

# AMHERST COLLEGE

2021–2022

## Academic Policies and Procedures

*The Office of Institutional Research  
and Registrar Services*





# Academic Policies and Procedures

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**T**his document includes an overview of academic policies and procedures for faculty and staff at Amherst College. More detailed information related to policies in this document are found in the *Amherst College Catalog* and *Faculty Handbook*. Academic calendar dates are available on the college website, including important dates and deadlines.

**Important Links:**

- *Amherst College Catalog* - <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/473635>
- *Faculty Handbook* - <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/82602>
- *Student Code of Conduct* - <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/531270>
- Academic calendar - <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/74852>
- List of faculty committees - <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/80811>
- Office of Accessibility Services- <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/64992>
- Registrar's site - <https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/Registrar>

## **Grading Policies**

*Grading deadlines are set by faculty policy. Midterm and final grading policies are found in the Faculty Handbook and Amherst College Catalog. Directions for how to submit grades as well as grading deadlines for the current academic year are available on the website of the Office of the Registrar.*

### **Midterm Grades**

At the midterm of each semester, faculty should plan on entering midterm grades for students who are on track to receive D or F letter grades in their courses. This information is used by the Office of Student Affairs in order to send warning letters and to support students throughout the rest of the semester. Faculty are not required to enter midterm grades for students who are on track to earn higher than a D letter grade, but they may choose to communicate concern for the academic success of the student to the student and to the student's class dean. Faculty may also submit comments to the class dean via AC Data.

### **Final Grades**

Fall semester final grades are due by noon on the date published on the registrar's website. Spring semester final grades are due no later than 9:00 a.m. on the Monday after the last day of exams for graduating seniors and all E class students participating in commencement. All other final grades for students not graduating are due on the Wednesday after the last day of exams.

### **Completion of Work and Policy on Extensions**

Examinations are held at the end of each semester and at intervals throughout the semester in many courses. After final grades are reported, the record for the semester is closed. In conformity with the practice established by the faculty, no extension of deadline is allowed for papers, examinations, and laboratory or other course work beyond the date of the last scheduled class period of the semester, unless an extension is granted in writing by both the instructor and the class dean. Students will not be allowed to register or participate in add/drop for the subsequent term until all grades from their previous semester are recorded by the registrar.

Final exams are scheduled after faculty notify the Office of the Registrar at the beginning of each semester regarding the type and length of the exam (two or three hours). A student who cannot attend a final examination may be granted the privilege of a makeup examination by the instructor in consultation with the class dean, who will arrange the date of the examination with the instructor. For students needing accommodations for their exams, faculty may contact the Office of Student Affairs to make arrangements for an exam proctor. A final examination may be postponed only with the approval of the instructor and class dean.

Extensions may be granted beyond the final examination period with approval of the instructor and the class dean. In such cases, the instructor must submit a request for extension to the Office of Student Affairs by the end-of-semester grading deadline. The request shall indicate the extension deadline and default grade, which the registrar records only if the instructor does not submit a final grade by the extension deadline. The instructor should record the incomplete and default grade information via AC Data.

Faculty should work with class deans on any extension that goes beyond the last day of final examination period. This will assist class deans and the registrar when following up with missing grades and students experiencing medical or personal issues.

## **Grades and GPA**

In spring 2021, the faculty approved a new grading scale. The grade of A+ is still assignable, but now has the same weight as an A for calculations of GPA and class rank. The faculty has also adopted a 4.00 GPA system. The Office of the Registrar will provide a numerical GPA to students or their advisor upon request. The registrar will also verify students' GPA for graduate school, fellowship, or academic award applications.

Grades in courses are reported in three categories:

Passing Grades = A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D, P

Failing Grade = F

Incomplete Grades = I

Term averages and cumulative averages are reported on a 4.0-point scale rounded to the nearer whole number letter grade. The conversion equivalents are: A+ = 4.00, A = 4.00, A- = 3.67, B+ = 3.33, B = 3.00, B- = 2.67, C+ = 2.33, C = 2.00, C- = 1.67, D+ = 1.33, D = 1, D- = 0.67, F = 0. A

Pass does not affect a student's average.

## **Pass-Fail (P/F) Grading Option**

The aim of the pass-fail (P/F) option is to encourage students to take intellectual risks, to explore the breadth of Amherst's open curriculum, and to reward students for engaging fully in all their courses. Under this option, students may elect to declare one course per semester, and no more than four courses over four years, to be taken pass-fail. A declaration of pass-fail requires the permission of the student's advisor(s) and must be made before the first day of the exam period. If a student designates a course pass-fail, the student's transcript will have a "P" recorded in the case of passing grades ("D" or higher). No grade-point equivalent will be assigned to a "P." If the letter grade assigned by the instructor is an "F," an "F" will be recorded on the student's transcript and will count toward the student's GPA and class rank. Once students have declared a course pass-fail, they cannot later opt for the grade. Students admitted as first-year students may elect the pass-fail option four times during their Amherst College career. Transfer students admitted as sophomores shall have three pass-fail options, and those admitted as juniors shall have two.

Students may not take a first-year seminar pass-fail. Departments and programs may decide not to accept courses taken on a pass-fail basis in fulfillment of major requirements. Each department's and program's policy on accepting pass-fail grades toward major requirements must be included in the *Amherst College Catalog* and in other departmental and program materials.

The FGO has been discontinued by the faculty. Any use of the flexible grading option (FGO) in spring 2020 and one use of the FGO in each term of the 2020–2021 academic year will not count toward the maximum number of pass-fails allowed during a student’s time at the college. Pass-fails or FGOs used prior to spring 2020, or in addition to the one allowed in each term of 2020–2021, will count against each student’s allotted number of pass-fails, as defined above.

### **Change-of-Grade Process**

The change-of-grade process begins with the instructor of the course. If the student is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the instructor, the student may appeal to the provost and dean of the faculty. (See *Student Code of Conduct-The Resolution of Student Grievances with a Member of the Faculty* at <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/531267>). If the instructor agrees to make a grade change, the following steps should be followed:

- The instructor logs into AC Data and selects “Change of Grade Request” from the menu.
- The instructor selects from a drop-down list of rosters (the list includes only courses taught within one academic year).
- From the roster, the instructor selects the student and enters the new requested grade.
- The reason for the change is entered in a comment field.
- Once the instructor clicks “submit,” a series of emails are sent to the chief student affairs officer, the registrar, the associate registrar, and two administrators in the Offices of the Chief Student Affairs Officer and the Provost and Dean of the Faculty.
- Once the chief student affairs officer approves, an email is sent to the provost and dean of the faculty for approval.
- Once the dean approves, the grade is changed by the Office of the Registrar, and all parties above are notified.

If the chief student affairs officer and/or the provost have additional questions, they may request more information from the instructor via the AC Data form. If either party denies the request, the grade is not changed by the registrar, and all parties are notified of the outcome.

## **Roster Management**

### **Managing Course Enrollment**

Instructors who wish to manage their own course enrollments without guaranteeing enrollment at the end of the second-round registration period must convert their courses to “Instructor Permission” prior to Advising Week by updating the course description through the Committee on Educational Policy, specifying how enrollments will be prioritized. New courses are handled in a similar fashion. Such conversions are recommended for reserving spaces for first-year students in the fall semester, as well as for courses that require additional evaluation by the instructor prior to enrollment. In addition, a new option has been made available to reserve a certain number of seats for first-year students in the fall semester. This feature can also be accessed by updating the course description through the Committee on Educational Policy.

### **Course Rosters in AC Data and Moodle**

AC Data is the system of record for the college and is the source for official course rosters. If a student is not on the AC Data official roster, that student is not registered for the course and will not appear on a grade roster, nor will the course be recorded on the student transcript.

Moodle is the learning management system for the college. Until the second month of a semester, Moodle rosters may include: students officially registered for the course, Five-College students attempting to register for the course, and Amherst students who have placed a course on their preferred course list but have not officially registered for the course. Students not officially registered in the course will have a petition/petitioner notation following their name in Moodle. Petition/petitioner status allows the student temporary access to course information posted on Moodle.

By the second month of a semester, all petitioners and other individuals who have not been officially registered are removed from Moodle rosters. The process of removing Moodle access for students not officially registered occurs after add/drop to allow Five-College students have access to course materials while the registration process is under way between consortium institutions. In addition, the college allows time for students with various types of holds on their accounts (financial, health, etc.) to view course information while they are being advised and assisted through a hold clearance process. The petitioner status on Moodle allows students access to course work while they resolve holds.

Those seeking to audit a course at Amherst must obtain the permission of the faculty member teaching the course. The decision to accept an auditor rests solely with the faculty member, who will define and communicate the ways in which the auditor may participate in the course. All auditors must adhere to the standards of the college.

## Course Registration

Amherst College students register for courses at two points in the semester, pre-registration and add/drop.

The complete four-week registration timeline is as follows; specific dates for this timeline are available on the website of the Office of the Registrar:

- **Advising Week:** Students should meet with advisors to discuss academic goals and schedule preparation for upcoming terms during this week. Advisors approve course selections with students during this time. Course registration approval is given via AC Data. Email approval can only be used for Five College course registration.
- **Pre-Registration Week One:** Students submit their advisor approved course selections in AC Data.
- **Roster Management Week:** Instructors with an over-enrolled capped course following pre-registration are asked to cut their class rosters to a number greater than or equal to their approved cap by the fifth business day following pre-registration. While faculty are not required to reduce class rosters, students remaining on the roster at the end of the second registration period are guaranteed enrollment (subject to meeting prerequisites and attendance during the first day of class).
- **Second Round Registration Week:** Advisor course approvals remain in place from pre-registration, but advisors may need to approve additional substitute courses so that students can complete the registration process if they have changed course selections or been removed from courses after roster management week.
  - Capped courses at or below their cap following pre-registration have their caps enforced automatically by the registration system in the second round. Nevertheless, an instructor can always add students beyond the cap or by utilizing the “Convert course to Instructor Permission” in AC Data. (This tool is only available if the course has reached the cap).
  - A student remaining on a roster at the end of the second registration period is guaranteed enrollment in the course (barring unforeseen circumstances such as lack of available classroom space or equipment), provided the student attends the first class during add/drop (or submits an excuse from a class dean) and has satisfied any pre-requisites or grade requirements for the course.
- **Add/Drop Period:** At the start of each semester, students can make further changes to their course registration as necessary. Faculty may also add students to courses during this time (room capacity permitting). All students must be registered for a full course load of four, or four--and-one half courses, or four-and-two-half courses, by the end of the add/drop period.

- **Five College Registration:** Five-College students participate in the pre-registration process based on their home institutions registration dates. Following the second round of registration, Five-College students remaining on the roster are not guaranteed enrollment.
- **January Term 2022:** Students are permitted to enroll in one course during the January term. Students should expect their enrollment in this course to be a full-time commitment. January courses may be offered as either in person or remote. More details on the enrollment period for January 2022 will be announced early in fall 2021.

### **Registration Requirements for Students**

All special permission forms must be submitted to the Office of Student Affairs by the end of the business day on the last day of add/drop.

All students (with the exception of Independent Scholars and those on a reduced course load) are required to register for four full courses each semester. Students may elect one or two additional half courses in addition to the normal program and do not require special permission.

### **Half Courses**

Changes to the half-course policy were instituted with the pre-registration period in spring 2019. Students are still required to fill out and submit the permission form in order to take 3.5 courses following a previous semester of 4.5 classes, but the combination of half-courses has changed. Students may now match half course music lessons, theater and dance courses, as well as some science labs, as described below. The policy remains that two half-course language sections can be count as one course, as long as they are the same language. Students who are music majors must take matching half-course music classes in order to count as a full course. Questions regarding music major requirements should be directed to the music department and will require use of the permission form.

Additionally, because more departments have agreed to match half-courses, students may take three full courses and two half-courses with permission of their class dean and advisor using the permission form noted above. Only two sets of half-courses (the equivalent of two full courses) may count toward the total thirty-two courses required for graduation.

Students may take more than four half-courses, but they won't count as part of their overall course totals. Students must finish their degree requirements with a minimum of thirty-one classes (with their class dean's and registrar's approval) which can be a combination of twenty-nine or thirty full classes, and four half classes.

The biology, chemistry, and physics, and astronomy departments offer some laboratory courses for half-course credit, when taken concurrently with the main lecture offering. Students should plan on registering for one-and-one-half courses for these lectures with lab. The biology and chemistry departments will match all of the following half- courses in any combination **except** in the first semester of a student's first year: BIOL-181L, BIOL-191L, CHEM-151L, CHEM-155L, CHEM-161L, CHEM-165L, CHEM-221L, CHEM-231L, and any half-courses offered by departments that permit them to be matched with biology and chemistry half-course labs. The physics and astronomy department will give half-course credit for the following laboratory courses: PHYS-116L, PHYS-117L, PHYS-123L, PHYS-124L and PHYS-125L as well as ASTR-200L.

Students may elect one or two half-courses in addition to four full courses at their discretion and without additional permission of the class dean. All students wishing to register for four full courses and two half-courses should contact the Office of the Registrar with their request as, at this time; AC Data will not allow students to make this change through the online program.

More information on half-courses can be found in the *Amherst College Catalog*.

### **Course Overload**

Students who wish to take more than four-and-two-half courses in a semester must have a strong academic record and obtain written permission of the advisor and class dean in order to register for this course overload. First-semester students do not have an Amherst record and therefore cannot take an overload. If a first-year student wishes to pursue more than four and-one-half courses, the dean of new students must submit written permission for this exception. Generally, first-year students are not advised to register for a course overload in the first term.

Other students who need to make up a deficiency and who do not have a strong academic record should discuss other options with their class dean.

### **Reduced Course Load**

In consultation with their class dean and the Office of Accessibility Services, some students are able to register for a reduced course load. Generally, students will take three courses in a semester. For more information, faculty should consult with the Office of Accessibility Services (<https://www.amherst.edu/mm/64992>).

### **Five-College Registration**

Amherst College students may not register for Five College courses during their first semester at the college. Upon the start of the second semester, students may take up to two Five-College courses per semester. Exceptions are made for students who are pursuing a Five-College major and must take particular courses that would not be available in another term, upon receiving written permission from the major advisor and class dean. First-year and transfer students should be advised to wait until their second semester or later to take Five-College courses.

Students register for Five-College courses via the following process:

- Enter a Five College placeholder on AC Data so the advisor and registrar know that the student is planning to take a Five-College course. Placeholders are one of the following:
  - UM\_COURSE\_REG (University of Massachusetts Course)
  - SC\_COURSE\_REG (Smith College Course)
  - MC\_COURSE\_REG (Mt. Holyoke College Course)
  - HC\_COURSE\_REG (Hampshire College Course)
- Enter information on the online Five College Course Request Form. This allows the registrar to send documentation to the other Five-College registrars.
- Submit the Five College permission form to the registrar with instructor and advisor signatures. This shows permissions are granted for a particular course. Only liberal arts courses are accepted for Five College registration.

### **Course Withdrawal**

Students are generally expected to complete thirty-two courses and eight semesters in residence in order to be awarded the bachelor of arts degree. Students who have matriculated as first years may fail or drop a course (withdrawal) without penalty (“W”) during the first three years and may graduate with thirty-one courses. Students must follow guidelines for exhibiting attempts at progress, as determined by the class dean, and should be advised to meet with the class dean before the sixth week of the semester. In most cases, withdrawal will be allowed only if the student is failing the course, despite following the plan worked out in consultation with the class dean.

Transfer students must complete thirty-two full semester courses or their equivalent, at least sixteen of them at Amherst, and at least four semesters of residence at Amherst. However, a transfer student may withdraw from a course without penalty once and graduate with thirty-one courses, as long as that withdrawal is not during their senior year at the college.

Any student withdrawing or failing a course in the final year will have to make up this deficiency at another institution. Courses must be taken at an accredited higher education institution in the United States and taught in-person. No

online or hybrid courses will be accepted for transfer credit. International students may be able to take courses outside of the United States in consultation with their class dean. Students should contact the Office of the Registrar for pre-approval of transfer credit before registering for any transfer course.

## **Degree Requirements**

The bachelor of arts degree is awarded to students who:

- Complete thirty-two full semester courses or the equivalent and four years (eight semesters) of residence.
  - Transfer students must complete thirty-two full courses or the equivalent, at least sixteen of which are at Amherst, and must be in residence at Amherst for at least two years (four semesters).
  - All students who have withdrawn from or failed a course during any semester except their last two (final year) shall be allowed to graduate with thirty-one full courses or the equivalent, provided that they have met the residence requirement. Transfer students must also have completed at least fifteen full courses or the equivalent in-residence at Amherst.
  - Students enrolled during any part of the 2020–2021 academic year will be permitted to graduate with the equivalent of thirty courses, due to reduced course load expectations during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Complete the requirements for a major in a department or a group of departments, including a satisfactory performance in the comprehensive evaluation.
- Attain a general average of C- (1.67) in the courses completed at Amherst and earn a grade of at least C in every course completed at another institution for transfer credit to Amherst.

## **Major Declaration**

Liberal arts education seeks to develop the student's awareness and understanding of the individual and of the world's physical and social environments. If one essential object in the design of education at Amherst is breadth of understanding, another purpose, equally important, is mastery of one or more areas of knowledge in depth. Juniors and seniors are required to concentrate their studies by pursuing a major. Majors allow students to gain specific knowledge of a field and its special concerns, and to master and appreciate the skills needed in that disciplined effort.

### **Major Requirements**

A major normally consists of at least eight courses pursued under the direction of a department or special group. Students may change their majors at any time, provided that they will be able to complete the new program before graduation. Students must declare their major by the last day of classes of their second semester sophomore year.

Students may complete the requirement of at least eight courses within one department. They must complete at least six courses within one department and the remaining two courses in related fields approved by the department.

Some students may wish to declare a major in more than one department or program. This curricular option is available, although it entails special responsibilities. At Amherst, departments are solely responsible for defining the content and structure of an acceptable program of study for majors. Students who elect a double or triple major must present the signatures of all academic advisors when registering for each semester's courses and they must, of course, fulfill the graduation requirements and comprehensive examinations established by each of the academic programs. In addition, double or multiple majors may not credit courses approved for either major toward the other without the explicit consent of an announced departmental policy or the signature of a departmental chairperson. In their senior year, students with a double or multiple majors must verify their approved courses with both academic advisors before registering for their last semester at the College.

### **Interdisciplinary Majors**

Students who would like to construct an interdisciplinary major must submit a proposed program, endorsed by one or more professors from each of the departments or programs concerned, to the Committee on Academic Standing and Special Majors. Under ordinary circumstances, the proposal is submitted no later than the seventh week of the first semester of the junior year. The program will include a minimum of six upper-level courses and a thesis plan. The Committee on Academic Standing and Special Majors authorizes the appointment of an ad hoc advisory committee of three professors, which will approve any possible modifications in the program, administer an appropriate comprehensive examination, review the thesis, and make recommendations for the degree with or without honors. Information on proposing interdisciplinary programs is available in the Office of Student Affairs.

### **Comprehensive Exams**

A part of the major requirement in every department is an evaluation of the student's comprehension in the major field of study. This evaluation may be based on a special written examination or upon any other performance deemed appropriate by each department. The mode of the evaluation need not be the same for all the majors within a department, and, indeed, may be designed individually to test the skills each student has developed.

The comprehensive exam or project should be completed by the seventh week of the second semester of the senior year. Any student whose comprehension is judged to be inadequate will have two opportunities for reevaluation: one not later than the last day of classes of the second semester of the senior year, and the other during the next college year. Notification of completion of comprehensive exams must be sent to the Office of the Registrar for inclusion on a student's transcript.

### **Degree with Honors**

Latin honors are awarded to students completing a thesis within their major department or program, depending on the major department's recommendation and the student's graduating cumulative average. English honors are awarded to students solely on the basis of performance in course work. The awarding of both Latin and English honors is made by the faculty of the college and will appear on the diploma.

The following guidelines have been voted on by the faculty regarding awarding degrees with honors:

#### *Latin Honors*

- Candidates eligible for the degree *summa cum laude* must have a minimum overall grade point average in the top 25 percent of their class and have received a recommendation of *summa* based on a thesis or comparable work from a department or program in which they have majored. In addition, the theses of candidates for the degree *summa cum laude* are reviewed by the Committee of Six, which will transmit its recommendation to the faculty. Candidates also have their entire records reviewed by the provost and dean of the faculty and the Committee of Six, which will transmit its recommendations to the faculty.
- Candidates eligible for the degree *magna cum laude* must have a minimum overall grade point average in the top 25 percent of their class and have received a recommendation of *magna* based on a thesis or comparable work from a department or program in which they have majored. Although each department or program may define additional criteria upon which it will base its recommendation, the candidate must submit a thesis or comparable work that is judged by the department or program to be of *magna* quality. Candidates will also qualify for the degree *magna cum laude* if they have been recommended for *summa cum laude* and are in the top 40 percent but not the top 25 percent of their class and have otherwise met the requirements for the degree *summa cum laude*.
- Candidates eligible for the degree *cum laude* must have received a recommendation of *cum* based on a thesis or comparable work from a department or program in which they have majored. Although each

department or program may define additional criteria upon which it will base its recommendation, the candidate must submit a thesis or comparable work that is judged by the department or program to be of *cum* quality. Students recommended for *summa sum laude* who are not in the top 40 percent of their class will graduate *cum laude*. Student recommended for magna cum laude who are not in the top 25 percent of their class will graduate *cum laude*.

*English Honors - Graduation with Distinction*

Candidates eligible for a degree with Distinction must have an overall grade point average in the top 25 percent of their class.

The registrar must have all senior grades in hand by the senior grade deadline in order to calculate honors. Grades for students in the “E” graduating class are also required by the senior grading deadline so that the registrar may clear students for early participation in commencement.

**Participation in Commencement Exercises**

Participation in commencement exercises is limited to those who either (1) have completed all graduation requirements and whose degree will be voted by the faculty and the board of trustees; or (2) are within four courses (sixteen credits) of the total required for graduation, have no disciplinary violations, and are a member of the current graduating class, any prior class, or the subsequent graduating “E” class.

Students who wish to participate in commencement early must complete an application to do so. Additional details on early participation at commencement may be found on the Registrar’s webpage (<https://www.amherst.edu/mm/494185>).

Once permission is granted, these students will not be eligible to participate in any other future commencement exercises, and they will receive their diplomas and official transcripts recording completion of the degree only after all degree requirements have been satisfied and the degree voted by the faculty and the Board of Trustees.