

# SOUTHWESTERN

LAW SCHOOL  
Los Angeles, CA

## Grading and Scholastic Honors Policy

### Faculty policy.

**Revision history:** Formerly a part of the annually revised Student Handbook; established as a standalone policy in August 2022; revised in September 2023 to remove the Incomplete Grade Policy and Independent Study Policy sections, which were established as standalone policies, and to rename the policy; revised in October 2023 to remove the Distance Education Policy which was established as a standalone policy and renamed the Distance Education Policy for Programs Other Than the Online J.D. Program; revised in May 2024 to change Section B, Alphabetical Grading System, to take into account the Online J.D. Program and to create a standalone policy on Concentrations; revised in June 2024 to add the “M” grade, which takes effect as of the start of the SCALE I term in June 2024, and to create a standalone administrative policy on Scholarships, Grants, and Fellowships; revised scholastic honors section in September 2024; revised in December 2025 to clarify definition of academic year for continuing students and to explain how GPA is calculated, including treatment of summer and January intersession grades; revised in April 2026 to establish separate grading for Online J.D. Program students in certain classes with mixed cohorts, effective immediately; revised in April 2026 to modify SCALE initial ranking calculations and apply the upper-division grading policy to Evidence, each effective June 1, 2026; revised in May 2026 to address variances from the required grade standards.

**Related policies:** Master of Laws Program Policies; Incomplete Grade Policy; Attendance Policy; Policy on Student Academic Work-Product Originality (Plagiarism) for All Southwestern Students and Collaboration Rules in Legal Analysis, Writing, and Skills Courses; Student Honor Code; Academic Policies and Procedures; SCALE Program Policies; Distance Education Policy for Programs Other Than the Online J.D. Program

**Scheduled Review Date:** January 2027 (Office of the Vice Dean)

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### **A. Course Syllabus and Grading Criteria**

Course syllabi will be posted by Academic Administration on the portal and by faculty on the course Canvas page and will include a course outline, course learning objectives, a description of course materials, the grading and attendance criteria, and any other information deemed relevant by the faculty member. In the event of an inadvertent conflict between the syllabus and this policy, the provisions of this policy will prevail.

#### **1. Anonymous grading rule**

Southwestern uses an anonymous grading system for all written examinations to ensure objectivity. The professor may also use anonymous grading in other parts of each course. A confidential computer-generated anonymous Exam ID number is issued and made available through Self-Service each semester. Faculty members cannot access information matching student names and anonymous student Exam ID numbers. Students may obtain their anonymous Exam ID numbers from the Registrar's Office upon presentation of proper identification. Students should not share their Exam ID with professors or other individuals.

#### **2. Time limits for submitting grades**

Faculty members must submit all grades to the Office of the Vice Dean(s) within four weeks from the date of the final examination, final assignment, final paper, or final trial in a course. The grades submitted are the final grades after they have been approved by the Office of the Vice Dean(s).

#### **3. Issuing final grades**

All final grades are made available to students on Self-Service. Grades will be available via Self-Service starting after the last final exam of each examination period, except for the fall semester and Period 6 grades,

which will not be available until after the winter break. Grades will be released Monday-Thursday between 12:00-12:30 p.m. and 4:00-4:30 p.m. and Fridays between 12:00-12:30 p.m.

#### **4. Policy on changing grades**

Once grades are final, they will not be changed except for a documented clerical or computational error or as otherwise explicitly stated in this policy. A faculty member seeking to change a grade must present a Change of Grade form with appropriate documentation to the Vice Deans Office. No grade can be changed for any reason 90 calendar days after the final grade has been posted or the examination has been made available to the student in the Registrar's Office, whichever is later. The change will become effective only after the petition has been approved by the Vice Dean assigned to oversee academics and filed with the Registrar's Office.

### **B. Alphabetical Grading System**

Southwestern uses an alphabetical grading system in which the actual grade earned is represented by an alphabetical letter. Grades are assigned from A+ to F. No unit credit is granted when the grade received is an F. All students must maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 2.330. The GPA is a mathematical depiction of a student's law school grade performance carried out to the first three decimal places. The GPA is derived by multiplying the number of grade points earned in each graded course by the number of units assigned to that course. Those numbers are then added, and the resulting figure is divided by the total number of graded units attempted in the applicable period. The quotient is carried out only to the first three decimal places. Courses offered on a Credit/No Credit basis are not included in the GPA computation.

To ensure equity in multiple-section courses and uniformity of grades, the faculty has adopted a grading policy for "first-year" courses and "upper-division" courses.

For purposes of this grading system, the following are "first-year" courses:

- Courses offered during the first year of the Full-Time Residential, Online, and PLEAS/Part-time Day Residential J.D. programs;
- Property and Constitutional Law I and II, when offered in the Online J.D. Program and during the second year of the Evening Program;
- Property and Civil Procedure I and II, when offered in the PLEAS/Part-time Day program; and
- Courses offered during SCALE Periods 1, 2, and 3.

In the Online J.D. Program, when Property and Constitutional Law I and II include both 1L full-time and 2L part-time cohorts, each cohort will be graded separately.

First-year spring electives are not considered "first-year" courses for purposes of the "first-year" grading policy. In SCALE, grades awarded for Quarter 1, Quarter 2, and Quarter 3, except for Evidence Law & Practice I in Quarter 3, are graded under the first-year grading policy. In SCALE, all grades awarded for Evidence Law & Practice I, the SCALE summer session, Quarters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 are graded under the upper-division grading policy.

"First-year" courses must have a mean of 2.800 (plus or minus 0.05). In addition, at least 15% of grades awarded must be in the A range (A+, A, and A-). The minimum standard deviation is .70.

All upper-division courses must have a mean of 3.000 (plus or minus one-tenth) and a median of B. As a guideline in upper-division courses, 15% of grades must be in the A range (A+, A, A-). In courses with fewer than 30 students enrolled, the mean and median standards are to be used as guidelines. LL.M. students should refer to the Master of Laws Program Policies for applicable grading policies.

Deviations from the required grade standards set forth in the two paragraphs immediately above are permitted only in exceptional circumstances and must be approved by the Vice Dean. A variance may be appropriate, for example, where evidence shows that overall class performance materially exceeds historical norms, such that applying the required grade standards would artificially depress grades. Variances may not be used to fall below the minimum requirements established in the required grade standards. Faculty seeking a variance must submit a written request to the Office of the Vice Dean that includes a detailed explanation of the circumstances, supporting data (such as comparisons to prior iterations of the course or historical grade distributions), and any additional information requested by the Office of the Vice Dean.

## **1. Academic year definition and GPA computation**

An academic year for first-year students is based on the fall semester and the spring semester. An academic year for continuing students is based on the summer term(s) (if taken), the following fall semester, the January intersession (if taken), and the spring semester.

The academic year for SCALE I is comprised of Quarters 1 through 4, and the academic year for SCALE II is comprised of the summer session and Quarters 5 through 8. The academic year for the SCALE 2.5-year modified curriculum includes SCALE II plus an additional semester of fall courses.

For programs other than SCALE, units earned during the summer term(s) and the January intersession are counted toward the total units completed and included in the calculation of the cumulative GPA. Summer term(s) grades are included in the calculation of a student's cumulative GPA but are not included when calculating the GPA for the preceding spring semester or subsequent fall semester. January intersession courses are graded on a Credit/No Credit basis; while the credits earned count toward total units, they do not affect the GPA. Additionally, grades or credits earned during the summer term(s) or January intersession are not considered when determining academic disqualification based on a minimum GPA over two consecutive evaluation periods. For GPA calculations in SCALE, see SCALE Program Policies.

## **2. Class rank**

Official class rankings by percentage in 10% increments are based on cumulative GPA and are computed for each class at the end of each academic year, except for SCALE students, whose official class rankings are computed at the end of Quarter 3 and Quarter 8. Southwestern Law School does not provide cumulative GPA breakdowns within the 10% increments, breakdowns beyond the 10% increments, or actual numerical standings. Percentiles for class ranks are rounded up. For example, 10.01% is considered in the top 20%.

Students from the part-time Online, Evening, and PLEAS/Part-time day programs are ranked together. Students from the full-time Online and full-time residential programs are ranked together. SCALE students are ranked together. First-year students also receive an unofficial mid-year class rank.

If a student receives a grade change due to an error (e.g., a scoring error on a final examination or paper) after ranks are calculated, the Registrar's Office will manually re-rank the student. Ranks for other students will not be impacted.

Students will not receive a rank or manual re-rank for any semester or period in which they received an Incomplete.

## **3. Transcript symbols**

Grades are assigned on an alphabetical basis. Listed below are the letter grades with the grade point equivalent.

A+ : 4.33   C : 2.00

A: 4.00 C- : 1.67

A- : 3.67 D+ : 1.33

B+ : 3.33 D: 1.00

B: 3.00 D- : 0.67

B- : 2.67 F: 0.00

C+ : 2.33

The grades of A+, A, and A- denote outstanding scholarship and intellectual initiative; the grades of B+ and B denote above-average work; the grade of B- indicates full satisfaction of the law school's requirements; the grade of C+ represents minimal competency sufficient for good standing and satisfactory progress towards graduation; the grades of C and C- represents work below minimal competency; the grades of D+ through D- reflect unsatisfactory work, sufficient only for credit; and the grade of F designates failing work that is insufficient for credit.

In addition to the alphabetical grades, the following letters are used on student transcripts:

AU: Audit (No credit is earned and permission to enroll is required. Used when a student or non-student enrolls in a course at the regular unit tuition rate.)

CR: Credit (Credit in a Credit/No Credit course when a student performs work equivalent to D- or above. Credit is earned toward graduation. No alphabetical equivalent. Not included in GPA.)

CRW: Credit in an honors program that also meets the writing requirement.

\*F: Administrative grade of F (see *Administrative Fail (\*F)* below)

INC: Incomplete (see *Incomplete Grade Policy*)

M: Multi-term course (See "*M mark*" below)

NC: No Credit (No credit in a Credit/No Credit course when a student performs work equivalent to F. No credit is earned toward graduation. No alphabetical equivalent. Not included in GPA.)

W: Withdrawal

WA: Administrative Withdrawal (Withdrawal for insufficient attendance. May be assigned when a student misses more than 20% of class sessions.) (See *Attendance Policy*.)

Other notations that may be placed on the transcript as appropriate include, but are not limited to: Dean's List, Honors at Graduation, Concentrations, Concentrations with Honors, Law Review, Journal of International Law (Law Journal), Moot Court Honors Program, Negotiation Honors Program, Trial Advocacy Honors Program, Public Service Distinction, Leave of Absence, Withdrawal, Academic Disqualification, Reinstated, Readmitted, Disciplinary Action, Disciplinary Probation, Disciplinary Leave, Disciplinary Suspension, Withdrawal with Disciplinary Investigation Pending, and Disciplinary Expulsion.

#### **4. Administrative Fail (\*F)**

An Administrative Fail (\*F) is a final grade assigned by the administration as noted below and cannot be changed:

- a. A student drops a course without approval;
- b. An official Incomplete is not made up within the one-year period allowed by the Incomplete policy (see Incomplete Grade Policy);
- c. The Associate Dean for Student Services denies a petition for an Incomplete; or
- d. A student violates the Honor Code regarding signing the attendance roster.

An Administrative Fail (\*F) is subject to correction when:

- a. A student puts an incorrect anonymous number on an examination;
- b. There has been a faculty or clerical error in entering a grade or conveying a grade, or when an examination is lost through no fault of the student; or
- c. The Associate Dean for Student Services receives documentation supporting an Incomplete. (See Incomplete Grade Policy.)

An Administrative Fail (\*F), being a final grade, is treated like a final earned grade of F to compute a student's GPA.

## 5. **M mark**

An "M" mark is used for courses that span multiple terms. All units and the grade are awarded in the final term of the progression and appear on the transcript for that term. "M" is a permanent transcript notation that remains on transcript for the initial term(s) but has no GPA or unit impact.

## C. **Credit/No Credit Courses**

To receive credit for credit/no credit courses, the student must satisfactorily complete the course and program requirements. Students may take no more than 22 units of Credit/No Credit coursework. The 22-unit Credit/No Credit cap does not include units completed at other law schools for a letter grade, such as summer-abroad programs or units awarded as transfer credit, for which a Credit/No Credit grade is assigned at Southwestern. In rare cases and for compelling reasons where a student can demonstrate that additional Credit/No Credit units would substantially enhance their educational program, the student may obtain permission for additional Credit/No Credit units from the Student Services Office before registration, but rarely will more than 22 Credit/No Credit units be permitted. Students cannot request that letter-graded courses be changed to Credit/No Credit.

## D. **Scholastic Honors**

Southwestern places the notations described in D.1.b and D.2 on the student's transcript.

### 1. **At graduation**

To compute the percentages for Graduation Rank and Graduation Honors, the graduating class will include students graduating at the end of the spring semester and the preceding July, December, and January.

#### a. **Graduation rank**

All graduating students, regardless of program, are ranked by percentage in 10% increments based on cumulative GPA. Percentiles for the graduation rank are rounded up. For example, 10.01% is considered in the top 20%.

#### b. **Graduation honors**

##### i. ***Summa cum laude***

The top 1% of the graduating class qualify for this honor.

**ii. *Magna cum laude***

The top 5% of the graduating class qualify for this honor.

**iii. *Cum laude***

The top 10% of the graduating class qualify for this honor.

**2. Dean's List**

Students in the top 10% of each program noted in this paragraph, by class year, will qualify for the Dean's List at the end of each academic year. The programs are: (1) part-time Online, Evening, and PLEAS/Part-time day programs (combined), (2) full-time Online and full-time residential programs (combined), and (3) SCALE students.

Full-time students must complete at least 20 units of graded courses, and part-time students must complete at least sixteen 16 units of graded courses per academic year to qualify for this honor. The academic year starts with the summer session and concludes with the spring semester or Periods 4 or 8. Students with an Incomplete on their transcript are not eligible for the Dean's List honor. Percentiles are rounded up. For example, 10.01% will not receive the Dean's List honor.

**3. Other academic honors**

In recognition of academic excellence and at the professor's discretion, the top student or top two students in a course (i.e., those students who receive the highest letter grades in the course) may receive the CALI Excellence for the Future Award or the Distinguished Performance Award. CALI is awarded by the Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction. The awards are distributed twice a year, with the summer session and fall semester distribution in April and the spring semester distribution in August. When the second-best exam is significantly poorer than the top exam, faculty may award the CALI and Distinguished Performance Award to the same student.

**E. Scholastic Honors and Class Rank Representations**

In sharing their class rank (see B.1 above) or other scholastic honors described in this policy on their resume or otherwise, students must include an accurate description. For example, the "Graduation Rank" should note that it is the student's rank among all graduating students (not just the student's program). As a second example, the "Class Rank" should note that it is the student's rank among the particular cohort for a given year (e.g., the part-time Online, Evening,

and PLEAS/Part-time day 3Ls; the full-time Online and full-time residential 2L; or SCALE 1Ls).

**F. Policy Revisions**

Southwestern expressly reserves the right to change or modify any aspect of this policy at any time, with or without prior notice.