



March 24, 2020

Dear Students:

At this time of considerable challenge and uncertainty, the administration, faculty, and staff of the Sturm College of Law are committed to one paramount objective: the welfare of our students. Honoring that commitment requires compassion, creativity, and overarching regard for the best interests of our student community. With these considerations in mind, I write with an update on our grading policy, academic probation and dismissal policy, and conditional scholarship policy as they relate to the spring 2020 semester.

A. Grading Policy

Law deans, faculty members, legal regulators, bar authorities, and employers understand that law students across the United States are currently experiencing unforeseen and unprecedented challenges, among them: illness experienced by themselves, family members, and loved ones; anxiety; social isolation; financial insecurity; potential challenges in accessing medical or counseling services; access to internet connectivity; challenges in adapting to online learning midway through a semester; and increased pressures on time and study conditions due to family responsibilities or living arrangements. It is also widely understood that these burdens are borne *differentially*, depending on students' individual circumstances.

Over the past week, the administration and faculty of the Sturm College of Law have been carefully assessing the possibility of modifications to our grading system for the spring 2020 semester. This assessment has been shaped by input from the Student Bar Association and individual students, consultation with the University, benchmarking of peer institutions, guidance from the American Bar Association, engagement with relevant state bar authorities, and the perspective of employers. *At a special faculty meeting held yesterday afternoon, the faculty voted to adopt a system of Honors, Pass, No Pass for the spring 2020 semester.* As detailed in Appendix I, grades received by students at the Sturm College of Law in the spring 2020 semester will have no impact on their GPA or class rank. Although it was understood that students and faculty members held different perspectives on such issues, the resolution adopted by the faculty was viewed as being in the best interest of our student community.

B. Academic Probation and Dismissal Policy

*The faculty also voted yesterday to temporarily suspend the law school's academic probation and dismissal policy. As detailed in Appendix II, no student will be academically dismissed at the conclusion of the spring 2020 semester, nor will any new students be placed on academic probation.* In association with these measures, the faculty adopted additional guidance relating to participation in the Bar Passage Program and progress towards graduation, both designed to support students' academic and professional

development.

C. Conditional Scholarship Policy

Finally, in consultation with the Admissions and Scholarship Committee and the Assistant Dean for Admissions and Financial Management, the law school has suspended its conditional scholarship policy for the spring 2020 term. *No students will lose conditional scholarships at the conclusion of the spring 2020 semester, nor will any new students be placed at risk of losing them.* At this time of financial uncertainty, these measures are designed to maintain the continuity of scholarship support for students who currently hold conditional scholarships.

In closing, let me emphasize that the law school's administration, faculty, and staff are committed to supporting you during this difficult time – and beyond. We will continue to advocate for your interests, respond to your concerns, and make decisions that advance the interests of our student community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce P. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bruce" being the most prominent.

Bruce P. Smith  
Dean  
Sturm College of Law

## Appendix I

### Motion

The Curriculum Committee and the Faculty Executive Committee request the Faculty adopt the following grading policy for the Spring 2020 semester:

- Faculty will submit grades using an Honors/Pass/No Pass scale.
- In all required classes and in classes of more than 20 students, faculty may assign Honors to a maximum of 25% of the students. In non-required classes of 20 or fewer students, faculty have discretion as to the percentage of Honors and Passes.
- Faculty may designate a student as receiving the highest grade in a class.
- For all courses, Pass corresponds to any grade other than what would be an F on the usual grading scale. There is no mandatory curve. Faculty members may give a Pass to all students in their classes but may give a No Pass if warranted by student performance.
- Honors, Pass, and No Pass grades will not count towards students' GPA. Students who receive an Honors or Pass grade will earn credit for the class. Students who receive a No Pass will not earn credit for the class.
- Students who receive a No Pass in a required course will be required to repeat that course.
- Students' transcripts will denote the change in the Spring 2020 grading policy due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

## Appendix II

### Motion

In my role as Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, and in consultation with the Faculty Executive Committee, as well as the Chairs of the Curriculum Committee and the Examinations, Standing, and Readmissions Committee, I hereby propose a motion for the faculty to approve the following amendments to our current rules to apply for spring 2020 only:

- *Dismissal:* No student will be dismissed at the end of the spring 2020 semester. Students in their first semester of probation will have until the end of the fall 2020 semester to reach their half-way point and until the end of spring 2021 to reach a cumulative GPA of 2.3. Students in their second semester of probation will have until the end of the fall 2020 semester to reach a cumulative GPA of 2.3. No new students will be placed on probation at the end of spring 2020. Students who take a leave in fall 2020 will have to meet the requirements of this paragraph by the end of the next consecutive semester(s) in which they are enrolled.
- *Intermediate Legal Analysis:* Any student who, at the end of their second semester of law school at the Sturm College of Law, has a cumulative GPA of 2.7 or lower will be required to take Intermediate Legal Analysis *during fall 2020*. If, at the end of the fall 2020 semester, they still have a cumulative GPA of 2.7 or below, they will be placed in the Bar Passage Program. No new students will be placed in the Bar Passage Program at the end of spring 2020. Students already in the Bar Passage Program will remain in the Program.
- *Graduation:* In an exceptional circumstance, where a student has received at least a passing grade in all of their classes in spring 2020 but is unable to graduate because their GPA is below 2.3, and/or because of a change in how the Law School administers grades, the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, the Chair of the Examinations, Standing, and Readmissions Committee, and the Chair of the Curriculum Committee, in consultation with the student's professors during spring 2020, will determine whether that student should be allowed to graduate.
- *Notification:* The Associate Dean of Academic Affairs will notify all students currently on probation and all first year students with a cumulative GPA of 2.7 or below of these new rules in writing by April 9, 2020.