

May 13, 2020

Dear Vice President Beaudin and Vice President Adams:

The College Academic Standards Committee has expressed concerns that faculty and governance did not have input on modifications to current academic policies such as the withdrawal policy, made by the college administration due to the current COVID-19 situation. In addition, the committee has concerns regarding the level of communication of these extremely important matters.

The majority of faculty found out about the withdrawal policy change by reading College Brief #115 that was sent to the entire college community, including students. This college brief stated that students would have until the last day of the term to withdraw without an instructor's signature. However, that date was never specified. Had this information been shared with faculty leadership, this issue might have been addressed prior to a mass distribution. There has since been an email that was sent to students stating that withdrawals will be granted until May 19th but that information did not officially go out to faculty until several days later, which is concerning.

The committee feels that some of the communication that has gone out has caused confusion among students and faculty. One such example is the use of incomplete grades. We feel that the college brief and emails that have been sent to faculty and students have misconstrued the intention of an incomplete grade. The language did not convey that the request for an incomplete should be student initiated, include a valid reason, and is awarded at the instructor's discretion. Some of the communication has implied that it is an option based on grade status and a way to potentially improve a grade, which is not the purpose of an incomplete. College Academic Standards Committee has clear recommendations for the use of an incomplete as well as a form that clearly states the expectations and deadlines, which are located on the CASC Governance website and attached here. We would have hoped that these documents would have been included with any communication to faculty and students about the Incomplete, so that all are well-informed about the recommended guidelines.

In our last CASC meeting, the committee discussed this issue of the incomplete in great detail. We discussed potential problems that can arise for students who receive an incomplete, such as the possibility of it converting to a failing grade, which was not mentioned in the email sent to them. We would have hoped that the primary focus of communication with students would have been to encourage them to complete their coursework now rather than encouraging them to inquire about incompletes and withdrawals. To be clear, faculty are here and working hard to support their students in many different ways during these very difficult times. However, it is important that we uphold our academic policies and integrity while doing so.

We understand that these are uncertain times, but Suffolk County Community College has a long history of shared governance. And it is clear that we all have the student's best interest in mind. However, we hope that moving forward, faculty input is solicited regarding academic policy decisions and that faculty are aware of any decisions before they are disseminated to students.

Respectfully,

The College Academic Standards Committee

ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE
SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE USE OF THE INCOMPLETE
GRADE

The current policy of the college regarding the granting of the “INC” grade states:

INC INCOMPLETE

Students who are ill or are unable for other valid reasons to complete the semester’s work may, at the discretion of the instructor, receive an INC on their transcript. All work must be completed within the first four weeks of the subsequent semester; otherwise, the INC will automatically become an F.

It is the opinion of the CASC that the Incomplete grade should be reserved for unique circumstances and should not be used simply because a student failed to show up for a final exam or turn in a final paper. This grade is a privilege that should be reserved for students in good standing. In extraordinary circumstances, and with a mutual understanding between the student and the professor, the “INC” grade allows for the completion of coursework rather than a total abandonment of a student’s efforts. The Incomplete grade should be *requested by the student* for a particular reason. To aid in the productive use of this grade, we have developed the following document that the professor can use to clarify expectations for the student and to maintain standards in the application of this unique grade.

Request for an Incomplete Grade

Current Date: _____

Student Name and ID#: _____

Faculty Name: _____

Course: _____ CRN: _____

Semester: _____

This document indicates a formal request for an Incomplete Grade from the above student.

In the space below the faculty member should indicate what work needs to be completed:

The above work needs to be completed by _____ in order for a final grade to be calculated.

The student understands that an "INC" will automatically turn into an "F" if the work has not been completed and the grade has not been changed by the professor four weeks into the subsequent semester.

Signature of student: _____ Date: _____

Signature of faculty member: _____