BIOSTATISTICS
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Policy for graduate students in Biostatistics degree programs taking courses S/NS

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Purpose

This policy outlines how graduate students in Biostatistics degree programs can request permission to take electives for Satisfactory/Non-Satisfactory grading.

Scope

This policy applies to graduate students in Biostatistics degree programs.

Policy Statement

University regulations permit graduate students to elect to take numerically graded courses on a Satisfactory/Non-Satisfactory basis. Specifically:

*A graduate student, with the approval of the graduate program advisor or supervisory committee chair, may elect to be graded S/NS in any numerically graded courses for which the student is eligible. If a student does not so elect, then the student will be graded on a numerical basis. If approval is granted, the student must elect the S/NS option when registering or no later than the last day of finals week of the quarter. Numeric grades will not be converted subsequently to S/NS grades (or vice versa). The instructor shall submit a numeric grade to the Registrar, who shall convert grades of 2.7 and above to S and grades lower than 2.7 to NS for graduate students. [*SGP 110 Grades, Honors, and Scholarship – UW Policy Directory *retrieved 9/03/25]*

To request permission from the graduate program advisor to be graded S/NS, students should email biogpd@uw.edu, stating the request and giving a rationale for it, cc'ing bcurric@uw.edu. To give time to consider requests before instructors submit grades (see above) **requests must be received at least one week before the end of classes (i.e. one week before finals week) of the quarter during which the student has taken the course**. Earlier requests are welcome. Any courses' graded S/NS are excluded from calculations of students' grade point average (GPA). While the instructor still submits a numeric grade to the registrar, if the submitted grade is ≥2.7 then 'S' will appear on the student's record; otherwise, the student's grade is 'NS'.
Grading S/NS is unusual for Biostatistics graduate students and will be discouraged in most cases. However, it may be appropriate in some circumstances. Students should note the following:

- For core courses, required for a student's degree program, S/NS **will not typically be approved**. Students are required to achieve grades of 3.0 or above in these courses unless this requirement is waived. An "S" grade, dichotomized at 2.7, does not indicate the 3.0 level was reached.
- For elective courses that are primarily methodological and meet degree requirements, requests for S/NS **will be considered but are discouraged**. The skills taught in these courses are integral to our graduate programs and will often be important for the students' further research, in our program and beyond. Demonstrating mastery of course material above the level indicated by a 2.7 grade has considerable value.
- For elective courses that are either (i) methodological and taken beyond degree requirements or (i) non-methodological, S/NS **will be considered**. Non-methodological electives are typically those where students are expected to acquire background knowledge, helping them interact with subject-matter experts in applied projects. Students are typically not expected to pursue the relevant topics in depth as part of their degree program, and time spent pursuing a high grade in these courses may not be worth the time spent away from other commitments.
- Students are reminded that they can also apply to *audit* courses - where they register for the class and take it, but no grade is given and the course (and credits for it) do not appear on their student transcript. The process requires instructor approval, but does not involve the graduate program advisor. Full details are provided on the Registrar's website [https://registrar.washington.edu/registration/policies-procedures/, retrieved 4/27/23]

Before requesting S/NS grading, students should carefully consider the impact on their resumes and their subsequent career steps. For those seeking post-doctorate or similar positions, precise GPAs will rarely matter much compared to research productivity, and the presence of unusual S/NS grades may be an unhelpful distraction. For those seeking entry into other graduate programs, where GPA may be relatively more important, the arguments for S/NS grading (where available) may be more compelling. However, even in this case the presence of multiple S/NS grades may be viewed as a weakness.