Date: July 1, 2020  
From: Curriculum and Educational Policy Committee  
To: Dean for Academic Affairs Jennifer Scanlon and President Clayton Rose  
Re: Academic Policy Adjustments for Fall 2020

Introduction and Recommendation

In the spring of 2020, following the coronavirus emergency and the College’s switch to remote learning in the middle of the semester, GFA recommended and the dean and president determined that rather than a standard grading system, the College would employ a credit/no-credit system for all grading for Spring 2020. This temporary, one-semester policy expired after the spring semester’s close.

In light of the decision to move to an almost-completely online semester in the fall and following the announcement that the College will return to its standard policy of grading, members of GFA and CEP met this month and determined that CEP would make policy recommendations relative to grading for the fall. Given the limited time between the president’s announcement of a primarily online fall semester and the deadline for students to decide their enrollment plans, GFA and CEP agreed that significant policy changes for the fall requiring faculty deliberation and approval would not be feasible. GFA charged CEP with addressing the issues quickly, on behalf of the faculty. CEP’s deliberations included exploring the difference between a planned online semester and the spring’s “emergency” semester; examining letters and a policy paper from individual students recommending both for and against the renewal of the standard grading system; considering a petition advocating for a credit/no credit system for all fall courses, signed by more than 400 students; discussing the many concerns faculty and students alike have about our practices of and reliance on grading, and the relationship between these concerns and practices of equity; and examining the ways in which the College can support its online learners in the fall. Based on these deliberations, we conclude that a return to a standard grading system is necessary. At the same time, we tried to enhance existing grading-related support options to offer students greater leniency, if needed, during this ongoing public health crisis. We recommend that the dean and president implement the temporary adjustments described below.

As we consider the principles and practices of grading, CEP recognizes that, even with the tremendous efforts that faculty will put into developing excellent online offerings for the fall, some Bowdoin students will struggle to achieve academic success given the challenges of physical or mental illness or extremely difficult home environments. We know that the coronavirus has hit poor communities and communities of color disproportionately, and that some of our students will find that their lives start or continue to be disrupted in the most fundamental ways at the same time that they will be trying to achieve academic success in their courses and majors. CEP seeks solutions to these challenges, and we make the following recommendations to the faculty, the Dean for Academic Affairs and the President of the College.

General Recommendations regarding Grading

CEP encourages the faculty and the College to commit to supporting all of our students, in and outside of the “classroom” in the fall and spring semesters and as long as the pandemic disrupts our educational processes. In addition to providing residence on campus for a group of students whose lives outside of Bowdoin present significant challenges to sufficient academic engagement, the College must do all it can to foster inclusive excellence in online learning. Concrete ideas for support in the online environment

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have emerged in the report of the Continuity in Teaching and Learning Group (CTLG), particularly the recommendations in Appendix III; the ongoing faculty-directed pedagogical and student-directed learning support work of the Baldwin Center for Learning and Teaching; and the trainings available to faculty through the BOLT (Bowdoin Online Learning and Teaching) initiative, in which an interdisciplinary group of Bowdoin faculty and staff are working with an outside consultant to partner with all faculty this summer and throughout the academic year to enhance our teaching and learning resources and practices.

The CTLG, with its focus on equity, has provided a set of recommendations for the faculty to follow in designing online courses that provide excellence in instruction and, at the same time, reduce the cognitive load on students. Among these recommendations are using learning goals and pedagogy as starting points for online success, designing clear and transparent formative assessments, and exercising flexibility in the learning environment. We cannot overstate the need for flexibility, as our students, on and off campus, and for a wide range of reasons, will continue to be impacted by the ongoing public health crisis and its attendant, and disparately experienced, consequences.

CEP’s discussion about grading systems noted a range of concerns about grading as a means of assessing and fostering student achievement and success. We support the exploration of alternatives to our standard grading practices, but meaningful alternatives will require considerable deliberation among the Bowdoin faculty. Many Bowdoin faculty share these concerns about grading, noting student stress as it relates to grades and the issue of grade inflation, and will be eager to discuss the potential of adopting new practices and policies. We are hopeful that the shift to online teaching and learning, and its attendant concern with best practices in assessment, will help launch a conversation about grading. CEP commits to fostering that conversation in the upcoming academic year.

Policy Change Recommendations for Fall 2020

Bowdoin’s academic policies are established by the faculty and are designed to maintain the integrity of the degree and support students fairly. At times, temporary adjustments to our policies may be deemed necessary to preserve this intent, as in Spring 2020. CEP anticipates that, given the continuing public health crisis brought on by COVID-19, students will face unusual and extenuating circumstances in Fall 2020.

Following careful consideration of the spring policy adjustments, CEP concludes that the most effective approach to dealing with grading and related issues is to undertake a two-part process. The first part, which we engage in here, following the return to standard grading, recommends some immediate and temporary policy adjustments for Fall 2020 in support of our students. The second part, a further consideration of additional COVID-19-driven academic policy adjustments, requires deliberation with and approval of the faculty. CEP will introduce these considerations at the start of the fall semester, at which time we will better understand the context and the need for making further changes.

Recognizing that our students will have disparate and inequitable experiences, and determined to foster robust practices of support, CEP recommends, for the fall of 2020, the following academic policy adjustments and options to support a wide range of challenging situations:

- **Credit/D/Fail**: Normally, Credit/D/Fail is an option that students may choose by the sixth week of the semester, for one course in a full load of four, and for up to four courses total. We recommend expanding this option for Fall 2020, as follows:
  - Make the Credit/D/Fail grade mode available for students to choose until the day before Thanksgiving break begins (November 24th) at 5 pm. Additional time to choose this option recognizes that students may encounter difficulties related to the public health and
online learning context at any point in the semester, no matter how much effort they have been putting into their coursework.

- Students may choose one course Credit/D/F with a full load of four credits, and this will not count against their career total of four.
- As is standard policy, students may not choose the Credit/D/Fail mode for First-Year Writing Seminars, distribution and division requirements, and in most cases, major and minor requirements. It is beyond CEP’s purview to recommend changing these prohibitions without input of the faculty; however, in light of the current context, CEP will ask GFA for time in a faculty meeting early in the fall semester to discuss potential changes to these institutional policies on a temporary basis, and CEP will ask departments and programs this summer to consider whether any of their required courses might be taken Credit/D/Fail for current Bowdoin students.
- From week 7 - 11 (Wednesday, October 21 - Tuesday, November 24), all students carrying four credits or more who have already chosen to take one course Credit/D/Fail via Polaris will be able to choose to take a second course Credit/D/Fail and it will not count against the student's career total of four Credit/D/Fail courses. Students will initiate this request via a form that must be approved by the instructor of the course, the student’s advisor, and the student’s dean.

- **Limits on Fifth Full Course**: Students should be allowed to add a fifth full credit only during Add/Drop II in the Fall semester and only with advisor permission. Given the findings that taking four remote courses is already a very heavy load and a different challenge than taking four in-person courses, this will serve as a precaution against students taking too many courses and will also help to ensure that all students are able to enroll in the courses they need.

The following policies are already available to students and will continue unchanged. We note these as existing supports/options for students:

- **Add/Drop**: Students may drop courses without permission during the first two weeks of the semester. CEP does not recommend extending the Add/Drop period beyond the first two weeks, as adding a course after that time makes catching up too difficult for the student.

- **Incomplete**: In unavoidable circumstances (personal illness, family emergency, etc.) and with approval of the student’s dean and the instructor, a grade of Incomplete may be recorded. An Incomplete represents a formal agreement among the instructor, a dean, and the student for the submission of unfinished coursework under prescribed conditions. Students must initiate their request for an Incomplete on or before [the last day of classes] by contacting their student dean.

CEP plans to monitor these temporary policy adjustments in the Fall semester to be sure that they are functioning as intended and, in consultation with faculty committees and relevant administrative staff, determine whether further changes are necessary. Given the unpredictability of the coronavirus pandemic, CEP stands ready to assess the need for additional policy adjustments rapidly, as needed.