

Cadets,

It is hard to believe that over six weeks ago, just as we were starting recognition, a majority of our cadet wing left campus for homes around the globe. In one sense, these weeks have flown by as we converted to online classes, graduated the Class of 2020, and then restarted our remaining classes. In another sense, these difficult days and weeks have dragged by – every day has been challenge in some way, and the entire USAFA community has felt the suffering of our nation. And, like your community at home, our faculty have faced illness and hardship of family and friends as a result of COVID.

On Monday, the Superintendent, Commandant, Executive Director for Athletics, and I held a “live event” to get you up to speed on the changes and decisions being made for the remainder of the semester. You can watch a recording of the event [here](#).

While we haven’t finalized all decisions, the Academy Board has approved the schedule and grading policy for this semester (see attached). Many cadets let us know that the extenuating circumstances of sheltering at home during COVID-19 meant that they were not able to learn and complete courses at their normal level of performance.

We listened to these concerns and developed an alternative grading approach—adding the ability for departments to award a Pass (“P”) instead of an A through D letter grade. Department Heads can recommend this grade when cadets are suffering from extraordinary circumstances – for instance, mental or physical health problems or excessive financial burdens. Alternatively, instructors can award an “incomplete uncontrollable” where the course can be finished after the semester ends. Finally, the preservation of our normal grading (A through D letter grades) ensures that we continue uphold high academic standards and an understanding of where each cadet is at in his or her understanding of the material, much of which forms the foundation for future coursework. These alternative grading approaches give you and your instructor options to meet your particular academic needs and circumstances.

This approach is remarkably similar to the approach approved by the Academy Board for the Class of 2020. All told less than a dozen firsties requested a pass/fail option. I and your faculty know that you are facing different challenges than the Class of 2020, and we believe this grading policy allows for appropriate consideration of those challenges. I will also note that this approach is different than Navy and West Point, which to date have not added a Pass/Fail option. While each institution of higher education has its own reasons for adopting particular grading practices, the Academy Board determined that for USAFA we wanted to ensure that an option was available to meet the needs of cadets facing particular hardships.

Through your questions to the Live Event (and some social media posts), I also recognize that some of you may not feel comfortable sharing your particular circumstances with your faculty. If that is the case for you, I urge you to discuss your situation with your chain of command. Your AOCs and AMTs can then take appropriate steps to preserve your privacy and work with our faculty to reach the right outcome. I also know that many of you have and will continue to share your challenges with your faculty and academic advisors...and I thank you for doing so. We are here to support and assist you on this journey.

I can’t express how incredibly proud I am of you and your instructors this semester. You have met the challenge of shifting to remote learning while still maintaining USAFA’s high standards. But the challenge isn’t over -- after classes end next month, you faculty will use the summer to improve our

curriculum, teaching, and delivery. We will be prepared for whatever method of instruction USAFA is using when coursework begins again in the fall. And we will need your feedback and your help to improve how we teach our classes and engage in remote learning. Just as we used your inputs to craft a new grading approach, we want to use your inputs to help craft the future. I've opened up a "Tell the Dean" site where you can provide us feedback and ideas. Please feel free to drop a note when you get an idea [here](#).

In the meantime, continue to study and prepare for class. Communicate with your instructors and/or your chain of command so they can help you where you struggle. Be ready – we'll be back together before we know it.

Together we are USAFA. Together we are strong!

/r,  
LAL

LINELL A. LETENDRE, Brigadier General, USAF  
Dean of the Faculty