

## **MSU's Grading Policy Option: Implications for Graduate and Professional School Applications**

Provided by JMC Career Services

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In an April 13, 2021 message, the MSU Provost's Office announced that the university will offer its Satisfactory/Not Satisfactory (S/NS) binary grade reporting option for undergraduate students through summer 2021. Summer 2021 is the last semester MSU expects to offer its S/NS grading option. View the Provost's latest communication [online here](#), and check out MSU's FAQ document related to grade reporting [here](#).

Every student is encouraged to speak with their advisor(s) to help navigate a best course of action based on individual circumstances. This brief memo is meant to outline some issues worth introducing into those conversations.

### **How will graduate and professional schools view grades reported as S/NS when students apply to their institutions? Will we have to provide some kind of conversion on the transcript?**

Like MSU, many institutions have gone to a binary grading system since the pandemic began. Generally, it is expected that graduate and professional schools will take the unique circumstances surrounding COVID-19 into account as they consider applications. The university's FAQ document related to grade reporting notes, "We can reasonably expect that graduate and professional schools will [keep our] unique circumstances in mind as they consider applications. MSU will also put on transcripts a statement describing the semester (and associated grades) as having occurred under unique circumstances."

Wondering how a specific institution you're considering as an option for professional study might approach a binary grade on your transcript? Reach out to their Admissions/Recruitment Office to have a conversation and gather insights that can empower you to make an informed decision.

### **Will I be able to explain to potential graduate and/or professional schools why I opted for the S/NS grading scale vs. a numerical 0.0-4.0 scale?**

In most cases, yes. Many advanced degree programs invite applicants to submit an addendum or diversity statement alongside their other application materials to provide an explanation for anything on their academic record they think deserves some special context.

### **I'm worried about being judged or penalized by an advanced degree program for my decision to report my grades on the S/NS scale.**

Remember that the institutions considering your candidacy will, in most circumstances, ask you to compose a personal statement to offer insights into your motivations for graduate study and your background/strengths as a student. Your perseverance in the face of COVID-19 may be an appropriate and powerful way to demonstrate your ability to tackle and overcome academic challenges and an interesting part of your "story" to share with admissions committees. Think about the ways you've grown as a student during the pandemic and how you might talk about your adaptability in the face of adversity in your application essay(s).

### **Who can I talk to more about this?**

Feel free to connect with JMC's Career Consultant, your Academic Advisor, and even faculty you have good relationships with for additional insights and considerations.

## **Sources**

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Michigan State University. (2021, April 20). *MSU Guide to Remote Access: FAQ for Students*. <https://remote.msu.edu/grading-option/faq.html>

Michigan State University. (2021, April 13). *Summer and Fall Planning Update*. <https://provost.msu.edu/communications/Summer-and-Fall-Planning-Update.html>