

A MEETING
OF THE UNIVERSITY FACULTY SENATE
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1, 2020

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: So on the screen, you see the ground rules for today's meeting. It should be smooth, but like many of you, we're novices to running Zoom meetings like this, so please be patient if stuff goes awry.

I should say that if the system does crash or other problems come up, just go to the agenda web page for instructions. We're ready to launch a backup meeting, if necessary. These are just precautions that probably don't have to be exercised.

You want to take down the screen, the PowerPoint? Okay, are we all set?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah?

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Okay, good. So today's meeting is sort of like the January meeting, where we talked about the social science initiatives.

And there was a discussion -- (Audio difficulties) -- the timeline here is very compressed. As you know, the online classes start on Monday -- sort of have to be resolved or taken care of pretty quickly, which means we are going to talk about things today [Indiscernible] we are going to talk a little about the academic integrity document that's been produced [Indiscernible] recognize that we have a very different situation and we need to have an equitable instruction environment.

So it consists of two parts. And it's important to have them side by side, because I want students to see faculty responsibilities, and faculty should see students' responsibilities, with reminders that we are in this online environment.

So here's how we produced this document. It started with Neema and me sketching things out with several students, students who were on the Weiss Teaching Committee, who pay attention to teaching and things like that, and we produced a rough draft. That was then circulated to the senate, to the GPSA, the SA, to all the chairs of the academic integrity hearing boards and others. We collected input over the weekend, and then produced the final document that you see now.

The idea, then, is that if all three of these assemblies pass this, it will give this a high profile, it will carry some force. There's no magic wand, no one's naive about this, but it will provide guidance to both faculty and students, and reminders.

This is packaged up in a resolution that basically says I support or we support this one-pager, and you'll have a chance to vote on that after the meeting.

Let me pause here, if there are any questions about this. I should say we can't do quorum, we can't do motions because we don't have numbers. So what we're looking at here is sort of -- well, I can use the word up or down vote for both of these things that we're talking about today.

But having said that, I do want to have anyone that wants to speak up about this document, if you have concerns about it. Again, it could be wordsmithed to death, but if you have serious concerns about this or comments, please raise your hand and we'll address -- okay, so I see Ken Birman. Don't forget, raise your hand. Once you are acknowledged, you can unmute yourself, and you have two minutes to sort of talk. Ken.

KEN BIRMAN: Okay. Ken Birman, Computer Science. I just want to express the concern that we're discussing a document that most of us only received about an hour

and a half ago, in my case. I don't know about the rest of you. This means I haven't had a chance to discuss it with my colleagues in Computer Science, not in the form it was shown to us. And I feel that's a genuine concern. I'll just note the proposal is signed by people that don't include --

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: You're talking about the wrong item. We're talking about right now the academic integrity document, not the --

KEN BIRMAN: Then I have no objection on that.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Okay, any other hands up on this? I don't see any, okay. Jerry?

JERY STEDINGER: Sorry. I object to -- on the faculty, where it says the entire teaching team will be accessible to the students. I often have graders and things that are part of the teaching team that we do not make accessible to the students. And when I taught a larger class once, I had a TA whose English was very poor, so we kept -- we did not make them accessible to answer questions. So I object to Number 6 for the faculty. Thank you. Jerry Stedinger.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Okay, how would you rewrite it?

JERY STEDINGER: I'd delete it.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: It's extremely important there's a real channel between students and the teaching team in this online venue. In fact, at some point, we're going to have to demonstrate there was sufficient contact, there wasn't just a professor putting their notes up online and take it or leave it and I'm not going to talk to you.

There has to be a reaffirmation that the channel between the teaching team and the students, we have to pay attention to it and it has to be there.

JERY STEDINGER: Okay, well, then make it that the teaching team will be accessible. Just get rid of the entire. Why does every member of the teaching team have to be accessible?

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: This is an advice document, okay. I'm sure there are special cases where faculty -- the common sense of discretion will take over. As I said, at this point, the whole thing or not. I sort of see your point, but again, I would trust a faculty member who has a hierarchy of staff to exercise the right judgment.

Any other comments?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I think we might be covered with the fact it says we'll try to do everything that you could, that I can, so I think that might cover it.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Again, these are not rules. They are guidelines. We are trying to inspire people in a very difficult situation to rise to the occasion, to pay attention to honesty and to use common sense and discretion.

We're now going to move on to the main topic, which concerns the grading policy for the for the spring semester. We will talk about an overview of the options and parameters, and then Lisa Nishii will talk about the current plan, and Risa will discuss the resolution. So Neema.

NEEMA KUDVA: Charlie, you're breaking up quite a bit, so I'm going to repeat quite a bit of what you said, because I could barely hear you. So for everyone on the call, I'm just going to walk through very quickly the different rationales for the different

schemes that we have. We have Lisa Nishii, the vice provost for undergraduate education, with us here, and then can open up the conversation to a discussion.

The rules for bringing your comments to the group have already been laid out, and I'm hoping that everybody knows it by now. Please do use the chat function to bring your comment in, or raise your hand, and Charlie or Jill will be following the chat box and will take up your comment.

If the audio is bad, we know that it's bad. Sometimes Charlie's home, sometimes it's your WiFi. Thank you for letting us know, but it's just what it's going to be, and my apologies for it.

There's a resolution that was brought to the faculty senate which, by a group of faculty senators, was signed by a number of faculty that will be raised here shortly. What we are just trying to do here is to look at sort of the overview, and it's on the dean of faculty website. There's a grading options overview.

The current Cornell policy is to allow for all courses an S/U option. And for us, S is either equal to or above a C minus for undergraduates. The grade of S will satisfy requirements for entering majors and minors in all colleges and count towards graduation requirements. There's a deadline that's been specified by the vice provost for undergraduate education's office. The current policy is laid out on the website, and arguments for and against it.

The argument for it, the strong argument for it is that it is student-centered, it gives choice to the student and preserves student agency and control in a very difficult, uncertain and variable environment. It doesn't disadvantage any student who is on a

merit-based scholarship that requires a GPA threshold to be met each semester. And it also allays concerns expressed by students over admissions to competitive professional and graduate programs. These are the arguments for it.

The arguments against it is that this is an unusual, fast-changing, difficult time which constrains student agency, and there are many difficult home situations without private spaces for study. Students have been forced to help with other family duties like elder care or sibling care. There are expected huge numbers of job losses with parents, and there's a lot of grief, due to this both pandemic and anxiety due to the recession.

What we are trying to do is sort of remove that additional anxiety and stress because of the perception of an invisible boost or penalty that many students were taking for letter grades -- who can afford to take the class for letter grades will receive. There are concerns expressed both by students and faculty that this may reduce the quality of grade-related feedback that students receive and it could reduce incentives to produce good-quality work. That's something we've been hearing quite a bit.

We also hear that it magnifies sort of a competitive and stressful work environment in a virtual instructional setting, where many, many things are difficult to control. Witness our trouble with audio, for example.

There are three options under consideration here. One is do we switch to a universal S/U, where it becomes a mandated grading policy that requires all courses to be taken S/U for spring 2020. The arguments for and against this clearly are linked to the arguments that I already sort of laid out before you, and it essentially acknowledges

constrained agency and lack of choice for many students and tries to create an equal playing field. The idea primarily is to reduce this increased anxiety and stress.

Again, all the arguments sort of against the proposition are concerns that it will reduce the quality of grade-related feedback, are concerns that students who can pass a class with a D grade will now be getting a U, an unsatisfactory, which is a problem, and therefore do not receive credit for a mandatory S/U course. That, of course, will disadvantage students who are on merit-based scholarship and disadvantage students applying to competitive professional and graduate programs in the future.

For these last two points on the merit-based scholarship and the admissions to competitive programs, it is unclear what requirements agencies and graduate schools will impose, though there is some chatter that there could be a notation in the transcript and that accommodations will be made to take this unprecedented situation into account.

The universal pass/fail is Option 2, and it mandates a grading policy that requires all courses to be taken on a pass/fail. You would have seen there are multiple petitions floating around, and one of them is for a universal pass/fail. At Cornell, we don't actually currently grant P/Fs, and it would require a huge amount of time and resources to change the current technological environment within which we work. When Charlie and I were going through this and hearing from people, it's a question about whether we can do this and whether we should focus our energy on this, when we have so many other challenges to meet.

The big advantage of a universal pass/fail, if one wants to go in that direction, is that someone receiving a D grade would receive the pass, a D minus even, and they would receive credit for the class. The arguments against it, of course, remain the same.

The third option is an opt-in/out for an S/U after final grades are done. This is, in some ways, even more student-centered, and it combines all the benefits of our current grading policy with the additional benefits of allowing students to make a choice throughout the semester, even after assessments are complete.

There is an Option 4, which is about uncovering. It is not really an option. It's like an added policy piece. In the work that we did to put this together, we find that, again, we really need to look into whether the technology will allow us to do this. But more importantly, there is really very little experience of applying this uncovering as a policy across all coursework in universities, so we don't fully understand everything that needs to be taken into account in going for uncovering.

I'm going to stop there. And Charlie --

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Lisa Nishii, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education.

Lisa?

LISA NISHII: Hi. Thank you. So I'll just add a little bit. I think you did such a great job of covering the different options. I wanted to add that actually there was one more option that students have been circulating, which is a universal path, which is that all students would pass all courses, period, without question.

There's been a lot of debate over this. I've been tracking it quite closely for over a month or so. There's an iterative nature to it that I think is worth noting. I think we

did a good job of getting out there early with an announcement about the increased flexibility that we would be able to afford, allowing S/U in courses that don't usually offer it, and also allowing those S/U grades to count to fulfill various requirements.

Once a handful of schools came out with a mandatory pass/fail system -- and it's still only a handful -- we got inundated with additions to follow suit, as you know. One of the compelling arguments posed in favor of a mandatory pass/fail system was that some graduate and professional schools, like Neema indicated, suggested early on that they would consider pass/fail grades if it was an institutional-level decision, not one that was made by the student.

This fueled a fury, because those most hard hit by the pandemic would be penalized either for opting for an S/U, and therefore maybe appearing weak, or choosing a letter grade, but not being able to earn a good letter grade and having a bad grade on their transcript. Many graduate and professional programs across the country have since responded by issuing a statement. Sometimes they even have a revision to an original statement to indicate that they will accept pass/fail grades, whether the choice was made by the institution or the student, given the unusual times that we're in.

This is unfolding right now. I've gotten several updates today about the language being used by graduate and professional programs, including our own. A lot of them will also give students the opportunity to describe how they were impacted by the pandemic, in case they want to be able to provide context for their transcript from this semester.

I think we've covered most of the arguments in favor of the student-centered choice-based policy. I've gotten -- probably some of you have also gotten a lot of emails. I have gotten quite a few really compelling stories on all sides of this from students in such a wide range of disciplines.

One of the things that really resonated was when students argued that on the surface, a universal pass/fail system might appear to be treating students all equally and leveling the playing field, but that they don't feel that is true; that in fact, the opposite may be true, because everybody is in a different stage of their college careers. Some are performing well in the first half of the semester and feel like they've already earned great equity in the course. They have different needs, will face different family and personal circumstances and so forth.

Many students talked about actually struggling at Cornell during the first couple years or first semester, and a lot of students talked about how that was the case because they came to Cornell less academically prepared, from low-income first-gen background, for example, or from rural areas with no AP courses. And they are just starting to get in the swing of things and feeling really confident, and that this actually would hurt them because they can't maintain the momentum and improve their GPA to try to catch up.

Another point that I thought was a really good one was that while the assumption in that template email that has gone around is that students from low-income backgrounds would be disadvantaged by the need to work multiple jobs at

home, of course, we don't know to what extent this is possible in the current situation because of the lockdown across most of the country.

But for many low-income students, an important rebuttal that they voiced is that actually now they are in a better position than they may have been here on campus to focus on academics because they can continue to earn their federal work study wages even at home, even though they don't have to invest as much time in that work, so they can reinvest that time into their studies.

I've also heard -- I'll say one last thing. You'd be happy to know that students expressed the faith that they have in their professors who have demonstrated a deep commitment to their learning and also deep concern for the personal circumstances that students are facing. And they feel that, with the support of their faculty and academic advisors, they'll be able to make the choice that's right for them, whether it's to choose specific courses, to prioritize those and take the rest S/U, or to take S/U across the board. But they would like to be able to have that choice.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Okay, thank you, Lisa.

Risa will now present the resolution that supports -- Risa?

RISA LIEBERWITZ: Great. Thank you, Charlie. I hope that you can hear me okay. I know it's uneven, depending on who's speaking. If it really is a problem with connections or hearing, if somebody would just interrupt me, because I'm looking at notes, so I'm not going to be looking at the chat function.

Yeah, I'm here to present this resolution on behalf of the endorsers who signed it. I believe we're up to about 57 people who have signed it, including six faculty

senators. And this is a resolution to adopt a mandatory universal S/U grade policy for this semester.

We've already heard, I think, some very good presentations of the pros and cons of the different approaches, and I want to acknowledge at the beginning, and I think that this is indicated by what everybody has said so far, there isn't a perfect solution. We're in a situation of nothing being what it was, nothing being the expected, everything being upended. We're obviously, as we all know, in a global crisis.

And so what the goal of this resolution is, is to address one aspect of the impact of this kind of current, kind of uncharted territory of this crisis and the impact on the university, and specifically addressing the grading policy as a temporary measure for this semester.

As you know, this recommends a change in the grading policy for the semester to implement this mandatory, universal S/U grade policy for all courses. This would include an annotation on everybody's transcript to include the annotation that the grades for this semester reflect the Cornell policy in response to a current public health emergency, rather than students' individual choices.

And then the other aspects that we have in the resolution are the same as what the university's doing now in terms of meeting requirements for majors and minors, fulfilling graduation requirements and not counting against students' maximum number of S/U graded courses.

We believe, the people who have endorsed this and agree with this resolution, we believe that this is a temporary measure that creates a grading policy that responds

to the current realities of the conditions of students and faculty, that it's a reasonable and it's a feasible way for faculty to evaluate student performance under the current conditions.

For students, it's a grade policy that will level the playing field for all students. It will not please everybody, but we believe that it will help to mitigate a harm to students who are experiencing the most extreme hardships resulting from this crisis. And I want to highlight just certain points that support that overview that I just put out there.

With everything changing now in terms of the impact on universities, the online courses, I think we should really acknowledge that, as much as people are trying to do to make this work as well as possible, online courses being adopted in the way they are, are massively disruptive, they are qualitatively completely different from what we've done before.

In many cases, the pedagogy is going to be inferior because of the nature of the course delivery, even if people think that online learning can work. I have my own views on that, but setting that aside, some courses will simply be inferior in terms of how they are being experienced and delivered, and online is unsuitable for certain courses. We are doing this in a hurry. This is massively disruptive, and our ability to teach well is going to be affected and our ability to evaluate well in this new territory is affected.

Certainly, there's a massive impact on students who have been uprooted, who are dislocated. Everybody is stressed and anxious. But for some students, it's particularly extreme in terms of personal and economic hardship that will create particular obstacles for them to fully engage in online courses.

These obstacles are often related to existing structural, economic and social inequalities. They don't map on completely, but they are oftentimes intersecting very closely with existing structural inequalities. But while students are on campus, to some extent, these structural inequalities can be endowed with equal access to courses and facilities.

However, for many students now, the current crisis exacerbates those obstacles they have to deal with, economic obstacles, access to study space and the Internet, family care that they have to do, even without illness, but the onset of other illnesses, including the current pandemic, lack of access to good medical care -- are we okay? Can you hear me? Meeting rent that they have to worry about, child care, job loss in the family, possibly needing to get a job.

And Lisa gave us a lot of, I think, compelling stories of students who are saying keep the S/U policy as an opt-in approach, but there are also very compelling stories certainly for many students who are describing not only the immediate effects of this crisis, but kind of ripple effects in terms of their situation at home, with relatives, with the stress, the kinds of distractions, the terrible situation that they're in, which are really heart-rending. So we know people are having different experiences, but we also know that the experiences of those who are already overcoming obstacles are even more extreme.

An opt-in S/U policy, which Cornell's currently adopted, places these students who are facing these kinds of obstacles in an unfair and inequitable situation, where

they will be pressured to take a letter grade to avoid unfavorable comparisons with their peers.

Students with fewer obstacles will more easily pursue a letter grade, they'll achieve what appears to be a stronger academic record, while students with greatest obstacles will bear the adverse impacts of either choosing S/U and achieving what may appear to be a weaker academic record, or driving themselves to pursue a letter grade at whatever the cost, in order to avoid the appearance of a weaker academic record relative to other students. This is not just an individual choice. It is necessarily a choice relative to others.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Excuse me. See if you can wrap up. We need plenty of time for discussion. Can you wrap up in a minute or two here?

RISA LIEBERWITZ: Yes, I can and I will. So other colleges, as has been noted, have recognized that this is an equitable approach, and they have adopted a mandatory S/U. The Cornell Law School's done it, Harvard, Columbia, MIT, Stanford. This can free us all up to be flexible under the conditions and flexibility that will help students and faculty. We've also heard that for professional and graduate schools, including medical schools, some of them have stated that S/Us are not affecting their evaluation of candidates if the policy applies to all courses.

I also want to mention that the Student Assembly voted last night in favor of a mandatory universal S/U policy. They also recommended that the S/U policy be interpreted this semester as being at at least a D minus, more like a pass/fail, or above,

as opposed to the C minus. And I would note that Williams College is an example of a school that's already done that as well.

That does wrap up for me.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Okay, thank you very much. Why don't we go for people raising their hands, and we can then acknowledge you, and you can unmute yourself and say something.

JILL SHORT: Are you going to choose who goes first?

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: I don't see any hands. Why don't you pick out a question that came up in the chat, and we'll kick it off that way.

JILL SHORT: We have three hands: Ken Birman, Hakim Weatherspoon and David Delchamps.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Go in that order.

KEN BIRMAN: This is Ken Birman, Computer Science. First of all, I think as a resolution, this is premature, simply because we were shown it about an hour and a half ago and haven't had time to consult with our faculty colleagues. It's cosigned by people who are entirely in Arts, and so it doesn't really represent a consensus view across Engineering, CIS, Hotel, Law School, other units.

I think that this points more broadly to something that was made as a point -- in fact, I thought the points made were excellent by all three speakers, which is that the situation differs across pockets of the campus. The situation in Arts may well argue for what Risa favors. The situation at CIS, which is where I'm located, I think, favors some form of opt-in or opt-out, if ever that's where we would go. And the students have

been emailing me all day today about four to one in favor of opt-in policy, with the others very passionately saying what Risa was saying.

We have different pockets of students, and any mandatory solution to this is harmful to groups of them. And so first of all, I think it's very premature to vote on anything without talking to our colleagues. And secondly, if we vote, I would hope that we'll vote for the non-mandatory solution, which is opt-in, which is what the university seems to have already favored in the email we got the other day.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Just a comment and a reminder. As you know, almost everything we do in the senate is advisory, and also this has to be determined before Monday, but the next speaker was Hakim.

HAKIM WEATHERSPOON: Hakim, Computer Science, and I have two clarifying questions. So one of them was about the Option 3 and 4. I didn't quite get the difference between those two, so if you could just say a second about that.

The other one is for the technical solution, which I think was Option 3 and 4 again. Is it the case that the instructor would answer in a letter grade and then the system will somehow allow for unmasking or changing from S/U to a letter grade? What does the instructor do with the question?

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Neema, why don't you start.

NEEMA KUDVA: Lisa, I'm going to answer the question, then correct me if I say the wrong thing, yeah? Okay. So Hakim, it's Option 3, which is to allow students to opt in or opt out, however you want to say that, offer the S/U after receiving final grades.

And yes, in many ways, it's super beneficial, it takes all the arguments that are being made here to level the playing field into account.

It also allows students -- sort of acknowledges that the situation is changing very fast and we almost don't know what's going to happen even two or three weeks down the road. We're trying to do the best we can, given very uncertain sort of situations. Yes, it depends on the technology on whether -- what the faculty member will do would be put the grade in. And whether that then shows up as an S/U and can be uncovered to show the right grade really depends on whether our technological environment allows us to do that. That becomes a question for the registrar's office and for Lisa.

LISA NISHII: Right. Option 3 is after the grade is posted, students -- some have argued to have the option after the grades have been posted to choose whether or not they want to take the grade or instead change to an S/U. That would require grades potentially being posted twice, and we currently actually don't have a way to support that within PeopleSoft.

Option 4 would be everyone is S/U. The idea here is it's a universal S/U; but in case later a student's request transcript grade verification, that is it turns out they do need to have had a grade in a certain course, can unmask what grade they would have earned.

And also, from a tech standpoint, it's unclear how that would actually work. There's no way to record two grades in PeopleSoft, so would it be acceptable for grades, for example, to be in your grade book, faculty grade book in Canvas, but otherwise it's an S/U, but that's not an official grade. It's not actually recorded in the system, so

there's a slippery element to that. The answer is really, from a tech standpoint, both -- we don't know if it's even possible.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: David Delchamps has a --

DAVID DELCHAMPS: Yes. Just quickly, I think our learning outcomes are going to be worse this semester, no matter what we do. I think the quality of grade feedback will be worse this semester, no matter what we do. I think those are kind of givens. I think that in terms of learning outcomes, the opt-in or opt-out S/U option will be better. I think that's unequivocally true. I think there's more people who will cash out, if it's a uniform S/U.

And finally, I got a lot of emails, just like everybody else, from students, and I would say that the arguments in favor -- I should say the arguments against an opt thing, the arguments in favor of universal S/U, the only thing that people brought up that they felt was substantive was that an S would be perceived as or would be assessed as lesser than a grade, whatever. And I'm thinking that imputes an awful lot of pig-headedness or thick-headedness or myopia onto the assessors and perceivers.

Honestly, I do admissions for my department for transfer students, and I can't imagine looking at an application and saying oh, well, that person opted for an S. I'm going to think of that as less than the person who went for the grade. I think it's -- the arguments in favor of the opt were a lot more substantive, in my view. People who were clawing their way up to a good GPA after two bad years, coming from a disadvantaged background and also fellowships that require a GPA, they might change too. That's in flux. But anyway, that's just my two cents on this.

NEEMA KUDVA: If I may just step in for a moment. There's a comment I think I need to read out to everybody. The Student Assembly has voted on this as well, and their vote is 16-7 for a universal S/U.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Jill, what's the lineup look like on the chat list?

JILL SHORT: We've got Buz Barsto next, and Chris Schaffer.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Okay, Buz.

BUZ BARSTO: Thanks, Charlie. Risa, my moral intuition says absolutely to agree with your proposition about a universal pass/fail; but in canvassing my students in my class, I can see a lot of very coherent and well-thought-out arguments for the opt-in pass/fail.

In thinking about it over the past 24 hours or so, I keep coming back to this idea that if -- we are supposed to be one of the world's greatest educational establishments. And what we're doing, we're providing the sort of motor for social mobility. And if we opt out of giving grades, are we abdicating our responsibility and that sort of motor. I can't shake that feeling, if we walk away from giving grades.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Thanks, Buz. Chris Schaffer.

CHRIS SCHAFFER: Hi, everyone. Chris Schaffer from Biomedical Engineering. I'm very much in favor of the sort of opt-in for pass/fail. One thing that I would say, though, is because everyone's situation is changing so rapidly, it might be better to think of that pass/fail as more like a satisfactory withdraw, and that's the option that students have.

If things go really bad and a student is just not able to successfully complete parts of the course, they don't even have to have an unsatisfactory on their transcript.

They can just fully withdraw, as if they withdrew from the course by the standard. I think that would be deeply sensitive to students who find themselves in situations where they're just not able to complete the work associated with their class.

JILL SHORT: We have more speakers, hands: Neil Saccamano, Risa Lieberwitz, Michael Mazourek.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Neil.

NEIL SACCAMANO: Neil Saccamano, the English Department. I just wanted to explain why I signed as an endorser to the resolution. I had been satisfied with the opt-in S/U policy, as had been already established, until I started hearing from students, and particularly from students who were sending me comments on a petition that had 1,800 signatories. And that was confirmed by the Student Assembly resolution that also favored it.

The universally mandated S/U policy seemed to me to be the most equitable solution to the problem that the opt S/U --

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Neil?

NEIL SACCAMANO: Can you still hear me? I disappeared. Seems like my WiFi is glitching.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: You're back, yeah.

You're back.

NEIL SACCAMANO: Am I back?

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Yes.

NEIL SACCAMANO: I can see how this is going to go when I start doing online teaching from home, right?

It's very simple. My explanation is very simple. If the S/U option was instituted in order to protect the most-challenged students, the most-vulnerable students that we have, in recognition of the differences among our students, then it seems to me that the only way to really do that is to make universal mandatory S/U the policy because, as I've learned from posts from Harvard Medical School, certain universities will not distinguish between an S that is taken as a result of a medical or health concern or an S that is taken because it represents a lower grade. That ambiguity is built into the S, and it's only an option in courses that other students are taking letter grades.

The Harvard Medical School says it will accept S in classes where it's mandatory, but not necessarily in classes where it is an option. And that's the main reason why I decided to endorse this. I realize it has all these other disadvantages, as Risa said from the very beginning. It is not perfect. This is a tough situation. None of these options is perfect. I realize that some students may not decide to work as hard or as diligently in classes, if there's a mandatory S or P.

But again, my main concern is that Cornell look out for the least of us, those who are the most vulnerable, those who are the most challenged. And it makes no difference to me whether or not someone else thinks I can do more work now that I'm at home, because I have more quiet time, when that has to be balanced against someone having to take care of children because they're home from school and parents

who are not working, and then maybe having to figure out how to make time in order to do work. If you care about that student, you have to vote for universal mandatory S/U.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Okay, thanks, Neil. Michael Mazourek, I think his hand was up.

MICHAEL MAZOUREK: Yeah, so thanks. One of the things that I'm not fully understanding why we're not discussing it more is every year, I have students that something traumatic happens, something that impacts their ability to complete the course. I generously work with them on incompletes. I think we'll have much more students impacted negatively this semester than any other. We're still not sure to what extent.

In my course, it seems out of 60 students, so far, most are in a good space. Some of them are in really bad spaces. My plan is to work with them very generously on incompletes; one, to help them get all the content they paid for, to help them get the chance to get the learning they are going to need for all of these subsequent professions, and to balance where they are in a rough position.

And for me, in my course, I'm thinking that is going to be a big part of a fair way forward. I recognize it's going to be a lot more work, but I'm just -- I'm not really understanding that -- I haven't heard that entered into the discussion really yet, as we're talking about --

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Good point. Lisa, can you talk about incompletes, as have come up in discussions in the provost's office?

LISA NISHII: Sure. There was a committee with associate deans and registrars that talked about various academic policies over the last year. And one of the recommendations across colleges was to have a more standard policy about incompletes; that is, what kind of equity you have to have in the course before -- in order to be eligible for an incomplete, and then what happens after the one-year period is over.

The colleges decided that students should have 50% equity in a course and, then, when an incomplete is submitted, the professor would indicate what grade the student has earned at that point, the 50% equity or more. And then a year later, the incomplete would revert to that grade, if the student didn't complete the course.

This semester, though, the associate deans -- anyway, we haven't had a chance for that policy to go through the faculty senate, and agreed that rather than define with such clear number, 50%, that faculty can be more accommodating and flexible in making that decision about incompletes. The only thing that we want to keep our eye on is not putting students in a position next semester where they're buried under both incompletes and new courses. So trying to really help them finish up their courses with the extra time that they need is what we would, I think, hope to try to do for them.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: For a professor like Michael, who wants to, say, be very generous with incompletes and processing them, no one's going to challenge that, I would assume. Yeah.

JILL SHORT: Risa, and David Pizarro, and Joanie Mackowski.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Okay, three is all I can remember. Risa, then Joanie, and then --

RISA LIEBERWITZ: I just wanted to follow up on some of the things that have been said. One is, to follow up on Neil's points, in terms of looking at people's situations, one of the ways I think that we can pose this is asking the question of who should bear the burden of the outcome or the impact of the grade policy that we choose; that if we have this opt-in policy, it's the students with the greatest obstacles who bear the burden of that policy.

It isn't only the question of will an S be viewed as lower quality, but that's connected to the students feeling pressured not to choose the S, because they have all the same concerns that other people have about going to graduate school or doing other things. And so the pressure is on them, where they can least afford to bear that pressure, to make the choice to go for a letter grade.

Who should bear that burden? It certainly isn't the students who will be harmed the most, which I think is another way of talking about what Neil was also stating. I think that there's a real appeal to the notion of individual choice, and I'm certainly in favor of people having individual choices in many, many areas; but I think this is one of those areas where the collective good is what we should be going for, and we have to weigh those options and weigh who is harmed and who is harmed most and choose the one on the basis of that kind of equity, a mutual sort of equity.

I also just want to mention, for the incomplete issue, I don't know about all of you, but my experience with incompletes has generally been not a good one. It creates

an albatross over students that follows them around. It is so, I think, really impractical and unfeasible for us to think about incompletes in a situation which will possibly get worse.

I don't think that we can pretend that things have not changed. They have changed radically, and I think that the way we approach it has to be consistent with that change. Thanks.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Joanie. Joanie Mackowski, I think you were next.

JOANIE MACKOWSKI: Hello, thank you. I wanted to speak to the issue of our responsibilities -- Buz brought this up -- our responsibilities in regard to grading, in regard to excellence. And also, like Neil, when I first heard about this, I was not in favor of a mandatory S/U. But now I am. Our responsibility for students also includes usually providing a classroom, providing an equal access to the material that way. We provide the campus, which is that place where everything happens. And we're not providing that now.

I mean, I'm quite comfortable here in my home, and I'm getting my salary, and it's great. I'm concentrating and working just fine. But this is not the case, I can't project that onto my students. I think that we need to recognize that we are not fulfilling our responsibility to create the campus -- to create the environment where the learning happens. And because of this, I cannot, you know, hold the students to that they will fulfill their obligations in the same way.

And also, I just wanted to quote a little bit from Allison Stanger's article in "The Chronicle" of March 19th about universal pass/fails. She writes that -- she's the political

scientist at Middlebury -- the truth is that everybody would benefit from a pass/fail policy. Faculty members could focus on engaging students for learning in demanding new circumstances. Students would get a respite from direct competition with their peers to focus on both individual growth and doing their part in a common endeavor, a skill we are very much going to need in the months ahead. Much as it did in shutting down, the university would reaffirm its commitment to the ties that bind us at a time when the world needs it most.

It's not stepping away from our responsibilities going to universal pass/fail. It is our commitment to a level playing field and to reducing tension and focusing on learning, and not just on grades. I mean, on grades. That's it.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Thanks, Joanie. Jill, what's up next?

JILL SHORT: David Pizarro, and then David Lee, Chris Schaffer.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Okay, David Pizarro.

NEEMA KUDVA: Missed Jerry in the middle.

DAVID PIZARRO: Hi. First thing, I think it's very heartening to hear everybody speak with such empathy for the students. I think everybody who has spoken so far, it just feels nice that the students are being kept as the central focus.

It's such a tough question. I don't think that I've decided yet, but I wanted to present the possibility that if the discussion is focused so much on the signal value of an S at this point, it's not at all obvious that making a mandatory S/U is going to send the signal to all, say, grad, med, professional schools that the S is to be treated -- or to be

discounted. It still will be required for us to communicate in very clear terms that it was a mandatory S, that these were extenuating circumstances.

And even if we already know, say, that Harvard Medical School has said they're going to take this into account, it's not clear that all graduate programs will take that into account. And so the burden would be on us to communicate it clearly. And I have an inkling that if a school, if a program is already going to be listening to that communication, that they would be likely to also discount that semester, even if it wasn't mandatory.

You're going to be getting a ton of applications from a ton of different institutions, some of which switched to mandatory, some of which didn't. And if you're going to be reasonable enough to try to find which ones switched to mandatory, I think you'd be reasonable enough to take into account that this semester might have been weird for everybody, no matter what the school's policy was. I don't know; that's just a possibility.

The second thing I wanted to say is even though our discussion has been student-focused, I want to turn the lens a little bit to us. I'm not sure if this is the case at all, and it's certainly not an accusation. Everybody's working their asses off, that I know, to make this semester pedagogically sound, no matter what; but could there be a side effect that moving to a mandatory S/U will disincentivize professors to do the necessary work to have the gradations of performance evaluation? I don't know; I just wanted to throw it out there. Again, not an accusation.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Thanks, David. Those are good points. Jill, you see the list there. Who's next?

JILL SHORT: Jerry Stedinger.

JERRY STEDINGER: Jerry Stedinger from Civil Engineering. Maybe I'm going to disappoint David a little bit, but I had two points. One is, I'm not anxious to teach an all pass/fail course. It's really nice when seven students take it seriously and want to work harder and the grade is a real incentive that they recognize.

The other point I'd like to make is I feel uncomfortable with the university making a mandatory policy for all the colleges. In Engineering, we thought about this a lot, and we're going to give students the opportunity to select pass/fail courses they wanted to, up to eight or ten units, and this would override a policy that we had already debated and I think had agreed upon. Is it necessary for the university to push down on all the colleges and make them follow a uniform policy?

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Just one point; students take courses in colleges other than their own, so that argues kind of for a little consistency. Who's next?

JILL SHORT: Chris Schaffer.

CHRIS SCHAFFER: Hi. Chris Schaffer. Actually, I have a somewhat technical question for Lisa. It sort of strikes me that many of these things, or at least this Option 3 we're talking about, including this sort of grade/satisfactory/withdraw grading scheme, you have those three possibilities, that could be achieved just by being able to technically push out the date where students decide whether to drop a course or not, and the date at which students decide whether to get graded pass/fail or with a letter

grade. And then as faculty, we would just have to communicate individually with our students and record their wishes, and then we enter into the system as normal.

So Lisa, could all of that just be pushed out till after the end of the semester?

LISA NISHII: We've been aggressively exploring this as a way to try to achieve a solution that is maximally supportive and flexible for as long as possible without penalty to students. I don't fully understand all the ins and outs of the technical system, PeopleSoft underlying it, but I do know that there are a lot of rules that are built into the system and that moving the deadline back -- so originally, the drop deadline, which is the same as a grade change deadline, was March 17th, then pushed it back to April 14th, and then to April 21st, so that students would have two weeks after we went to online instruction.

I think that we can push it back all the way to the last day of instruction, which is May 12th, which would give students that much -- I worry about, well, what could happen between April 21st and May 12th, right? With the way the pandemic is spreading, we don't know; and a student can't predict, nor can the faculty member.

I think I still have to look at a few more things, but in terms of -- there are a lot of issues related to compliance here as well, and guidance that we're following from the New York State Department of Ed. Lots of things related to financial aid also that we need to be very mindful of; but from what I can see so far, I do think that that would be possible and potentially a wonderful solution for students.

What this would mean is until May 12th -- that's the last day of instruction -- students could manually go into the system to change their grading basis. It would take

quite a while for all of this to be reprogrammed. It's not like there's a switch that can be easily flipped to make this happen. They could also withdraw from their course without a W on their transcript until that day. Those two days would coincide, or those two events, so to speak, would coincide in the academic calendar.

NEEMA KUDVA: Thank you for that, Lisa. I just want to raise an issue that we've heard from different faculty. Now, for a student to be able to make a determination on whether they want to take a class for grade or for S/U or whether they want to withdraw, they're going to want to see that grade. So it means that turning the lens back to faculty.

All of you guys, 109 or however many of you are on this call, need to think about the fact, all of us need to think about the fact that we are going to be putting grades out there for students to be able to make these sorts of decisions.

And we teach everything, from small, four-person, very intense seminars to 800-person computer science courses or the oceans course or whatever other courses we teach. So we teach a huge variety of courses, 4,000 of them. There's 80,000 grades that are going to be submitted. But in order to allow students to have choice, we have to do the work of actually being able to give them that grade before whatever date we're going to be choosing. So we need to keep that in mind as well.

JILL SHORT: David Lee.

DAVID LEE: Yes, thank you. This is a really tough issue on both sides, or I guess there are multiple sides, and I see a lot of good reasoning on both sides --

JILL SHORT: We can't hear you.

DAVID LEE: Can you hear me now? I'm unmuted.

JILL SHORT: Come closer to your microphone.

DAVID LEE: How about now? Can you hear me now?

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Try it.

DAVID LEE: Can you hear now?

NEEMA KUDVA: Yes.

DAVID LEE: Okay. I tried my other microphone. Can you hear it?

JILL SHORT: Yes, yes.

DAVID LEE: Okay, thank you. All right, so three quick comments. I was saying that I believe this is truly an issue where there are multiple legitimate sides, as it were. One thing -- three quick comments. One is we've already effectively created a floor grade of a C minus, right, with the S/U option. So I think that's something to keep in mind, and so the argument that students are being disadvantaged, I think we have to keep in mind that they already expect to be -- a grade greater than a C minus, they can elect an S.

Secondly, and I guess I disagree to some extent with Allison Stanger's argument. You know, this is a unique semester. This is like camp stay, this is like 9/11. This is going to go down as a very unique year, and the learning environment has fundamentally changed, and I think we shouldn't keep comparing it to the standard learning environment.

I think we should accept it for what it is, a unique situation, and judge it in those terms. When all is said and done, I find it very hard to believe that any graduate or

professional school five or ten years from now is going to deny a Cornell student or former Cornell graduate admission because of what happened in spring of 2020. I just can't believe that.

And lastly, several people have talked about the learning environment. I think that if we have a mandatory S/U, I think for every student that's truly disadvantaged by the current policy, we're going to have many more that are just going to kick back for the rest of the semester. My experience is that many of our students are focused on credentials, and if they don't have the potential payoff of a good grade, I just see lots of my students kicking back for the rest of the semester, and I don't think that's going to be very good for the learning environment. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Buz Barsto.

BUZ BARSTO: Thanks, Jill. You called me out there. Buz Barsto from Biological and Environmental Engineering. I'd really like to thank Risa and Joanie for sort of being the voice of conscience in all of this, and I think you make really wonderful points.

And again, in my decision, what's an angle to take on this, I keep coming back to this thought that the sort of admonition to think beyond grades is perhaps reflective of a world that we'd really like to see, but doesn't really exist. We have to take responsibility for having created that world, where grades seem more important than scholarship, but it's the world our students live in.

And I think many of them, they feel like this situation is causing them to lose all control of their lives. And by taking away this opportunity to sort of better themselves,

we're sort of pulling the rug from underneath them, and I think we sort of have to own the world that we're in, unfortunately.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Thanks, Buz.

JILL SHORT: Bruce Lewenstein.

BRUCE LEWENSTEIN: Thanks. Clearly, there are strong arguments for almost all of these options. I'm finding that I'm concerned about our making decisions for students. I'm really finding the agency issue to be a strong one. We all got these various letters. I personally found some of the least-templated arguments, the most sort of individual heart-felt ones, to be from students who were concerned that we were taking away their individual agency, even when they were in quite -- already in difficult situations.

I think that the statement that Lisa put up in the chat, that Berkeley has just issued, confirms the kind of thing that David Lee just said, which it's really hard to believe that any admissions committee or, indeed, any employer who's looking at grades on a transcript is going to look at the spring 2020 semester with a fine-tooth comb as to whether or not somebody had a mandatory or an optional excuse.

I forgot to say, I'm Bruce Lewenstein from Communication. I'm leaning at this point towards one of the option versions. I kind of prefer Option 3, especially with what Lisa said, if we can push back the deadline to as late as possible, because it feels to me that that gives agency to the students, who ultimately are the ones who are having to make these choices. Thank you.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Thanks, Bruce. Jill?

JILL SHORT: Robert Travers.

ROBERT TRAVERS: Hey, thank you. Can you hear me? This is Robert Travers from History. Like others have said, I think there are very strong arguments on all sides of this question. I think none of us want to be making this decision in the middle of a semester.

And I want to follow up on what Bruce said about agency. I'm concerned about the idea of taking choice away from students. I guess, though, I feel that one of the most powerful arguments for a universal S/U is exactly that agency in this context is very unequally distributed, and that if I was a student facing a lot of challenges in the next two months, uncertain how I was going to access my online classes, uncertain how I was going to balance the difficulties in my life with my work, and I was listening to this conversation, I would, I think, maybe not feel that I had a real choice, if this was left up to students.

I would feel like -- because some of the things that the grad schools have issued saying well, if it's a mandatory, then we would accept it, but if it's not a mandatory policy, then that changes how we read the S/U, I understand they've been rolling those statements back, but it would still leave a lingering doubt in my mind.

I guess I feel like one of the strongest arguments for it is that sense of solidarity, that sense of pooling our educational resources, that sense of being there for the student who actually will not feel they have a choice to opt out of the grade, because they will feel if they do that, they'll be falling behind. That's a part that makes me anxious.

The second point I want to make is about this question of grades and learning incentives. I really liked what Joanie said, that learning -- how we measure learning is not simply a matter of grades. Now, I know what Buz says is right too. We live in a world where grades matter a lot. Grades are an incentive, there's no question, but they are also a disincentive in important ways.

They're a disincentive to risk-taking and experimentation and trial and error and taking courses where you'll learn a lot, but you might get a lesser grade. Just going forward, I do think this whole debate has raised for me a question of the limits of grades as an incentive, what grades actually incentivize, whether they incentivize learning or whether they incentivize a kind of risk aversion in our students.

Just something I wanted to flag for a longer conversation is actually what are the limits of grades. Grades are very important to our students. What are the limits of grades as a measure of education.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Thanks a lot. Jill.

JILL SHORT: Can we do Judith Peraino, please?

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Sure.

JUDITH PERAINO: Can you hear me? It's Judith Peraino in Music. Okay, great. So I wanted to speak to something that hasn't come up so far in the question of grading, and that is those of us who have a class that uses a lot of TAs. In a way -- and I'm coming out in support of the universal S/U, partly because of the ways in which I think it might ease up on the TA burden, and also to speak to the point of being perhaps more creative in how we are going to do assessment, which is what is coming to us, at least

from our dean in Arts and Sciences, this question now of moving away from exams, of trying to come up with alternative ways of assessing engagement.

I teach a large course that is filled generally. Almost half of the students take it for S/U anyway, this is the history of rock 'n' roll. They're seniors. They just want to have a fun course. And many of them are getting As anyway, in taking an S/U grade option. They are still getting As.

So I sort of don't buy that it's necessarily going to mean that students are less engaged. If they're engaged in the talk, they'll be engaged. So I think we have to have faith in that sort of interest in learning. But I do think that allowing the TAs to also experiment or be more flexible in how they assess, giving different types of feedback that doesn't necessarily compute numerically into that glandular level of giving an A, an A minus, a B plus. And I also think it will free students up from going into that kind of mania of why did you give me a B plus and not an A minus. That's where I stand.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Thanks, Judith.

JILL SHORT: Do you want repeat speakers or --

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Sure. I want to leave ten minutes at the end for Good and Welfare. We have a couple of people who want to speak, but --

JILL SHORT: Two more -- and Ken Birman.

KEN BIRMAN: It is Ken, but I think you said someone else's name first.

JILL SHORT: Yes. Chris Schaffer.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Let Ken go, then Chris.

KEN BIRMAN: I'm not going to make a remark on my own. I just wanted to say someone who's been listening in on this emailed me, a student talking about Option 3, and asking -- he like's Chris's point, or she, of extending the date.

So this is a person who self-identifies as being in a disadvantaged group, wrote a very long email, and I'll actually put it somewhere public where people can look at it. Basically argues very passionately that a mandatory S/U deprives him or her of control and that they've fought to the get to Cornell and fought to be successful in courses, talks about some courses where they received A minus grades at great effect and how proud they and their families were, and repeatedly emphasizes that a mandatory S/U deprives them of control, harms them and makes a presumption that because they're disadvantaged, that they don't have action in the situation.

And I think we've heard a few people talking about this. We should not presume that we're speaking for these people. Here's somebody precisely in the category that some people feel they're speaking from, in fact, completely disagreeing; wants control and opt-in S/U.

I'll say also I agree with the remarks that we shouldn't assume that medical schools and law schools are going to be rigid in looking at an S/U that somebody opted for this particular semester. To me, that makes very little sense. Any admissions group is going to be flexible. I'm going to put this somewhere, and I'll put a link to it right now in the chat.

JILL SHORT: Chris.

CHRIS SCHAFFER: Hi, everyone. Chris Schaffer from Biomedical Engineering. I wanted to reiterate the points that the person and -- brought up about how important it is to try to preserve choices that are available for students rather than continuing to curtail them, when we're all living in a world where many of our short to medium-term choices are being curtailed.

I think we also need to recognize that students know their situation best. I agree, there will be some students in truly dire situations, but it's not us that knows best what the situation our students is in. It is the students that know best what their situation is, and we should empower them with the ability to make the best decision for them about how to be evaluated, based on their situation.

I just want to emphasize, some of those situations could be really dire, and I think we need maximum flexibility, more than has been sort of casually talked about here today. Students should be able to have a letter grade, a pass or a withdrawal, like the course just didn't happen, and they should be able to select that after they know their grade status.

Lisa, the end of instruction is just not enough. I realize the technical challenges, but there are students who could have things happen late in the term, during finals week, things like that, where they should have the option to be able to just -- we do have to do something to minimize this perception that a grade versus a pass, withdraw evaluation, somehow one is better than the other. But I think we can do that through very clear communications about the motives and the goals of the policy the university is putting forth.

And then we have to, as the last speaker said, we have to expect flexibility from institutions in the future. I don't see students being penalized because their situation made it more appropriate for them to select an S/U or an S/W evaluation. That's the decision that private schools and medical schools, that's what they're basing the decision on, I just don't see that.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: I would like to sort of end this part of the meeting. Very valuable discussion. Let me just go over a couple of things. First of all, the audio will be posted online very soon after this meeting. You will receive two emails from me (Audio difficulties) -- and one for the resolution discussed -- that we have been discussing. Also, comments can still be hung off of the agenda web page.

All these things feed into what we will send the provost. The idea is to capture the various -- and those will be the things that will come his way and to his team and so on. I realize Robert's rules -- the timeline is crazy, but we have to -- communicating how we think about all these things to the provost.

Having said that, Carl Franck wanted to say a few things in the Good and Welfare section. So Carl, are you on the line?

CARL FRANCK: Yes, thank you very much, Charlie. Can folks hear me?

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Yeah.

CARL FRANCK: Thank you. I'm Carl Franck, Physics. And I appreciate the opportunity to share some thoughts on a different subject, and that was the concern over Cornell's finances at this time. I appreciate that the provost, Mike Kotlikoff, made a

very difficult policy statement a couple days ago on the matter of finances. He had to make some tough choices among competing interests.

And most importantly, I appreciate the effort that he's engaged in, the administration is engaged in to keep Cornell afloat financially, but I first have to say that the offer -- the allowance for our staff of ten additional health and service days is very far from being enough. I think we have to have leaders in preserving the opportunity for our staff to continue to work at Cornell at this time.

I also appreciate the personal contributions from our leadership to support financial aid to our students. But looking at all the financial pressures, I think we all have to make sacrifices, and especially look to tenured faculty salaries for across-the-board reductions.

Finally, referring to matter of donations, if we are to be donors, we must expect transparency, who's getting what, and we should have the option of directed giving, for example, to support our staff. I think we need oversight in the process from a neutral party, such as the ombudsman's office. Many of us may recall some bitterness about a decade ago from the protestations that our leadership made over what effects from divestment from the fossil fuel industry would make on our endowment, so I think we need some more transparency than we've had.

Just want to quickly close by saying I'm extremely lucky to be at Cornell, and I dearly hope we'll continue to flourish after this crisis has passed.

JILL SHORT: You have to unmute, Charlie.

CHARLIE VAN LOAN: Thank you, Carl. Anyone else on any topic?

Okay, well, thank you very much. We may have more of these in the coming weeks. And be very forthcoming, if you spot something you'd like to have broad discussion on. And again, you'll be hearing from me in the next hour or so, asking you to vote on these two issues. Thank you very much. Meeting's over.