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Regarding Brown's Grading Policy

Lomax-Emrick, Una <una_lomax-emrick@brown.edu>
 To: Zoe Zimmermann <zoe_zimmermann@brown.edu>

Wed, Apr 22, 2020 at 5:19 PM

Just realized I forgot to send this to you for your archiving project!!! Sorry for the delay!!

-Una

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Lomax-Emrick, Una** <una_lomax-emrick@brown.edu>
 Date: Mon, Mar 30, 2020 at 5:05 PM
 Subject: Re: Regarding Brown's Grading Policy
 To: College <college@brown.edu>

Dear Dean Zia,

Thank you for your correspondence in response to our many requests for universal pass for Brown students.

I am reaching out now in the hopes that you will reconsider the decision that the college has made in order to grant every student an equitable education.

I am a first year student here at Brown and a member of the Bonner Community Fellowship program. When I am on campus, I spend upwards of 6 hours a week volunteering at the Providence Children's Museum and much of the work I do there is geared toward volunteer appreciation. One of the most important lessons I have learned from the time I spend working with a local nonprofit centered around education, is that exceptionalism ultimately guarantees elitism. At the Museum, we honor all volunteers for their hard work and make efforts to prioritize diversity, inclusion, and equity in volunteer outreach and training. Part of this is making sure that all volunteers are held to the same standard of dignified and intentional treatment regardless of their background. No volunteer is praised more than any other volunteer regardless of their situation, the battles they have had to fight, or their identity.

An equitable education must be built on a foundation of mutual support and an acknowledgement of collective humanity before individual choice can be effectively utilized by the students this "agency" claims to serve. Both of my parents fought tooth and nail to attend college. They struggled their way through community colleges, four year schools, and eventually grad schools carrying legacies of trauma and poverty and accruing incredible debt along the way. This struggle is admirable, and every A they earned (and the fact that my mother graduated at the very top of her master's degree program and represented her graduate program at commencement) is testament to their hard work and dedication. My father earned tuition money doing dangerous work on Seattle's freezing shipyards before class and my mother struggled to find a place to safely live throughout her college experience. The many A grades they earned during this time, though the product of hard work are no more admirable than the lower grades they earned with just as much difficulty, in the face of the same hardship. Academic success for many students at Brown university who, like my parents, come from challenging circumstances, is the exception, not the rule at the best of times. Now, in the midst of a global crisis like this one, it is time to honor every student's struggle to *survive*, not a select few students' opportunities to rise above others.

The academic proposal that was made encourages students with the privilege to try and "tough it out" to do so, while leaving all other students, students like my parents who face financial, emotional, and physical hardship left struggling to rise to the standard of their "exceptional" (and exceptionally privileged) peers. This policy promotes a fictionalized and curated version of the ideal "Brown student" who can rise above adversity and finish strong in spite of the mounting evidence ([100,000 To 200,000 Americans Could Die From The Coronavirus](#)) that no one (not even Ivy League Students) are truly able to "rise above" a global pandemic. Students are taking care of their ailing families, students are sick with the virus, students are teaching their younger siblings, students are scrambling to financially support their families in the midst of increasing layoffs, and students are losing their family members. The academic security that will be provided by a universal pass system guarantees every student will be held to the same standard during this time of crisis. It does not promote the exceptionalism of the few who have a stable, and indeed, privileged, enough environment to "rise above." This policy guarantees many students will fall through the cracks so that a select few can prove they will succeed in spite of the circumstances. To employ this policy is to guarantee failure for many in order to promote an exceptional few under the guise of choice and agency. Students will be called to "rise above" to the detriment of their own well being, mental health, physical safety, and material realities. Resilience is admirable, but many students have farther to rise than others.

This policy is not equitable, it is the foundation of the elitism that maintains and streamlines power and prejudice within Brown's community and within the education system. Nearly 2,000 community members have signed a petition endorsing a Universal Pass policy and I'm sure in light of this decision, many will follow in their footsteps. I come from a long line of public school educators, union chairs, and activists, and they have taught me that the most effective community building efforts are those that rally around *everyone* in times of crisis, not just those who can afford it.

One final note: in this time of global crisis, we have the opportunity to reprioritize and focus on our true values. We, as a global community, are learning about strength, resilience, mutual respect, solidarity, shared resources, and love. Our policy should reflect these values-especially now.

I hope you will consider a policy change that better reflects the values of this institution.

Best wishes,
Una Lomax-Emrick

[Quoted text hidden]