



auckland university students' association

TE ROOPU TAUIRA O TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TĀMAKI MAKĀURAU

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The Clocktower
Princes Street
Office of the Vice-Chancellor
University of Auckland

Friday 24th April 2020

ATTN: Professor Dawn Freshwater, Vice-Chancellor
Professor John Morrow, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)

Kia ora Dawn and John,

The impacts of Covid-19 are causing unprecedented disruption to the way that students are learning and researching this year. Students have lost their jobs and sources of income due to Covid-19 and studying from home is not workable for many students, especially those with dependents, with poor wifi connections and for those in environments that are simply not conducive to positive mental health and wellbeing.

This disruption comes in the context of an already highly competitive post-study environment for our students. Grade Point Average (GPA) scores make or break many successful applications in the graduate job market and the GPA forms an integral part of the choices that students have for beyond their current level of study – whether that might be for further postgraduate study or simply applying to enter the workforce after study.

We acknowledge that the University, and the tertiary sector as a whole, faces a considerable challenge in continuing to teach and support research amidst this current pandemic. We would like to acknowledge and thank you both, and the University as a whole, for what you are doing in this space. The changes to assessment such as the 24-hour window for undertaking take-home assessments and exams and the Covid-19 Student Emergency Fund are very meaningful, positive steps to help our students.

However, in light of the highly competitive post-study environment that our students are entering into and the fact that we believe the University has an obligation to mitigate the negative impacts that Covid-19 has on our students' study, we are writing to request that the University strongly consider adopting an interim policy to allow students who achieve any passing grade that is less than the GPA they began Semester One with to have that Course noted as a "PASS" grade on their transcript and the result precluded from their GPA calculation.

We are asking the University to consider this approach for assessment as an interim measure to address the fact that this pandemic has caused considerable disruption on all of our students' ability to study, learn and research and because we believe this would be in keeping with the University's

own commitment to ensure that students are not further disadvantaged because of Covid-19. As our students are likely to enter into a difficult job market given the enormous economic impacts of Covid-19, our students are naturally concerned about what their GPA scores will look like at the end of this Semester given factors outside of their control.

We acknowledge that there is a potential moral hazard issue with adopting such a policy in that it might encourage some students to effectively opt out of their course before the end of the Semester on the comfort that they'll be able to achieve a passing grade with no impact on their GPA. However, in light of the circumstances we are in, we believe that the University can and should have faith in its students to uphold the scholarly values the University aspires for its students to have – that of self-directed learning, of scholarly inquiry and of self-motivation. The University has had to put considerable trust in our students to maintain their academic integrity in this environment of 24-hour take home assessments and examinations. We put it to you that if we have trust in our students to do the right thing here, we ought to put that same trust in our students to make the best choices for themselves when it comes to their studies, especially at a time like this. Furthermore, as the University already effectively has this policy in place for those students who score between a C- and a C+, this moral hazard already exists as students could choose to do the minimum required by them to pass in order to have their results precluded from GPA calculation already. We shouldn't incentivise those students who are able to perform above that grade range to perform below their usual level of performance because of the disruption caused by Covid-19 on their ability to perform as they normally would.

At a time when students are at home, often alone or in Flats with others, studying is a positive force and something that can help maintain wellbeing over this time. We believe that students will be much more inclined to participate fully in their studies, and perhaps more creatively too, if they can go into this Semester knowing that at least they won't be discounted if their academic performance suffers due to the unprecedented situation we find ourselves in. We also believe that this is a positive area in which students can be partners with our University – groups like AUSA, Faculty Associations and Representative Associations have a huge role to play in building online communities at this time to support an environment in which students are encouraged to study and be engaged. We have all been working on doing this and we relish the opportunity to do so.

Several overseas Universities have adopted policies giving effect to this, such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Stanford University. The University of Melbourne has also recently adopted the exact same policy that we are asking you to consider.¹ We acknowledge that the specific details of such a policy will need to be considered carefully if implemented and we appreciate that this would simply not be workable in programmes of study that rely on competitive entry such as the LLB Part I Programme or BSc First Year Biomedical Programme. However, we believe for all the reasons set out and the considerable global precedent that has now been set that the University should strongly consider adopting a policy to this effect.

As with anything that AUSA represents to the University, this policy request is endorsed by the AUSA Student Council which comprises the Presidents of our Faculty Associations and the School Associations belonging to the Faculties of Medical Health Sciences and Creative Arts and Industries and the Presidents of our Representative Associations such as Ngā Taurira Māori, the Māori Students'

¹ <https://students.unimelb.edu.au/student-support/coronavirus/information-for-all-students#wam>

Association and the Auckland University Pacific Islands' Student Association. We are confident that on this issue, we are able to represent our diverse student community.

We strongly hope that you will consider this policy request and we would be more than happy to meet with you to discuss this in more detail. We look forward to hearing from you and working with you.

Ngā manaakitanga,

George Barton
President

Emma Rogers
Education Vice-President

CC: Adrienne Cleland, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Operations), Brendan Mosely, Director of Campus Life, Joanna Browne, Director of Academic Services, Dr Kevin Morris, Director of Teaching and Learning, Anne-Marie Parsons, Associate Director (Campus Life), Student Engagement and Wellbeing