

COVID-19 Special Circumstances Exceptions to Academic Rules for Spring 2020

March 26, 2020

Background

On March 21, 2020, after extensive consultation with students, faculty, and senior administrators, Dean L. Song Richardson announced her decision, and the very strong faculty consensus, that spring semester 2020 law school courses will be graded on a mandatory credit/no credit basis for J.D. students. On March 24, 2020, after further consultation with the faculty and the directors of the law school's LL.M. programs, the Dean announced that this policy also applies to LL.M. students.

To implement this decision, a number of special circumstances exceptions to the J.D. Program Academic Rules and the LL.M. Program Academic Rules are necessary. Rule XII(A) of the J.D. Program Academic Rules and Rule XII(A) of the LL.M. Program Academic Rules provide that “[t]he Assistant Dean for Student Services may grant exceptions from these rules where the exception is deemed to be justified by special circumstances, is necessary to avoid serious detriment to the student, and/or is consistent with sound educational policy.”

The COVID-19 virus has upended the lives of the entire UCI Law community, including our students. We recognize the unprecedented nature of the events that are unfolding in our state, our country, and around the world. Law school is already stressful for many students. We understand that the transition to online learning has made it even more stressful for some. We know that well beyond a new learning environment, our students are also facing unforeseen additional challenges—moving off campus in the middle of a semester, caring for children whose schools have closed, caring for friends and family members, and financial insecurity. These are incredibly anxious times for all of us.

These are special circumstances that justify the exceptions to the Academic Rules set forth below. These exceptions were discussed by the full-time faculty at their March 24, 2020 faculty meeting. They will be effective for the spring 2020 semester. At this time, we do not find that any permanent amendments to the Academic Rules are necessary, although such amendments could be considered at a later date.

UCI Law is, more than ever, committed to supporting all of our students. We have and will continue to put in place measures to provide special support for our students, including those who are facing the most difficult challenges. An explanatory letter from the Dean will explain the spring semester credit/no credit policy so prospective employers and others will understand it, and professors have pledged to advocate for their students and communicate directly with prospective employers on their students' behalf.

Special Circumstances Exceptions

1. Scope. These special circumstances exceptions apply only to spring semester 2020 law school courses. They cover all students in law school courses, including both J.D. and LL.M. students. They cover all spring semester 2020 law school courses, including Lawyering Skills, clinical courses, first-year courses, upper-division courses, LL.M. courses, and spring quarter courses cross-listed with the law school. They do not cover January 2020 short-session courses or winter quarter courses cross-listed with the law school. They do not cover non-law school courses, as they are governed by the school offering those courses.
2. Exceptions to Credit/No Credit Rules
 - a. No Posting of Letter Grades. Notwithstanding J.D. Rules VII(B)-(E) and LL.M. Rules VII(B)-(C), instructors will not give letter grades. They will give each student the grade of either “credit” or “no credit.” Note that “credit” appears on UCI transcripts as “S” for “satisfactory” and “no credit” appears on UCI transcripts as “U” for “unsatisfactory.”
 - b. Standard for Credit
 - i. According to J.D. Rule VII.I(2) (for J.D. students) and LL.M. Rule VII(G)(2) (for LL.M. students), “[i]n order to receive credit for a course taken Credit/No Credit, a student must obtain a minimum grade of C- (1.7).” Instructors should give a grade of “credit” for work that the instructor, using their best judgment, finds to be the equivalent of a grade of C- work or higher. Otherwise, instructors should give a grade of “no credit.”
 - ii. There is no required number of “no credit” grades in any given course.
 - c. Exception to Credit/No Credit Limits. Notwithstanding J.D. Rule VII(I)(1), credit/no credit units earned in the spring 2020 semester shall not count toward the self-selected 8-unit limit. Notwithstanding LL.M. Rule VII(G)(1), credit/no credit units earned in the spring 2020 semester shall not count toward the self-selected 3-unit limit.
 - d. Grade-Only Courses. The credit/no credit option applies to spring semester 2020 courses originally designated as not available on a credit/no credit basis (i.e. “grade only”) under J.D. Rule VII.I(3) or LL.M. Rule VII(G)(3).
 - e. Year-Long Courses. For year-long courses, under J.D. Rule VII(H)(2) and LL.M. Rule VI(F), students receive a fall “In Progress” (“IP”) grade and one final grade for the entire course at the end of the spring semester. The fall IP grade is replaced by the grade awarded in the spring semester for the entire course. Students in some year-long courses receive a fall “shadow” letter grade. However, the final grade for year-long courses will be on a credit/no credit basis. Either “S” (if “credit”) or “U” (if “no credit”) will appear on transcripts for year-long courses ending in spring 2020. The shadow grade will not be placed on the transcript.
 - f. Submission of Grades. The normal deadline for submitting course grades remains in effect. Grades are due Tuesday, May 26, 2020. See J.D. Rule VII(O)(1) and LL.M. Rule VII(L)(1).

3. Related Exceptions

- a. Academic Probation. Notwithstanding J.D. Rules I(B) and VIII(A) and LL.M. Rule VIII(B), no first-year student will be placed on academic probation at the end of the spring 2020 semester based on the student's grade-point average and no student will be academically dismissed from the law school at the conclusion of the spring 2020 semester based on the student's grade-point average. Grade-point averages will be recalculated for those purposes at the end of the fall 2020 semester.
- b. Incomplete Upper-Level Writing Requirement. Notwithstanding J.D. Rule I(F)(2), a student whose Incomplete for a spring semester 2020 course is transformed to the letter grade of "F" will receive "no credit" in lieu of that letter grade. This exception does not apply to an Incomplete for a course in which a student enrolled prior to spring semester 2020.
- c. Directed Research. Notwithstanding J.D. Rule II(G) and LL.M. Rule III(G), a student will be graded on a credit/no credit basis for directed or independent research even if the student and the instructor did not agree in advance that work on the project would be evaluated on a credit/no credit basis.
- d. Failure to Complete Coursework with Extended Deadline. Notwithstanding J.D. Rule V(D) and LL.M. Rule VI(D), a student whose Incomplete for a spring semester 2020 course is transformed to the letter grade of "F" will receive "no credit" in lieu of that letter grade. This exception does not apply to an Incomplete for a course in which a student enrolled prior to the spring 2020 semester.
- e. Latin Honors: Notwithstanding J.D. Rule VII(L)(1), credit/no credit units earned in the spring 2020 semester shall not be included in the calculation of the 75 percent graded units requirement for eligibility for Latin Honors.
- f. Faculty Award and Dean's Award. In accordance with J.D. Rule VII(L)(2), instructors may give a Faculty Award and/or Dean's Award in first-year and upper-division courses. However, because no letter grades will be assigned, an instructor should give those awards to the highest performing student (for the Faculty Award) and the second-highest performing student (for the Dean's award), based on the instructor's best judgment of student performance. Presumptively, instructors will give no more than one Faculty Award and no more than one Dean's Award; however, an instructor may give either two Faculty Awards or two Dean's Awards (for a total of no more than three awards) if, based on the instructor's best judgment, the performance of two students is indistinguishable. Instructors are not required to give a Faculty Award or a Dean's Award, even in a first-year course.

4. Technical Corrections. The Assistant Dean for Student Services, in consultation with the Dean, Vice Dean, and Faculty Advisory Committee, may recommend technical corrections to these special circumstances exceptions that may be necessary or appropriate to ensure that they operate as intended.

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