ADVISING MEMO REGARDING NEW GRADING OPTIONS FOR SPRING 2020

Dear POSC, INTA, and PPA majors:

By now you all should have received the official notification (https://www.jmu.edu/news/2020/03/24-credit-no-credit-update.shtml) from JMU’s Provost regarding the expanded course grade options for spring 2020. These changes include an extended withdrawal deadline and a credit/no-credit option. To assist our majors in thinking through these options, the department is providing the following general advice:

What is the extended withdrawal deadline, and should I consider withdrawing from a course?

If you are CERTAIN now (or become certain by April 24) that you do not want to continue with a spring 2020 course, you may withdraw from that course through MyMadison by 11:59 pm Eastern time on April 24. This will result in a grade of “W” on your transcript and will not affect your GPA. Given the unusual circumstances of Spring 2020, employers and graduate schools are likely to be forgiving of a “W” on your transcript for this semester. If you are not certain that you want to withdraw from a course, you should continue with the course until the end of the semester. If things go poorly you still have the option to choose “No Credit” later on (see below). NOTE: you are strongly encouraged to consult with your instructor and your adviser before deciding to withdraw from a course.

What does Credit/No-Credit Mean?

If you choose the Credit/No-Credit Option for a spring 2020 course, then:

- If you receive a course grade of C or higher you will get a grade of CR (credit) for that course, but
- If you receive a course grade of C- or lower, you will get a grade of NC (no credit) for that course.

In normal semesters, JMU does not allow a grade of CR to count toward General Education, major, or minor requirements, but for spring 2020 only, a grade of CR may count toward Gen Ed, major, and minor requirements. NOTE: Grades of CR and NC will not affect your GPA.

When should I make a decision on the Credit/No Credit Option for a course?

The most important advice here is to WAIT to make this decision until you see your final course grades. JMU is allowing you to make this decision (via an electronic form on the Registrar’s Office website, https://www.jmu.edu/registrar/) beginning April 7, but you have until
Monday, May 18 at 5:00 pm to select Credit/No-Credit for specific courses. You will receive your course grades the previous week, so you can make this decision with full information. Once you select the Credit/No-Credit option, you cannot change your decision, so waiting until you see your grades is the best course of action. But keep in mind the Monday, May 18, 5:00 pm deadline, since LATE REQUESTS WILL NOT BE PROCESSED.

Is choosing Credit/No-Credit for a course a good idea or a bad idea?

This can get complicated, but here are the basic guidelines:

(1) If you receive an F in a course, you should definitely declare “Credit/No-Credit” for that course. You will receive “No Credit,” but the course will not affect your GPA and you will not have an F on your transcript.

(2) If you receive a passing grade in a course that is below a C (that is, a C-, D+, D, or D-), then declaring “Credit/No-Credit” will mean that you will receive an “NC” for that class. You will get no credit but it will not affect your GPA. Here you need to decide whether you are willing to tolerate the damage to your GPA from this low grade in order to pass the class and get credit for it. For the POSC, INTA, and PPA majors, you do not need a certain grade in a class in order to count that class toward your major. However, you do need an overall major GPA of 2.0 and a cumulative JMU GPA of 2.0 in order to graduate. Also, keep in mind that graduate schools, law schools, and employers will generally not be impressed with grades below a C, so take all of this into account and weigh it against the extra time, effort, and money implied by retaking a course to earn a higher grade. If you have any doubt, discussing this decision with your adviser is a good idea.

(3) If you receive a passing grade in a course that is a C or higher, then declaring “Credit/No-Credit” will mean that you will receive a “CR” for that class. You will get credit but it will not affect your GPA. If you receive a grade (an A, for example) that will help your GPA, you would not want to convert this to a “CR”. If you receive a grade such as a C that may bring your GPA down, you may want to take the “CR” instead. Again here, if you are uncertain it makes sense to consult your adviser.

What should be my general strategy with classes this semester?

We recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic has created difficult circumstances for many students. You should assess your personal situation and determine whether you still have the time and attention to devote to your full set of courses. If not, consider withdrawing from one or more courses, consulting with your major adviser as appropriate. If you believe you can keep up with your current set of courses (or even if you have decided to scale back to fewer courses), you should aim to maximize your grades in those courses: high grades will help your GPA and look better on your transcript than a generic “CR”. Be cautious about assuming you
can do mediocre work and earn a “CR”, because you still need a C or better – a C- will give you no credit under the “Credit/No-Credit” system and you’ll need to retake the course if you don’t take the letter grade. Having said this, if personal circumstances arise that make it difficult for you to perform at the expected level, the Credit/No-Credit option is a fallback option you can exercise after receiving your final course grades.

Are there any exceptions to the above guidance?

If you are currently taking a course Repeat Credit or Repeat/Forgive that you previously took for a letter grade, you cannot change that course to Credit/No-Credit.

What should I do if I have further questions?

First, be sure you have carefully read the JMU policy on Spring 2020 grades (https://www.jmu.edu/news/2020/03/24-credit-no-credit-update.shtml) – it may answer your questions. If you still have questions, please contact your major adviser, whose name can be found on MyMadison.