

# Cornell University Student Assembly

## Cornell University Student Assembly

Agenda of the Tuesday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020 Meeting

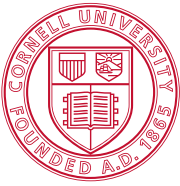
6:00-7:30pm virtually via Zoom (<https://cornell.zoom.us/j/115376253>)

### I. Call to Order

### II. New Business

- a. [S.A. Resolution #59: Support of the University Pass Grading System for the Remainder of the Spring 2020 Semester](#)

### III. Adjournment



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|                          |              |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| Originally Presented on: | 3/31/2020    |
| Type of Action:          | Legislation  |
| Status/Result:           | New Business |

## S.A. Resolution #59

Support of the Universal Pass Grading System for the Remainder of the Spring 2020 Semester

ABSTRACT: This resolution supports the Universal Pass Grading System for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester, due to unprecedented burdens that come with being home during the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic.

**Sponsored by: Natalia Hernandez '21, Liel Sterling '21, Moriah Adeghe '21, Gavin Martin '20  
Ahmed Elsammak '21**

**Whereas**, the unprecedented circumstances of COVID-19, students have been left without food security, internet access, and/or reliable housing are expected to perform at the same level as students who have stable situations at home;

**Whereas**, international students who have been abruptly relocated into time zones that do not align with regular EST class times will have severe difficulty attending classes that require live participation, such as seminars and sections;

**Whereas**, many students also have to care for siblings whose K-12 education has been suspended and are expected to provide childcare at home;

**Whereas**, some students may be caring for family members who are at grave risk during this time, or may be immunocompromised themselves;

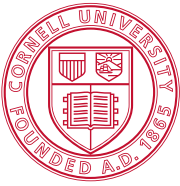
**Whereas**, when the lives of yourself and your loved ones are in jeopardy, academics should not be your primary concern;

**Whereas**, other universities have already begun to recognize the impact that a global pandemic has on students' abilities to participate in academia. An increasing number of them -- including MIT, Stanford, Columbia, Dartmouth, and Harvard-- have moved forward in implementing changes in their grading systems to lessen the burden of these drastic life shifts on our peers. We ask that Cornell follow suit;

**Whereas**, there is broad-based support for a Universal Pass system among students, alumni, parents and faculty members. In only five days, we have garnered over 1,800 signatures on our petition;

**Whereas**, on March 16, 2020 the Cornell Law School adopted a Universal pass/fail system to be used for the semester, acknowledging the various burdens on students during this time;

**Whereas**, Cornell's commitment to ensuring equality is met with equity can only be achieved in the form of a universal grading system;



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46 **Be it therefore resolved,** Universal pass is the most equitable solution because it does not  
47 stigmatize the pass/fail in relation to letter grades. A “Satisfactory” will always be seen as less  
48 than an “A.”;

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50 **Be it therefore resolved,** the Cornell Student Assembly supports the ‘Universal Pass’ and  
51 strongly encourages the University as a whole to adopt the grading model;

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53 **Be it finally resolved,** this resolution is to be immediately convinced to not only President Pollack,  
54 as dictated in our Charter, but also;

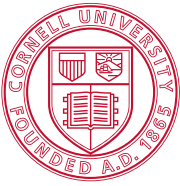
55  
56 The Cornell Faculty Senate, Executive Committee  
57 Cornell University Provost, Michael Kotlikoff  
58 Cornell College of Arts & Sciences, Dean Ray Jayawardhana  
59 Cornell College of Art, Architecture and Planning, Dean Meejin Yoon  
60 Cornell College of Engineering, Dean Lance R. Collins  
61 Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Dean Kathryn Boor  
62 Cornell College of Human Ecology, Interim Dean Rachel Elizabeth Dunifon  
63 Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Dean Alexander J. S. Colvin  
64 Cornell SC Johnson College of Business, Dean Kevin F. Hallock  
65 Office of the Dean of Students, Vijay Pendakur

66 **Respectfully Submitted,**

67  
68 Moriah Adeghe ‘21  
69 *Vice President for Finance, Student Assembly*  
70  
71 Gavin Martin ‘20  
72 *Vice President of Research and Accountability, Student Assembly*  
73  
74 Liel Sterling ‘21  
75 *Student Advocate, Office of the Student Advocate*  
76  
77 Natalia Hernandez ‘21  
78 *Director of Student and Campus Life, Office of the Student Advocate*  
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80 Ahmed Elsamak ‘21  
81 *Organizer, Big Red Pass*

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83 *(Reviewed by: Executive Committee, 5-0-2, 3/31/2020)*  
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### 86 Appendix:

Let's say Chad and Sabrina **both** want to go to Med School or work at ABC Company and both have a 3.5 GPA right now. Let's say they were on track to boost it by getting straight A's this semester by taking 6 courses they excelled at. Chad comes home to free wifi, a healthy family, and a personal library. Under Opt-in/out, he knows that he can manage home life and chooses to get letter grades. At the end of the semester, he accomplishes his goals and boosts his GPA to a 3.7.

Sabrina, on the other hand, has three younger siblings, her parents were laid off and are finding a way to take care of her elderly grandmother. There are two scenarios for her under Opt-in/opt-out.

- (1) Opt-in to Passing - Let's say she makes it through the semester and Passes all her classes.
- (2) Opt-in to Letter Grades - Let's say she "chooses" to do letter grades to pursue her law school dreams and works herself 24/7. Unfortunately though, one week after selecting this option, her family gets sick and the stress and anxiety really affect her performance. All the while, she must continue to work on her p-sets and essays. She isn't able to perform at her maximum potential and gets all C's. Or, maybe, the policy allows her to revert to Passes, but only after laboring through the entire semester past full capacity.

With either decision, throughout the rest of Sabrina's life, she will always be at a comparative disadvantage to Chad. Even if Grad Schools afford Sabrina the opportunity to explain away all the P's in her one semester, jobs and other external opportunities won't afford that empathy. Chad won't suffer though, he'll be ahead. A whole 6 A's ahead. He will have a higher GPA and he'll come out of the crisis with less home-life repercussions after the semester.

Any optional policy will stratify them based on their resources. And that's **not okay**.

If it's Universal Pass, both Chad and Sabrina will come out with a 3.5 GPA and can spend next semester, on-campus, equitably working to raise their GPA where they want it to be. If they are seniors and graduate this semester, they both come out judged equally on their previous merits. With Universal Pass, both will be able to spend this time taking care of their families and managing the immense stress of a world crisis, with grades and school work coming secondarily, as they should.