



Revisions to Proposal for Updating Grading Policies

March 30, 2026

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Undergraduate Educational Policy (EPC), Professor Amanda Claybaugh, Dean of Undergraduate Education, will move:

1. That for internal purposes such as honors, prizes, and awards, the College use average percentile rank (APR) rather than average grade (GPA) for quantitative comparison of student performance;
2. That instructors be allowed and encouraged to submit to the Registrar with their letter grades any scoring or ranking of the students consistent with the letter grades, to be used by the Registrar in calculating the percentile rank of the students in the course;
3. That instructors in ~~letter-graded~~ Harvard College courses **with undergraduate enrollment** may award A grades to at most 20 percent of the final ~~undergraduate~~ ~~letter-graded~~ course enrollment plus 4, with other letter grades, including A–, not subject to a limit, and that this policy be broadly advertised, including interpretive text on transcripts;
4. That courses may petition the Office of Undergraduate Education or its designee committee by a specified date, before the course registration period, to opt out of the limit on A grades, with the grading basis for courses that opt out being SAT/UNSAT, and that opted-out courses will not participate in the calculation of any internal and external metrics of performance;
5. That courses graded on the SAT/UNSAT basis be augmented with a further grade, SAT+, to be issued at the instructor's discretion to recognize students whose performance in the course has gone well beyond the minimal expectation for the SAT grade;
6. That no Faculty policies, including calculation of internal and external metrics for honors and prizes, may be sensitive to the distinction between SAT and SAT+ grades;
7. That a committee be appointed by the Dean of Harvard College to ease the implementation of and transition to the policy, and to address challenges that may arise during the transition; and
8. That this policy be effective as of the fall 2027 term, and reviewed at the end of the third academic year of its institution.

Notes on changes

Item 3: Course basis for 20% calculation

We clarify that the courses subject to the cap are all letter-graded FAS courses with undergraduate enrollment. The prior wording, “Harvard College courses”, inadequately picked out the pertinent set of courses.

We further modify the set of enrollments that the “20% of enrollment” applies to, by adding PA/FL enrollments. As previously specified, the 20% applied to students completing the course under a letter grade, for consistency with the cohort that would be limited by the cap. The change to include PA/FL students in the basis on which the 20% is calculated recognizes the difficulty in obtaining reliable early estimates of the basis for the cap and hence the cap itself. Modeling the change showed only a minimal effect on the effective cap.

Items 5-6: Augmenting the SAT/UNSAT opt-out

In courses for which comparative distinction among students does not match the pedagogical structure, the instructor may opt out of the cap on A grades by using the SAT/UNSAT grading framework. This framework is already used for this purpose in courses such as tutorials, first-year and house seminars, practicums, and reading and research courses.

However, in the course of our many discussions among faculty and students, we have heard consistent feedback that the SAT/UNSAT framework is deficient in not allowing for any recognition of performance beyond the minimal expected. The inability to recognize students who go beyond mere avoidance of unsatisfactory performance is frequently cited as demotivating for students in such courses. This issue with SAT/UNSAT is not unique to its use as an opt-out for the grading proposals; similar complaints have been expressed in its use for first-year seminars, tutorials, reading and research courses, and the like. However, it does also undermine the value of the framework as an opt-out from the A cap.

We therefore propose that the SAT/UNSAT grading scheme be augmented with a third grade of SAT+, to be issued at the instructor's discretion to recognize students whose performance in the course has gone well beyond the minimal expectation for the SAT grade. The option of this additional recognition is helpful not only for courses opting out of the A-grade cap, but also other courses whose pedagogical structure better matches the SAT/UNSAT framework. (Faculty have noted similar demotivation among students in first-year seminars, tutorials, and the like.)

In designing this extension to the SAT/UNSAT grading framework, care must be taken in thinking through the incentive structure it would generate. In particular, we are wary of reproducing a kind of grade inflation in this alternate grading framework, whereby SAT+

grades become the expected default grade over time, eliminating their utility as means of recognizing superior performance and of motivating continued engagement.

Although no limit is placed on the proportion of SAT+ grades issued in a course (doing so would be contrary to the principle of the opt-out), nonetheless it is generally expected that the SAT+ grade would be issued judiciously.

Like the SAT grade, the SAT+ grade would not affect calculation of internal or external metrics such as GPA or APR, first, because incorporating SAT+ or SAT into the calculation of metrics would be inconsistent with its use as an opt-out; and second, because (unlike the UNSAT grade, which is by faculty vote recognized as equivalent to E and other failing grades) there is no principled basis on which to specify a letter-grade equivalent for SAT+ or SAT.

Any treatment of SAT+ and SAT differently, beyond recording on the transcript, could lead to replicating the grade inflation problem within the SAT/UNSAT framework that we are attempting to address with the current proposal. For instance, concentration policies that require a SAT+ grade for a SAT/UNSAT course to count towards the concentration should not be allowed. More generally, no Faculty policies should be sensitive to whether a student received a SAT+ or SAT grade in a course.

Item 7: Effective date

We clarify that the implementation of the grading proposal requires a ramp up period to allow instructors to make whatever changes to their courses they feel will fit best with the new grading proposal, and for the various administrative units to support the grading changes, by specifying an effective date for the changes after an appropriate implementation period.