

Proposal to include the “FW” as a grade option at Santa Monica College

The “FW” grade is a more equitable and accurate reflection of a grade notation for students. It creates a distinction between:

completing the course requirements and taking the final but failing to master the course objectives

versus

failing due to lack of attendance/participation in assignments and not taking the final, and failure to withdraw.

Grades have a profound long-lasting effect on students (especially our first-generation students, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students). Many community colleges and universities use various grading symbols to differentiate between grades earned and grade symbols for students not timely withdrawing.

The proposed grades at SMC for students failing would be an “F” or “FW”.

Some examples are:
(calculated into gpa just like an “F”):

- WF: Withdrawal Failing
- UW: Unofficial Withdrawal
- WU: Withdrawal Unauthorized
- QF: Quit Fail
- FS: Failure Stopped Attending
- FW: Failing to Withdraw
- FX: Failed due to Attendance
- FN: Failed due to Attendance

Instructors may also initiate a faculty withdrawal of students for non-attendance/substantive participation as noted on their course syllabus.

The current SMC regulation states for federal financial aid purposes, the financial aid office must report attendance status of students who are assigned “F” grades. It reads as follows:

Note: The instructor issuing an “F” may be asked by the Financial Aid Office to verify if the “F” was the result of ‘nonattendance.’ Nonattendance means your last attendance date —or, if enrolled in an online or hybrid class, the last date of substantive participation — was prior to the 60% point of completion of the course. Poor performance means participation after the 60% point in the course and earned an “F”. Nonattendance may be grounds for return of financial aid funds.

F & FW Grade FAQ

This is to be used only as a general guideline. It is ultimately up to the academic and professional judgment of the each faculty member to determine the assignment of individual grades.

Explain the difference between an “F” and “FW” grade?

An “F” grade indicates that a student attended, participated and completed the course but failed to master the course curriculum.

An “FW” grade indicates the student **stopped attending/participating in a course after the “last day to withdraw” deadline and subsequently did not submit any work or participate in any exams**. The student could have started meeting your attendance/participation policy in your syllabus and then stopped attending/participating after the “W” deadline. They may have done some of the work or taken some of the exams prior to the deadline. This means that the student failed the course due to not completing/participating in the required amount of course work/assignments.

The grade value of both symbols is the same, zero points.

Why have two ways to document failing work?

It allows for more accurate tracking of student work. It creates a distinction between completing the course requirements but failing to master the course curriculum content versus failing due to lack of attendance/participation and failure to withdraw.

I’m still confused. Can you please elaborate?

The key is what happened **after** the “last day to withdraw from a course” deadline.









- Did the student continue to submit work even minimally?
- Did the student take the final exam?
- Did the student continue to attend/participate even though you did not receive any assignments?

In any of these cases, the student would earn the grade that matches what you’ve outlined in your course syllabus. If the grade is a failing one, the student would earn an “F”.

If the student stopped attending/participating and subsequently, there was no activity of any sort including submission of assignments, exam participation, etc. after the “last day to withdraw from a course” deadline. The grade would be an “FW”. See the chart on the next page.

**The last day to withdraw from a course:
through the 75th percentile of the course length**

When Should I assign an "F" or an "FW"?

	"F"	"FW"
Student attended/participated and completed course but failed at mastering the course curriculum/objectives.		
Student stopped attending/participating after the "last day to withdraw from a course" deadline without achieving a final passing grade.		
Student continues to attend/participate class after the "last day to withdraw from a course" deadline but turns in less than the required number of assignments or performs unsatisfactorily on exams.		
Student stops attending/participating after the "last day to withdraw from a course" deadline but turned in a few assignments or took an exam or two after deadline to withdraw.		
Student attends/participates class after the "last day to withdraw from a course" deadline but has not done any work.		
Student attends/participates class after the "last day to withdraw from a course" deadline but has not done any work. However, does take the final exam.		
Student in online course stops submitting assignments but does read the assignments.		
Student in online course does not turn in any assignments but takes the final.		
Student stopped attending/participating after the "last day to withdraw from a course" deadline and does not participate/turn in academically related activities and does not participate in exam(s).		