

SOUTHWESTERN

LAW SCHOOL

Los Angeles, CA

Grading, Scholastic and Other Honors, and Specialized Courses 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.

Related policies: Master of Laws Program Policies; Incomplete Grade Policy; Attendance Policy; Policy Statement on Student Academic Work-Product Originality; 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: June 2025 (Student Services Office)

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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 Office of the Vice Dean(s). 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 Office of the Vice Dean(s) 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 computation of the GPA.

To ensure equity in multiple-section courses and uniformity of grades, the faculty has adopted a policy requiring the courses listed below to have a mean of 2.800 (plus or minus 0.05). A minimum of 15 percent of grades in the A range (A+, A, and A-) must be awarded. The minimum standard deviation is .70. This policy does not apply to first-year spring elective courses.

- First-year Day, Online¹, and PLEAS/Part-time day courses
- Second-year Evening and Online Program's Constitutional Law I and II, and Property courses
- Second-year PLEAS/Part-time day Civil Procedure I and II, and Property courses; and
- SCALE Periods I, II, and III courses

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 percent grade in the A range (A+, A, A-) will be awarded. 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.

¹ The Online Program will start in fall 2024.

1. **Class rank**

Official class rankings by percentage in 10 percent increments are based on cumulative GPA and are computed for each class at the end of each academic year. 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 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.

2. **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.)

INC: Incomplete (See *Incomplete Grade Policy*.)

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. NC:

No Credit (No credit in a Credit/No Credit course. No credit is earned. Equivalent to a grade of F in a graded course. 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*.)

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

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.

3. 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.

C. Credit/No Credit Courses

To receive credit for credit/no credit courses, the student must satisfactorily complete the course and/or program requirements. Students may take no more than 22 units of Credit/No Credit coursework. This 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

1. Graduation honors

- a. ***Summa cum laude***
The top 1% of the graduating class will automatically qualify for this honor.
- b. ***Magna cum laude***
The top 5% of the graduating class will automatically qualify for this honor.
- c. ***Cum laude***
The top 10% of the graduating class will automatically qualify for this honor.

For purposes of computing the percentages for graduation honors, the graduating class will include July and December graduates, as well as those students graduating in January or at the end of the spring semester.

2. Dean's List

The top 10% of each class, based on the annual GPA for the academic year as

described below and the overall number of students in the class, will qualify for the Dean's List at the end of each academic year.

Each class will be computed separately for residential full-time day, evening, PLEAS/Part-time day, SCALE, Online full-time, and Online part-time divisions to award this honor. This honor will be based on the annual GPA for that academic year. 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. Students with an Incomplete on their transcript are not qualified for the Dean's List honor.

The scholastic honor system is subject to annual revision. Notations of the above are placed on the student transcript.

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) receive the CALI Excellence for the Future Award and/or the Distinguished Performance Award. CALI is awarded by the Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction and is 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 of significantly poorer quality than the top exam, faculty may award the CALI and Distinguished Performance Award to the same student.

E. Scholarships, Grants, and Fellowships

1. General scholarships

Southwestern offers a number of scholarships from income provided by gifts from donors, foundations, and its own general funds. Qualifications for and amounts of scholarships vary, but award determination is generally based on financial need, scholastic achievement, and the amount of funds available. It is the general policy of Southwestern that no student receives scholarship or gift aid from Southwestern or any of its benefactors in excess of tuition charged. If a student receives other scholarship or gift aid that would cause those funds to exceed the student's full tuition charged, Southwestern reserves the right to reduce the scholarship so that the full annual tuition amount is not exceeded. Information about select scholarships is listed below. Please refer to the scholarship information page on the Southwestern portal for additional and the most current information.

a. ***Entering students***

Southwestern awards a select number of merit scholarships providing up to full tuition to members of the J.D. entering class or concurrent degree programs who have demonstrated exceptional academic promise. Awards may be renewable or non-renewable scholarships. If renewable, students must meet the continuing academic performance requirements. Based upon the information submitted in their admission application files, all accepted Southwestern first-year J.D. applicants are considered for these scholarship types. There is no separate application for the scholarships.

Additional information regarding continuing eligibility for scholarships is found on the Southwestern portal. Students must consult the version of the eligibility rules from the academic year in which they entered Southwestern.

b. ***Continuing students***

Southwestern awards a number of scholarships to continuing students. For a complete and current list of scholarships available to continuing students, please visit the scholarship information page on the Southwestern portal. Below is a select list of scholarship awards:

i. **Dean's Academic Leadership Award**

The Board of Trustees established the Dean's Academic Leadership Award to provide full-tuition scholarships to the highest-ranking upper-division students (typically the top 1% of the class). Eligibility is calculated based on class ranks as determined at the end of the academic year and based on the cumulative GPA.

ii. **Dean's Merit Award**

The Board of Trustees established the Dean's Merit Award to provide partial tuition scholarships to upper-division students who have demonstrated academic excellence and are in the top 30% of their class. Award amounts are commensurate with class rank. Eligibility is calculated based on class ranks which are determined at the end of each academic year based on the cumulative GPA.

2. **Institutional scholarships**

Continuing students may be eligible for scholarships from more than 80 funds with specific criteria established by the donors. For further information, visit the scholarship information page on the Southwestern portal.

3. Public interest law grants and fellowships

Students interested in working for public interest law/civil legal aid agencies may apply for stipends created through Southwestern Grant and Fellowship programs. These programs provide the matching amount for Federal Work Study funds applied to positions off campus, thereby providing students practical experiences and career opportunities in public service while offering legal services organizations the assistance necessary to service indigent communities and clients. Other programs are also available to support work in the public interest, living up to the dual goals of enhancing the educational experience of its students and furthering the work of public entities serving underrepresented communities and individuals. Please refer to the Southwestern portal for the most current information for grants and fellowships that are available. Below is a short listing of available summer fellowships and grant awards for graduating students:

- George and Katrina Woolverton Public Service Award
- Harvey L. and Lillian Silbert Public Interest Fellowship Program
- Judge Harry Pregerson Public Service Fellowship
- Leigh H. Taylor Public Interest Endowment Fund
- Public Interest Law Service Award
- Summer Public Interest Law Grant

4. Outside scholarships

A number of other scholarships are available each year from a variety of outside organizations. Eligibility is usually based on need, academic achievement, and extracurricular activities. The necessary supplemental applications and specific requirements for these scholarships are on file in the Financial Aid Office, and the most current information is available on the outside scholarship information page on <https://www.swlaw.edu/admissions-financial-aid/financial-aid/scholarships-grants-fellowships/outside-scholarship>

5. Jose Siderman Human Rights Fellowship

The Fellowship brings an Argentine law graduate to Los Angeles to complete an LL.M. degree in Civil Liberties and Human Rights or Advocacy at the law school, including an externship with a civil rights organization.

6. Outside fellowships

Postgraduate fellowships are an outstanding way to jumpstart graduates' legal careers while building a network of mentors and supporters. Below are two examples of fellowships that regularly select Southwestern applicants. In addition to these two, other postgraduate fellowships are available in a variety of practice areas. To learn more about available fellowships, please schedule an appointment

with the Career Services Office.

a. *American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA)*

Every year, the Los Angeles County Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA) offers a unique fellowship program to local graduating law students who will be sitting for the July Bar Exam. Fellows spend one month with a civil defense firm, one month with a plaintiff firm, and another month with various judges at the Los Angeles Superior Court. This fellowship is open to students who have a strong interest in civil jury trial practice and intend to practice law in Los Angeles County.

b. *Presidential Management Fellowship Program (PMF)*

The Presidential Management Fellows Program (PMF) is known as the training ground for future government leaders. It is a two-year paid post-graduate program where Fellows have the opportunity to work in high-level federal government agencies. Through this Program, Southwestern graduates have worked at places like the Missile Defense Center and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

7. Writing competitions

A list of writing competitions provided by various organizations is located on the scholarship information page on the Southwestern portal. This information can also be found on Symplicity, a web-based platform the Career Services Office uses to list employment opportunities.

F. J.D. Concentrations

Southwestern offers seven J.D. Concentrations in the following areas of law:

- Civil Litigation & Advocacy
- Critical Race, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
- Criminal Law & Advocacy
- Entertainment & Media Law
- Labor and Employment Law
- Public Interest Law
- Technology Law & Entrepreneurship

Students must submit a Declaration of Intention form to the Registrar's Office to declare their intent to fulfill a J.D. Concentration. Students may submit the Declaration of Intention at any time but no later than the add/drop deadline of their final semester.

Information regarding the J.D. Concentrations and their requirements can be found on the Southwestern Law School website at

<https://www.swlaw.edu/curriculum/concentrations-and-customizations>.

G. Policy Revisions

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