

Law School Grads Divided on Pass/Fail Grading



There is a hung jury among recent law graduates regarding the swift move to pass/fail grades at most law campuses amid the coronavirus pandemic this spring, [according to a recent survey](#).

Of the nearly 200 law graduates polled by [Kaplan Test Prep](#), 48% said they supported pass/fail grading, while 41% said they opposed it, and the remaining 11% were unsure of what to think about the transition.

The grading policy emerged as the most widely adopted system among law schools in response to the COVID-19 outbreak in late March and a swift shift to fully online classes.

Almost 80 law schools had adopted mandatory pass/fail grades for the semester, including all but two of the T-14 schools. (Georgetown and University of Michigan Law Center gave students the option of going pass/fail after they see their spring grades.)

[Legal Academics and experts were also split on the decision](#), with some debating that the grading policy is the most reasonable approach during this anxious time, while others are saying that students must learn to be resilient amid adverse conditions.

Law school administrators argued that the grading scheme would reduce the pressure law students were experiencing at a time of uncertainty and would level the playing field for students who were attending class and studying under challenging conditions.

However, the law students opposing the shift from traditional grading argue it takes away their heir competitive advantage when applying for jobs and internships, according to the survey. Law firms have also echoed this sentiment, saying it makes it harder for them to decide who to hire.

“These are unparalleled times for everyone, and legal education certainly isn’t immune from changes that were once unthinkable just six months ago. It’s quite understandable that law schools have moved to pass/fail grading on a temporary basis since students are already stressed out enough thinking about how to stay healthy, secure a job, and prepare for the bar exam. Combining that with the naturally hyper-competitive nature of law school could add to that stress, adversely affecting students’ mental health. Students’ physical and emotional well-being must always take priority, perhaps now more than ever,” [said Tammi Rice, vice president of Kaplan’s bar prep programs](#).

[According to the survey](#), there is a good chance for any support of pass/fail grading to melt away once the pandemic is over.

When asked about the future support of the pass/fail system, 63% of respondents opposed maintaining the grading policy, while only 25% said they want it to remain. The remaining 12% aren’t sure.

[Harvard Law has already announced](#) that it is switching back to the traditional grading system in the fall semester.

“It’s highly unlikely pass/fails grading will be maintained once the pandemic subsides. Students who are looking to work for top law firms or secure prestigious internships know that high grades help differentiate them from others vying for those same positions and most are loath to give that up. It’s important to note that the pandemic is still a long way from being over and more significant changes to legal education, which already includes online learning, are likely on the way. Students should continue to make their voices heard and also adapt,” [said Rice](#).