

Common FAQ of Pre-Professional Students during the Pandemic

A couple of weeks ago Pre-Professional Advising sent out information on P/NP grading and the implications for pre-professional students. This remains a complicated issue for students and advisors. In addition, Pre-Professional Advising is receiving several other common questions we would like to address here.

Please keep in mind that this is a fluid situation—no consensus from schools is available as of yet on this information. It is unlikely that there will be complete agreement between programs.

We recommend that you refer students to our website rather than documents such as this one. We are constantly updating the COVID-19 section on our website while these documents may become out of date more quickly. www.purdue.edu/preprofessional

➤ *Can/should I take my classes P/NP?*

Generally speaking, many schools have mentioned being fairly accommodating, but individual school policies and preferences do vary. A student applying this spring probably won't see as many repercussions as a younger student who is further away from an application as committees will start to forget about what this semester was like.

Traditionally speaking, most professional programs want students to earn grades—especially in prerequisite courses. We have seen a variety of school policies:

- Accepting P/NP if the whole school has moved to this only.
- Officially accept P/NP but discourage it.
- Accept it, but for students not applying this spring, may want to follow up on those grades to see what the letter grade would have been.

One important note: The MD Application is no longer counting P/NP courses in the GPA.

Our advice:

We encourage students to stay motivated, to persevere with hard work, and strive for a letter grade, and to wait until later in the semester to decide on P/NP only if necessary. Having a grade will provide the maximum flexibility to apply anywhere. This is an opportunity to demonstrate adaptability and resilience as aspiring professionals. Students will be competing in their applications with people who have letter grades for all of their courses. In a hyper-competitive application pool, even though schools are individually understanding of the circumstances this semester, it is easy to remove an applicant based on the fact that they don't have all their grades. If the student is concerned about a B or a C in a required course this semester and wants to take a P because of this, we would recommend taking the letter grade. Admission committees will keep grades from this semester in context. They are probably better off with the grade. Ultimately, however, it may be better to have a P than a C- on a transcript depending on the other grades.

➤ *I'm applying to law school. Can I take my courses P/NP?*

Law schools have stated that they will be flexible on P/NP courses especially during this spring 2020 semester. As with healthcare programs, however, students attending law school will face stressful situations in their education and work life. Admission committees will look for students to be resilient under high stress conditions. Because law schools do not have prerequisite courses, it might seem like shifting coursework to P/NP would have few repercussions, but shifting to P/NP grading should still be done cautiously.

Our advice:

Unless students are facing personal difficulties (illness, family illness, personal stresses, difficulty adapting to online coursework, etc), they are typically better to take their courses for letter grades. While law schools are being flexible and the Law School Admission Council will provide a note in all application files for applicants who attended college during this semester reminding admissions committees about the particulars of the spring 2020 semester, that does not mean that admissions committees several years from now will view those students the same way when faced with other applicants who have all of their grades—especially at highly competitive programs.

➤ *Health professions programs typically don't accept online courses—especially labs. What happens with my lab classes this semester?*

Most professional programs have moved their courses online as well. It is unlikely they will view students completing the remainder of their coursework online this semester as a problem. While normally admission committees don't accept online courses, the situation in spring 2020 is clearly different and so far we are hearing flexibility on this and practically all students nationally are facing the same situation.

Health professions programs may see online courses as an indicator that an applicant was trying to take an "easy way out." Nothing about this transition from in person to online is easy, and none of this was a choice that students have actively made! Everyone is trying to be flexible right now.

Our advice:

Proceed with your spring prerequisites as planned. That said, we have heard from a few programs that they recommend waiting until you can take in-person lab courses. We feel this needs to be weighed against staying on track with your curriculum and that these programs will be understanding of the financial need to graduate on time.

➤ *Can I take a prerequisite lab class over the summer even though it will be an online lab?*

We have received communications from some schools such as Purdue College of Veterinary Medicine recognizing that this situation may well continue through the summer and including their acceptance of P/NP and online labs through that time. Other schools, including Indiana

University School of Medicine have strongly encouraged students to wait until they can take in-person lab courses. Thus, schools have very different opinions on this.

Our advice:

Some caution is needed here. While students may have curricular needs to stay on track, if possible, it may be helpful to wait and take lab courses in-person if it looks like we will be back on campus in the fall.

Many programs are more likely to question the rigor of online lab courses. If you want to take a course online, we'd recommend taking an elective or gen ed, so that you can potentially lighten the load in the later term when you take the prerequisite courses. If the student really needs to take a laboratory course in the summer and it will have an online lab, they might want to call and have a serious discussion with some schools where they plan to apply. Keep in mind that schools may officially accept these classes. The question will be how competitive will this type of course be compared to a student who has mostly in-person lab classes?

- *I'm scheduled to take my aptitude test, but I'm afraid it will be canceled. Should I go ahead and reschedule it or wait to hear if it is canceled?*

Most of the organizations that sponsor the aptitude tests have done away with rescheduling fees. Thus, it won't really hurt to go ahead and reschedule your test since you can reschedule again if needed.

Our advice:

Make sure you understand all the rescheduling rules so that you don't face any fees (most fees are being waived, but verify this just in case). We are all assuming the testing sites will reopen this summer. If so, they will do their best to open additional test dates to accommodate all test takers. If reopening testing sites is not possible until fall, it seems likely that schools will start to re-think how they will assess applicants.

- Can I take my aptitude test remotely?

The GRE does offer a remote option.

<https://www.ets.org/s/cv/gre/at-home/>

For those students who had an April LSAT that was cancelled, they have the option of LSAT Flex. In fact, they have been automatically scheduled to take the LSATFlex in May unless they opt out. This is a remote option of the LSAT exam.

<https://www.lsac.org/update-coronavirus-and-lsat/lsat-flex> (more details released 4/17)

The PA-CAT will be offered remotely beginning May 1.

<https://www.pa-cat.com/pa-cat-covid-19-updates/>

The MCAT does not have remote options, but is working on adding testing dates. Rescheduling fees have been dropped.

https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/article/coronavirus-mcat-faqs/?_ga=2.71419091.1567054812.1584908683-1156271144.1584409475

The OAT (for optometry school) and DAT (for dental school) are offered through Prometric Test Centers which are closed at least through April 16th. No remote option is available.

https://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Education%20and%20Careers/Files/DTS_COVID19_Update.pdf?la=en

Prometric Info <https://www.prometric.com/corona-virus-update>

Information about the impact on scheduling/rescheduling the PCAT (for pharmacy) is available on the PearsonVue site. No remote test is available.

<https://home.pearsonvue.com/Test-takers/Resources.aspx?ot=collapse156>

Overall, students should be willing to defend their choices

Whether choosing to take a course P/NP or to continue into the summer taking a lab class that is online, students need to have a reason they are willing to explain and defend, if needed, to a professional program. If asked at an interview, for example, why they didn't wait until they could take that lab class in-person, they need to have a good explanation.

When it comes to P/NP and knowing that schools look for resilience in students, reasons like, "it was just too much change" and "I was nervous about my grade" are probably not very convincing reasons. Going to professional school will be a lot of change for students. Presumably they are always nervous about their grades. A class not being adapted well to online format, problems with internet access, family crises, health issues—these are things that schools will understand.

In terms of continuing to take online lab classes past this semester if there is an in-person option, we know that some schools are resistant to this and worry that these courses may be of lower quality. Reasons would need to be strong such as needing to maintain progress toward degree for scholarships or the student is responsible for part of their undergraduate expenses and needs to keep the costs down and Purdue still offers the courses with online labs and was the most economical option.

These are not the only reasons that students could provide for schools, but they are examples that would be more acceptable to schools and would avoid the assumptions that programs can sometimes make about why applicants make certain decisions.

A few general principles to keep in mind:

We don't yet know how flexible the hundreds of admission committees at medical, dental, veterinary, nursing, audiology, athletic training, physician assistant and other health professions schools will be. We are very hopeful and have seen some indications that they will be flexible even if they take somewhat different approaches to the idea of flexibility.

One question, however, is how long will that flexibility continue?

- Law schools (the Law School Admission Council) will include a notice for applicants enrolled during the spring 2020 reminding admissions committees about the particulars of this semester.
- This year, the osteopathic application (AACOMAS) will include a question about how the pandemic may have impacted the student's preparation. It is too soon to know whether that question will be included in the future.
- MD schools are being encouraged to add this to their secondary applications.

In general, pre-professional students will face significant challenges during professional school and later in their clinical and professional work, often under hardship. During these times they will have a decisive impact on people's lives. Knowing this, admission committees value resilience, adaptability, and dedication in the face of challenges.

The guidance above is meant to help students keep options open at this challenging time. We will continue to monitor developments and offer further guidance when available.

Pre-Professional Advising is here to support students in navigating the remainder of the semester and beyond. If students have questions about grades, application concerns, letters, or any other concerns, we are available to them through email and BoilerConnect. We miss seeing students in person and would enjoy hearing from them!