

## **SR004 - FA20**

### **Resolution Calling for New Academic Procedures during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Sponsors: Senator Robb, Senator Chenoweth

Co-Sponsor: Senator McMillan

Under the advisory of: Executive Secretary Meczyssine

To Provost Gillman, Assistant Provost for Faculty Affairs Yogan, Dean Kilpinen, Dean Allen, Dean Erhardt, Dean VanZanten, Dean Johnson, and Faculty Senate President Goebbert

**WHEREAS** The COVID-19 virus has brought unexpected and unprecedented changes to academic approaches that will affect Valparaiso University's operations for an extended period of time, and;

**WHEREAS** These changes have overwhelmed students, caused unreasonable stress<sup>1</sup>, and contributed to mental health crises, and;

**WHEREAS** The lack of any break in 13.5 weeks of instruction has affected students negatively, academically and emotionally, and while the attempt to prevent COVID-19 cases due to travel during breaks is understood, the lack of a single mid-week break or "Reading Day" has been unexpectedly detrimental to the student experience, and;

**WHEREAS** the compressed semester has resulted in an unprecedented workload not only on students, but also on faculty and staff, and;

**WHEREAS** The condensed semester of 13.5 weeks, compared to a usual 16 weeks, has led to faculty condensing the same amount of course material into fewer weeks, rather than accommodating fewer weeks with less course material, and;

**WHEREAS** The unpredictable nature of COVID-19 has caused students to unexpectedly quarantine for several weeks, leading to faculty confusion and difficulty with technology, which can cause poorer academic performance and an unnecessary burden on students, and;

**WHEREAS** The community trauma of a pandemic causes clinical symptoms of mental illness, trends of fear and worry, and layers of adversity<sup>2</sup> on a community-wide scale, and;

**WHEREAS** There has been an attempt to prevent negative academic consequences on students during COVID-19 from some faculty by providing extensions to coursework, providing the option of attending in-person classes online, and providing group projects as a way to divide the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jmir.org/2020/9/e21279/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ldi.upenn.edu/healthpolicysense/responding-trauma-covid-19>

course load, but these attempts do not lessen the amount of work that would be expected in a full 16-week semester without the individual and community trauma of a pandemic, and;

**WHEREAS** The overwhelming coursework, individual and community trauma, and fear and uncertainty of the 2020 election will culminate in final exams at the end of the semester, on which many students will underperform due to the compressed and hastily-taught coursework, and;

**WHEREAS** Having the option of taking a class as Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory lessens the pressure of succeeding academically at the level of a normal semester and lessens the academic workload for students who are unable to complete coursework without that decision negatively impacting their grade,

**LET IT BE RESOLVED** by the Valparaiso University Student Senate here assembled that we urge Provost Gillman, Assistant Provost for Faculty Affairs Yogan, Dean Kilpinen, Dean Allen, Dean Erhardt, Dean VanZanten, Dean Johnson, and Faculty Senate President Kevin Goebbert to consider the following recommendations and communicate them to faculty members as soon as possible:

1. To implement the following for the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semester:
  - A. Instill a guideline, recommendation, or policy to faculty that taking finals that weigh under a certain percentage of a student's grade be optional.
  - B. Allow students to take their final exams within a wider time period (ie, 6-8 hours) on exam day, not just during their 2-hour assigned exam time block, unless the final exam is a lab, clinical, or other mandatory synchronous exam that would be impossible to complete asynchronously; and/or, allow for the option of taking final exams online at the student's request, unless the final exam is a lab, clinical, or other mandatory in-person exam that would be impossible to complete online.
  - C. Extend the Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory Deadline for students to the last day of classes in the semester, and expand which classes can be taken S/U, especially to include classes required for a major or minor, with a limit of 1 major/minor S/U class.
2. To implement the following for the Spring 2021 semester:
  - D. Communicate to faculty that the standard amount of coursework cannot be covered in the shortened semester, and that syllabi should be adjusted to reflect that.
  - E. Incorporate a mid-week monthly "Reading Day" in order to provide a break for students, faculty, and staff to foster positive mental health and encourage better academic performance.

- F. To recommend that faculty be in communication with their students on a regular basis to ensure that students are connecting with their professors and the course material adequately.