



**Howard University Student Association  
59th Administration**

MARCH 20, 2020

Dear Dr. Anthony Wutoh,

Hope you are safe and well, I am reaching out to you in hopes of joining the conversation regarding Howard's academic response to COVID-19.

**It is our researched suggestion that the University announce and enforce a campus wide pass/fail option for all 2020 spring undergraduate courses.**

As you are aware, the University's logical decision to close all campus housing during these unprecedented times has had a multitude of ripple effects on the student body. The main ones being as follows:

- A. Relocated students in non-EST time zones now face difficulties for online classes scheduled in Washington, D.C.
- B. Relocated students without stable internet access face difficulties at achieving an equitable opportunity to perform and participate
- C. Traveling students unable to retrieve their belongings from on-campus housing may not have access to their required academic materials
- D. Struggling students are facing the same unprecedented circumstances as the University, the added pressure of semester grades provide an unnecessary burden

While we recognize all students may not be directly facing these challenges, each listed concern is reflective of a general adversity affecting students across this country and abroad.

As Howard continues to provide drastic responses to virtually all aspects of campus operations (housing, programming, admissions) now is the time for a drastic academic response. The current environment for students is not suitable for aptitude in any subject to be accurately measured; similarly, we acknowledge that this virus also carries its own unique set of challenges for our professors and faculty.

As the representatives of students we are tasked with advocating for the most equitable solution. We present optional pass/fail credit assessments for all undergraduate courses for the following reasons:

1. Pass/Fail offers professors and faculty some remaining ability to evaluate their students performance this semester
2. Pass/Fail offers professors and faculty the ability to still assign and review assessments at their discretion; we add that professors should exercise extreme individual basis-understanding at this time
3. Pass/Fail would allow students to ease one heavy burden at this time which may be affecting the mental health of students
4. By allowing students the option to request a pass/fail grade high performing students are not negatively affected by a void academic semester (which would potentially lower a student's cumulative GPA)
  - a. Students can still, if they so chose to, select to receive all letter-grades this semester
5. Several institutions of similar prestige and rigor of Howard have adapted similar policies, some even taking more extreme measures. Please see attached "Academic Response Data" for more information.

We hope that the items and information presented are considered as the University evaluates its response. As the microphone for the student voice we are compelled to tell you that students, faculty, and professors are all struggling at this time; now more than ever Howard should and must lean into the community we cherish so deeply.

On Behalf of Students,

*Taylor Ellison*

59th President

Howard University Student Association

*Kylie Burke*

Chief of Staff

Howard University Student Association

## University Academic Response Data

Higher education finds itself in uncharted academic waters in regards to how to properly handle COVID-19 and the massive affects it is having on the calendar year. As many institutions continue to float in an indecisive, uncertain state of limbo some colleges are leading the charge.

As mentioned, several universities of similar prestige and rigor of Howard have adapted similar policies, some even taking more extreme measures. Stanford Law School's dean noted the inequality in test preparation that may affect students with later exam dates that have now been pushed back weeks, this helped her make the decision to transition to *Mandatory-Pass* credits for all courses. In California, a highly affected area that is home to several Howard students, Berkeley's President concluded that mandating Pass/Fail options for all undergraduate courses was ultimately the "fairest, most compassionate, and most equitable" way to move forward with grading under the circumstances."

The following chart below shares and catalogues College and Universities academic responses given the current circumstances regarding COVID-19.

University or College	Academic Response
Vanderbilt University	<a href="#">Pass/Fail deadline extended to April 10th</a>
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	<a href="#">No letter grades given to undergraduate or graduate students</a>
Smith College	<a href="#">No letter grades given to undergraduate or graduate students</a>
Georgetown	<a href="#">Pass/Fail available to all students</a>
Syracuse University	<a href="#">Pass/Fail deadline extended</a>
Texas Christian University	<a href="#">Pass/Fail deadline extended and policy amendment for Spring 20</a>
Northwestern	<a href="#">Optional finals across undergraduate classes</a>
Harvard	<a href="#">Pass/Fail concentration credits for certain undergraduate programs</a>
Stanford Law School	<a href="#">Mandatory Pass grade for the semester courses</a>
Berkeley Law School	<a href="#">Pass/Fail available to all students</a>
Cornell School of Law	<a href="#">Pass/Fail available to all students</a>

*All responses are cited in the hyperlinked article or journal.*