Alternative Grading During Academic Disruption

April 28, 2020
2:00 pm EDT
Presenters

Brandon Hunter, Director of Student Affairs, AAMC

Marie Lynn Miranda, PhD
Director, Children’s Environmental Health Initiative
Professor of Statistics, Rice University and Provost-Elect, University of Notre Dame

Princess Currence, DSW-C, MSW
Director, Curriculum and Education, Rush University Medical Center

David Wofsy, MD
Associate Dean for Admissions, UCSF School of Medicine

Sharifa Dickenson, M.A. Ed.
Director of AMCAS Operations, AAMC
Agenda

1. Welcome and Opening Remarks- Brandon Hunter
2. The Low Signal in Grades from the Spring 2020 Semester- Marie Lynn Miranda
3. Challenges with Mid-Year Adaptations- Princess Currence
4. Confronting the Underlying Narrative- David Wofsy
5. Alternative Grading on the AMCAS Application- Sharifa Dickenson
6. Discussion
Why pay attention to grades? They send a signal.

How good is the signal from the Sp2020 semester?

Poor.

Why is the signal poor?

- Institutions vary widely in how they handled grading.
- Pivot to online unevenly delivered.
- Student circumstances differ widely.

Signal/noise ratio is low – and small relative to the total signal available.

Call to action (CTA): Accept P/NC grades for the spring 2020 semester without conditions.
Medical School Signatories to CTA

- Boston University
- Case Western Reserve University
- Creighton University
- Dartmouth College
- Duke University
- Emory University
- George Washington University
- Georgetown University
- Harvard University
- Johns Hopkins University
- Kaiser Permanente Bernard J. Tyson School of Medicine
- Loma Linda University
- Louisiana State University HSC at New Orleans
- Michigan State University College of Human Medicine
- Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine
- Northwestern University
- Ohio State University
- Pennsylvania State University
- Stanford University
- SUNY Stony Brook
- Texas A&M University
- Tulane University
- University of Alabama Birmingham
- University of Buffalo
- University of California, Davis
- University of California, Irvine
- University of California, Los Angeles
- University of California, Riverside
- University of California, San Diego
- University of California, San Francisco
- University of Colorado
- University of Kentucky
- University of Louisville
- University of Miami
- University of Michigan
- University of Minnesota
- University of Missouri
- University of New Mexico
- University of North Carolina
- University of Pittsburgh
- University of Southern California
- University of Texas, Austin
- University of Utah
- University of Virginia
- University of Washington
- University of Wisconsin
- Vanderbilt University
- Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VA Tech)
- Wake Forest University
- Washington University in Saint Louis
- Yale University
Challenges with Mid-Year Adaptations

Princess Currence, DSW-C, MSW
Director, Curriculum and Education, Rush University Medical Center
Reimagining how we teach, assess, test and grade is not just for our students - we all need to adapt.
Flexibility During This Impossible Time

Uneven preparation across the board

Issues of Diversity and Inclusion
• Students
• Faculty

Opportunities for Innovation - Considerations
• Curriculum Challenges
• Assessment/Grading Challenges
• Faculty Challenges

We ask students to adapt – So should we.
Confronting the Underlying Narrative

David Wofsy, MD
Associate Dean for Admissions, UCSF School of Medicine
Pass/Fail Grades – Our schools will accept pass/fail grades, without prejudice, for courses taken during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has always been our practice to consider grades in the context of numerous other aspects of the application, and an international crisis certainly provides a unique and compelling context. In making this statement, we are cognizant of the fact that some undergraduate schools are providing an option for students to take courses either for grades or on a Pass/Fail basis. We therefore want to be explicit that applicants should not feel pressured by us to choose the graded option. Students and their families are facing many challenges at the moment – maybe even life and death challenges. The pressure for grades need not be one of them.
Alternative Grading on the AMCAS Application

Sharifa Dickenson, M.A. Ed.
Director of AMCAS Operations, AAMC
Alternative Grading

Working with The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), the AAMC has identified the following three common policies academic institutions are implementing:

- Maintaining their current letter grade system with no change
- Offering opt-in pass/fail
- Offering mandatory pass/fail

In the AMCAS application, all courses with credit hours and letter grades are calculated into the AMCAS GPA, regardless of whether the credit is counted towards a degree or has been counted towards a school-calculated GPA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE</th>
<th>CREDIT HOURS</th>
<th>=</th>
<th>AMCAS GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pass/fail and other non-qualitative, binary marks (credit/no credit, satisfactory/unsatisfactory) do not have value or weight on the AMCAS GPA unless a school provides an alpha letter grade conversion. Alternative grading policies are school specific.
Applicant Scenario – Graduating Senior Year

Standard Grading & AMCAS GPA impact

Below is coursework entry for an applicant who received standard letter grades during the second semester of their Senior year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAT</th>
<th>CLASS</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TERM</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>LAB/LEC</th>
<th>OT GRD</th>
<th>OT HRS</th>
<th>SEM HRS</th>
<th>SUP HRS</th>
<th>AM GRD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>BIOL €</td>
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<td>INTR BIOL ANTHRO</td>
<td>LEC</td>
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<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>BIOL</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>PLANTS IN HUMAN AFFAIRS</td>
<td>LEC</td>
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<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>ARTS</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL ON MASS CULTURE &amp; FILM</td>
<td>LEC</td>
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<td>SR</td>
<td>BIOL</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>CRIT ANALYSIS BIO RES</td>
<td>LEC</td>
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</table>

The applicant took four courses, three of those courses were classified as Biology (€). These courses are included in the Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Math (BCPM) GPA.

The applicant received official transcript (£) grades of A for all their courses. Their total credit hours earned for this semester was 12. Their AMCAS grades (¥) are converted to A for all their courses this semester.

The applicant’s grading history shows a 4.0 BCPM GPA in their senior year (€). The calculated BCPM hours for their senior year is 17 (£). The coursework entry (Figure 1) shows 12 of those hours were received in their senior year second semester.

The applicant’s GPA for all other (AO) courses is 3.40 (¥) where 3 of the 15 awarded credit hours ($) are from the second semester art course. The applicant received an AMCAS GPA of 3.72 (ß) with 32 credit hours ($) earned for their senior year.

The cumulative undergraduate AMCAS calculated GPA report is row (8).
### Applicant Scenario

**Pass/Fail AMCAS GPA impact**

Below is coursework entry for the same applicant who has received Pass/Fail grades during the second semester of their Senior year (Spring 2018).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STA</th>
<th>CLASS</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TERM</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>LAB/L</th>
<th>OT HRS</th>
<th>OT HRS</th>
<th>SUP HRS</th>
<th>AM GRD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>BIOL</td>
<td>€</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>INTR BIOL ANTHRO</td>
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<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>BIOL</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>PLANTS IN HUMAN AFFAIRS</td>
<td>PF</td>
<td>LEC</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>P ¥</td>
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<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>ARTS</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL ON MASS CULTURE &amp; FILM</td>
<td>PF</td>
<td>LEC</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>BIOL</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>CRIT ANALYSIS BIO RES</td>
<td>PF</td>
<td>LEC</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The applicant took four courses, three of those courses were classified as Biology (€). These courses are not included in the BCPM GPA.

The applicant received official transcript (£) grades of P for all courses. The total credit hours earned for this semester was 12. Their AMCAS grades (¥) are converted to P for all courses this semester.

The applicant’s grading history shows a 4.0 BCPM GPA (€) in their senior year. The calculated BCPM hours for their senior year was 8 (£).

They received 9 hours from the second semester biology courses which is counted under Supplemental Hours ( kube).

The applicant’s AO GPA for courses was 3.25 (¥). Three of the 12 (§) awarded credit hours are from the second semester art coursework and counted in the Supplemental Hours (kube). The applicant received an AMCAS GPA of 3.55 (ß) with 20 credit hours (Ȣ) earned for their senior year.

All pass/fail credits are recorded in Supplemental Hours (kube). The applicant earned 12 pass/fail hours in their second semester.

The cumulative undergraduate AMCAS GPA is represented here (f).
### Standard grades compared to pass/fail

#### Cumulative Undergraduate History Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Grade Type</th>
<th>BCPM GPA</th>
<th>BCPM Hours</th>
<th>AO GPA</th>
<th>AO Hours</th>
<th>Total GPA</th>
<th>Total Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard Grading Calculation</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>72.00</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>57.00</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>129.00</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pass/Fail Grading Calculation</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>63.00</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>54.00</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>117.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supplemental Hours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pass/Fail - Pass</td>
<td>12.00</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In Scenario 1, the applicant's performance of all A's would have increased their Senior year and Cumulative GPAs. In Scenario 2, pass/fail credit hours are counted as Supplemental Hours and not included in the GPA and hour totals. This results in the applicant from Scenario 2 having 12 less AMCAS calculated total semester hours calculated in the GPA compared to the applicant in Scenario 1. This scenario would result in the applicant's Senior year and Cumulative GPAs remaining the same as they were when the spring semester began.
Discussion