work there. They are not instructional designers, or at least there are serious deficiencies in this area. Perhaps they have improved over the last year in this respect? However I am not sure. They were certainly thrust into this new role and structure without much additional support or funding, it seems like. Instructional design is about using technology where appropriate, but it's not 100% about the tech, and it should be much more about pedagogy- I don't see the focus on pedagogy at CTLD, though again maybe they're already moving in this direction? See here for an approach that combines both, which is a direction I hope they move towards now and after the pandemic (because really, technology isn't going away when we get vaccines): https://www.teaching-matters-blog.ed.ac.uk/pedagogy-and-technology-from-a-postdigital-perspective/.

We need training specifically on peer evaluations of online classes.

While the CTLD has been crucial to the move online it has been mostly about the "technology" and "design." I believe we need increased pedagogical support, for online learning as well as for our diversity initiatives. I'd also love to see more information about how to "do" a peer observation online: What are the best practices? Who is "trained" in this? How can we counteract the negative effects of the online transition of our pre-tenured faculty through proper online pedagogy and evaluation?

CTLD has been doing a good job. But they can't -- and never will be able to -- fill the void left by the loss of the IFD. Putting "students first" means putting the teachers who teach them first, and

our faculty is a good one -- but all of us can be better, and the IFD helped us all to be so. We need more to fill that void.

CTLD has an opportunity to offer alternatives to certain inaccessible and problematic EdTech that have become pervasive in the last decade and seems to have skyrocketed over the last year. A couple examples:

- Turnitin: lots of problems with Turnitin, many of which outlined here: https://hybridpedagogy.org/resisting-edtech/. CTLD can offer workshops on how to ensure students don't plagiarize without using this tool.
- Similarly with rubrics or scoring guides for writing assignments: I think there's an impression that rubrics are the only means to assess student writing. There are other means (grading contracts, for instance) and other means that are better pedagogically and during a pandemic.
- Respondus (or Proctoria, or Honorlock): the problems with these surveillance softwares have been pretty well publicized. I think using these tools was fine as a quick-fix with the pandemic first happened, but now that we're a year in, CTLD can help faculty transition to revising testing material to prevent cheating without surveilling students.

And not just EdTech, but the CTLD can offer alternatives to course policies that seem untenable given the last year: what does a pandemic-minded, anti-racist attendance policy look like? Or policy on technology use? Or late work? Or participation? I think a lot of programs' move towards anti-racism, for instance, focus on rethinking the content of courses, but not looking at the course designs as a place to do anti-racist work. CTLD can be helpful there.

^More CTLD training about pedagogy, not technology, would be helpful.

This Center is woefully understaffed for what they are being asked to do.

Resurrect IFD, and let the faculty do what it does best - design their own courses and syllabi. Syllabi and course design are academic freedoms. Perhaps some instructional designers should be hired for the IFD to oversee?

The syllabi templates provided by CTLD are WAY TOO LONG. I tried them out this semester and despite having the clickable links on the first page, I found students in my courses used the syllabi less than normal (yes, I assessed this). Most of the policies in the syllabus were already on Blackboard in a much more accessible format than on the syllabus so midway through the semester I redid the syllabus using my old style. I wondered if they actually bothered getting students to evaluate the syllabus templates?

I felt that I got more out of the IFD. Why is there no one knowledgeable about designing laboratories in the CTLD (neither in the staff nor fellows)? When it was the IFD, that was fine as it was one person and I knew they couldn't have experienced every teaching modality. We teach a significant number of scientific labs and yet there is no pedagogical nor technological support for that type of courses that is provided by Stockton. Plus, every school has different

pedagogical and technological issues. Why aren't there people in the CTLD designated as specialists for each school and/or fellows for each school? Everything is about instructional technology (which was very helpful during the pandemic), but there is little discussion about pedagogy like there used to be with the IFD. I get most of my information from reading pedagogical journals and discussions with my faculty colleagues. I can figure the technology out for myself. I've been disappointed with most talks/courses I've sat in on as there is presentation of the technology, but not of advanced ways of using it. This seems to be due to a lack of understanding of what we actually teach and how we teach it (particularly in all but introductory level courses). Some of the suggestions I've encountered are the same things students were already tired of in middle or high school (Kahoot!)...and then we wonder why students don't view their education here as being substantially different from high school?

5. Physical and Mental Health Concerns Due to Lack of Spring Break

Please add your comments here

We "suffer" through the winter semester, so I suppose it can be done. But I hope we will not be setting a precedent. And I hope that there are incentives for students to take advantage of the many resources we have here: meditation, yoga, healthy/cheap dorm eating, etc.

Dropping spring break makes sense in terms of trying to mitigate the spread of coronavirus. Fair enough. But, otherwise, it's a terrible idea. As it is, we are one of the only colleges locally that doesn't have a fall break -- also a terrible idea. We all need a breather -- just ask any mental health professional. So, perhaps our faculty should consider ways to give students a de facto break during this general time.

The university should identify two long weekends or one full week without any assignments due to allow for some kind of collective "mini break", where faculty can still teach classes but aren't allowed to assign things (like the policy that's supposed to be in place for the "study days" before finals). For example, students can be asked to attend classes and watch lectures, but nothing would be assigned. I think it was a good move, mainly because we all know some students would go wherever they could that week, but there should be something established in lieu of a real break to address the need for a break from assignments at a minimum.

I generally agree with the statement above - taking away Spring Break is a terrible idea, but makes sense to mitigate the pandemic's effects. I would have liked to see, instead of full removal, maybe a few long weekends (since we know most students go home on the weekends anyway) in place of Spring Break. That way, we all still get the breather we definitely need, but it's in short, pandemic-manageable bursts instead of a week-long break that encourages widespread traveling.

I do not understand why a longer winter break was OK but spring break is not. We don't want them to come back from spring break with COVID but coming back from Winter Break with COVID is ok?

To add to the previous comment, in the absence of requiring testing and/or quarantine prior to return to campus we have simply shifted when students will travel and return, potentially exposed.

I can not think of ONE Stockton leader who has asked about my mental health during especially Fall 2020 which was much worse than Sp. 19. I think it just shows the little regard they have for faculty and what we do.

Keeping IFD would have been smart in this case - there were plans for a health and wellness retreat that got shelved when it was clear the IFD was being shuttered. IFD was where such concerns for faculty were being addressed. Rather than closing it, it should have been expanded.

Getting rid of spring break was a bad idea, and it is disappointing that faculty were not consulted. There's nothing we can do about this now, so we are all going to have to suffer through it.

6. Grade Replacement

I'd like to see the faculty senate take up the opportunity for students to **replace** a failing grade if they **retake** the course in another semester. As I understand it, if a student retakes a course they failed, their failing grade in their previous attempt does not get replaced, but rather is still incorporated in their GPA. Particularly in a pandemic, there is so much uncertainty in students' lives: a student does not plan for one of their family members, or themselves, to get sick two months into the semester. Or to lose their job. Some may say students should simply withdraw if that's the case, but if your life is completely disrupted, I cannot reasonably expect people to get the correct clerical paperwork in on time. If a student retakes a course to get back on track, I think they should be able to replace an off-semester's grade.

This (replacing grades for retaking courses) is critical for the university to allow permanently. Most other public schools outside of this region allow for you to retake a course and replace a grade. Keeping the old grade in effect punishes the student forever, as it will show up on their transcript and they can never really "redo" a course under the current policy. If they successfully retake a four-credit class and earn a higher grade, they should not have to keep that lower grade on their transcript, period. I failed two courses as an undergrad because of conflicting work schedules (I worked two jobs that semester) and thank god for being able to retake them and earn the grades I got the second time around. Why continue to exacerbate the systemic disadvantages many of our students already face?

^If grade replacement were an option, it would benefit students all the time, not just during the pandemic.I don't know why we don't already offer this option.

^I agree with grade replacement. I taught a G course full of transfer students who were taking all online courses. I felt it was totally unethical of the university to support them so little. I practically

begged my students not to give up, to submit stuff whenever they could but some just didn't have the support or ability to do so and failed. It was horrifying and heartbreaking. NOBODY should fail this class.

Agree grade replacement ought to be allowed - if a student makes the effort to take the course a second time to improve their grade, then the old grade should be expunged.

At other institutions that I have been at, they had grade replacement for the first or sometimes also the second "F" that students earned. However, they did not have grade replacement for all "F's". I failed two courses and the second did not get replaced. I had no money, no support, no health care, and was having serious health issues. That helped me understand that I needed to take a break. If I had had continual replacements, I probably would have kept on the way I was going and just gotten sicker. F's are a signal that something is wrong - whether it is lack of support, underlying health issues, being in the wrong major, or so many other things. I would advocate that the first few (to be determined by faculty/administration debate) should be replaced, but not an infinite number. The only time I would want universal grade replacement would be during a pandemic or if the student had left academia for a given period of time and was returning as an older student. It hurts to see a student who has returned and is now an A/B or B/C student held back by the transcript from what was essentially another life.

I agree with grade replacements for the reasons stated above, and many other universities have a policy of it. I also agree it should be limited, for example to two throughout their undergrad years.

This topic came from the Student Senate to the Faculty Senate years ago, and I believe the Faculty Senate was pretty firm in its rejection of it. The reasons were that (1) we have a later withdrawal deadline than just about any other school, and this allows students ample time to withdraw from a class to avoid a poor grade, and (2) a number of programs worried that they would lose valuable seats to students taking classes over and over again, blocking less senior students who are trying to take a course for the first time. This was especially a worry for students in NAMS and HLTH who are vying for a spot in medical school or one of our grad HLTH programs (DPT, MSOT, NURS, speech, etc). The faculty from these programs and the undergrad programs that funnel students into them worried that they would have students taking classes over and over again to improve their GPAs. I am against grade replacement, but if we are going to do it, I strongly encourage us to adopt a withdrawal deadline more in line with our sister schools (week 7 or 8 of the semester). To have such a lenient withdrawal deadline as ours combined with grade replacements puts us in the company of only one other college in the state - Kean. Not a good company to have.

In response to the concern above:

(1) the proposal is about helping students. Students who would benefit from grade replacement are likely dealing with different circumstances than those who would benefit

from withdrawal. I don't quite see how late withdrawal deadlines is a reason to not implement grade replacement.

(2) I'm very doubtful that students would repeat/retake—and funnel time/money—to the same classes over-and-over in a way that would be an actual, widespread problem. Have we implemented this policy before at Stockton with those results? If not, I don't see where such a problem is coming from.

But if that is a concern for some faculty, the policy can be written in a way that offers constraints. For instance, grade replacement could only apply to courses that students need to earn a certain grade to continue or graduate. For instance, students who need a C or better in a class for their major, but earned a D would *need* to retake the class anyway. However, a student who receives a D, but doesn't need a C or better would not be eligible for grade replacement (so would have no incentive to retake the class). I'm not saying that I'm in favor of constraints or suggesting what those constraints would be—I'm in favor of a universal grade replacement for any circumstances. But constraints are certainly possible.

Also these are simply grade policies. This does not have any correspondence to academic standards.

As someone in the senate at the time that the grade replacement proposal was brought to us by the students, the proposal was spearheaded by students planning to go to graduate school who did not get A's in some important courses and wanted to re-take them. The health sciences grad faculty can attest to the fact that we have many, many undergrads who wind up leaving Stockton without getting into the grad program of their choice. If we open up this option to retake and replace grades, we will not have enough seats for all of our students.

*I know this has been brought up before, but why not compromise and limit the number of retake-replace grades to two or three, or is that too many as well?