



SMU

Elizabeth G. Lobo
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Office of the Provost

November 16, 2020

Dear President Patrick:

Thank you again for submitting S-107-08 and S-107-09 on behalf of Student Senate for our consideration. After careful review and deliberation of both resolutions with the Associate Provosts, Deans, and President's Executive Council, we offer the following response.

S-107-08

In response to the challenges our students faced with transition to online learning in spring 2020, and in line with many of our cohort and aspirational peers, SMU made the decision to implement an interim grading policy for spring 2020. This interim policy provided students in undergraduate-level courses the option to select grades of Satisfactory ("S"), Satisfactory Minus ("S-") and No Credit ("NC"), rather than receiving grades on the traditional A-F scale.

This interim grading policy was developed due to the rapid and unforeseeable change from primarily in-person to a fully-online teaching modality in the middle of the semester as well as other unusual personal and educational circumstances arising from the COVID-19 outbreak in spring 2020.

For fall 2020, by contrast, students were given the opportunity to choose their preferred course modality (e.g., SMUFlex, fully remote) and, as of the date of this response, course delivery modalities have remained consistent over the course of the fall 2020 semester. Additionally, throughout fall 2020, we have monitored student academic engagement through early progress reports (EPRs) and mid-term progress reports (MPRs). Based on reviews of EPR and MPR data, we are not identifying trends to suggest that students are struggling to complete their coursework this year at a rate that is any higher than previous years.

As such, we have made the decision to retain SMU's current grading policy rather than returning to the interim grading policy introduced during the extraordinary emergency circumstances arising during the spring 2020 semester.

We recognize, however, the tremendous challenges students are facing in fall 2020 and that could persist until we are safely through the pandemic. One of the ways we have proposed to mitigate these challenges is through extending the deadline for course and term withdrawal for fall 2020. As previously announced, the date for course withdrawal and term withdrawal for the fall 2020 semester for undergraduate students has been

extended to December 2nd (5:00 p.m. CST). A drop or withdrawal at this point in the semester will result in a grade of W on the official transcript. Any withdrawal from a course or term may affect federal aid, veterans benefits, athletic scholarships and immigration status, so we encourage all students to visit with their advisors prior to making any decisions about course or term withdrawal in light of the extended time frame. This extension will not result in an adjustment to the University refund schedule. We also remind students that SMU has policies, such as the course repeat policy, in place to help students manage concerns about lower grades. See [here](#) for more information on these policies.

S-107-09

We continue to receive questions and concerns from some students about the decision to “stay the course” with the current spring 2021 schedule, starting our spring 2021 semester a week later than originally planned, on January 25, and continuing straight forward without a spring break through the conclusion of exams on May 12. Good Friday (April 2, 2021) will remain a University holiday.

We are aware of, and sympathetic to, the stresses associated with a course schedule that does not include built-in breaks and recognize the need to develop strategies to reduce the potential stressors brought on by a spring semester. However, we must balance these valid concerns with the need to promote campus health and safety during the pandemic. At this time, we believe that providing pre-scheduled mental health days throughout the spring 2021 schedule introduces too many risks to our ability to maintain healthy operations. Over the next two weeks, we will engage academic leadership and Faculty Senate leadership to make a final determination about whether it is possible to introduce additional breaks safely into the spring 2021 schedule.

One way that we will mitigate stress in spring 2021 is by giving students an opportunity to provide early-term feedback to their faculty on course content and delivery. We will charge the Center for Teaching Effectiveness (CTE) to develop an early term course feedback process, mirroring the end of course evaluations currently administered, as a way for students to share their perspectives on opportunities for improving the learning environment in spring 2021. We would recommend that survey data be made available only to instructors of record and their department chairs. We will also continue and expand upon our efforts to encourage faculty to follow CTE’s recommendations for Canvas course design and utilization as well as CTE’s recommendations to faculty for identifying and mitigating student stressors.

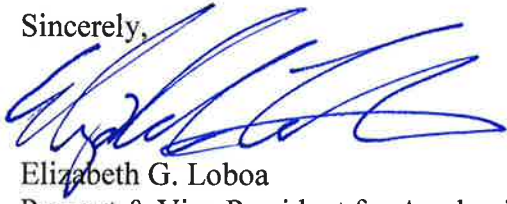
Additionally, we have heard from many students that the additional five minutes between classes that was implemented in fall 2020 to promote the safe transition between classes has caused additional workload for many students, as they are often required to make up these five minutes through out of class assignments. We will work with Deans and Department Chairs to communicate to faculty that the five-minute reduction in course time should not add additional course work.

Page 3

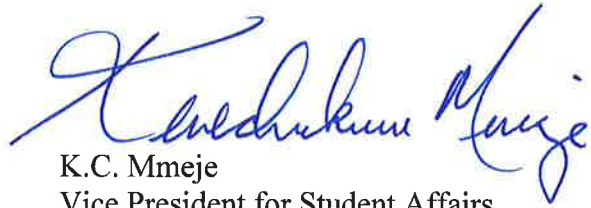
Lastly, we understand that there is lingering confusion about our COVID-19 classroom attendance policies as well as some concern about the inconsistent application of these attendance policies. We will work with Deans and Department Chairs to provide additional clarity.

We thank you, and Student Senate, for your interest in SMU's COVID-response and operational plans. We look forward to working collaboratively to limit the spread of COVID within our community.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth G. Loba
Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs



K.C. Mmeje
Vice President for Student Affairs