Once again freshman pass/fail is before the faculty for action, and our ad hoc committee is making recommendations. A brief history is at the end of this report for those who need or want it. During the four years of its existence, we investigated how "hidden grades" for medical school admission were used, consulted with departments about pass/fail, and, most importantly, sent questionnaires about pass/fail to all the faculty and a sample of students. We begin with a brief summary of the highlights of these.

The response rate from a sample of 250 freshmen and 250 juniors was 66% respectively. A few late questionnaires were not tabulated.

About 1/3 of the juniors felt that pass/fail had enhanced their choice of major, for instance by allowing them to replan, reexplore, and learn what they did and didn't like. Details by department can be seen at the end of the report, and we urge faculty to look at them. Jususon did not feel that pass/fail had any significant effect on how well prepared they were for upperclass courses.

In a series of questions, freshmen voted strongly in favor of the hidden grade policy, though many felt it could be handled better--for instance by more timely announcements.

In another series of twelve questions, both groups were asked what they did under pass/fail to what they thought they would have done under letter grades. There are no surprises in the results, which generally bear out the old view of pass/fail: it encourages freshmen to take more subjects, follow their interests, work less hard overall in their more subjects, spend more time in recreational activities, and contributes to a generally more relaxed atmosphere. These are only tendencies: many students felt pass/fail made no difference in their behavior.

Present attitudes: faculty
All faculty and freshmen advisors received the questionnaire, and over 500 returned it. For the school of engineering, the response rate was somewhat higher than the mean, for the school of humanities and social science, somewhat lower. The depth of feeling in many cases is remarkable--a third of the responses had extended comments, sometimes running to a page or more. Throughout, faculty in the school of science tended to adopt the centrist position; those in engineering tended to want better grade-giving, those in the other schools tended to support pass/fail. There was little difference in the attitude of the respondents (length of the statement, extent of contact with freshmen).

### How do you feel about pass/fail?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good or basically good</th>
<th>Fairly good</th>
<th>Fairly bad</th>
<th>Bad or drastically bad</th>
<th>No opinion/other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reasons most often cited were:

- on the one hand, reduction of anxiety, easing of passage to MIT, more freedom to explore; on the other, students work less hard and aren't adequately evaluated.

### What do you favor continuation of pass/fail?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Favor pass/fail without modifications</th>
<th>Favor pass/fail with modifications</th>
<th>Abolish</th>
<th>No opinion or no response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### What modifications?

- Many faculty recommended a change in the passing grade, from the present A, B, C, D to a more uniform system: either A, B, C, D, or A, B, C, D, F, or D, F, F, F, or D, F, F, F. There were also several suggestions for lessening the "pass" factor, to make it more "pass-like" and "harder". There were also several comments that pass/fail should be eliminated, or that faculty should be required to use a more stringent grading system.

### Continue to use a single passing grade

1. Continue use of the single passing grade F.

The questionnaires suggested alternatives and all were nibbled at.

### What should be the passing grades?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pass/Fail satisfactory</th>
<th>Pass/Fail unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Absolutely unsatisfactory</th>
<th>No opinion or no response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### One more change

The questionnaires suggested a change in the passing grade, from the present A, B, C, D to a more uniform system: either A, B, C, D, or A, B, C, D, F, or D, F, F, F, or D, F, F, F. There were also several suggestions for lessening the "pass" factor, to make it more "pass-like" and "harder". There were also several comments that pass/fail should be eliminated, or that faculty should be required to use a more stringent grading system.

### Continue to use letter grades

1. Continue use of letter grades.

The questionnaires suggested alternatives and all were nibbled at.

### What should be the passing grades?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pass/Fail satisfactory</th>
<th>Pass/Fail unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Absolutely unsatisfactory</th>
<th>No opinion or no response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because so many upperclass students get A or B, the Institute now is substantially on a two-level grading system. Either of the two-level alternatives really means a return to letter grades. Through the "honors" grade might be initially restricted to any 10% of the students, we remind the faculty that A used to be an honor grade too; inflation of the "honors" seems inevitable.

In the end there is no way to escape the value judgment: we feel that the good outweighs the bad with pass/fail, and think that any return to a two-level grading system will mean the end of the good without enough compensating advantages. We believe that our last two recommendations will help correct some of the present difficulties with pass/fail, so that the more drastic action of returning to a three-level grading system is not needed.

### Freshman evaluations

These forms are filled out twice a semester by student and instructor, and were initially intended both to substitute for grades and to give a more meaningful evaluation than grades could. They are not used as much as they were in the beginning, and the quality seems to be declining. A somewhat subjective study of a sample this fall rated about half the comments as "of poor quality"--too short, unresponsive, containing only grade-like information, etc.

### The reasons are plain enough

Mass-lecture-recitation subjects, often unsatisfactory by many, don't give much chance for the meaningful contact which could lead to good evaluations. For the self-paced subjects, the exam record is often considered adequate as an indication of progress, by both student and instructor. In other large subjects, grades are kept because of the upperclassmen in them, and this often leads to grade-like evaluations.

Look on the brighter side: half the comments are good, useful to students, their instructors, and the advisors. If the others are routine, they at least do no harm. For now, the FAC should be encouraged to experiment with the format of the evaluations. Instructions should let the freshmen know in advance that type of comments they will be able to provide, and what type they hope to receive from the students. Even if the evaluation is perfunctory, good students will still be guaranteed an indication of where they stand if our next recommendation is adopted.

### Continue to identify outstanding work

Of freshmen who had an opinion, 4/5 said it had either increased their interest, work less hard overall in their more subjects, spend more time in recreational activities, and contributes to a generally more relaxed atmosphere. These are only tendencies: many students felt pass/fail made no difference in their behavior.

### Experience and evidence

In the questionnaire, 17% of the freshmen report that medical school is at least somewhat more attractive to them.

Failure to provide grades or terse evaluations on request can be detrimental to a student's medical school application. Some medical schools translate a "pass" into a letter grade, either B or C. (For further discussion, see the Fall 1972 report of the ad hoc committee investigating this to the chairman of the faculty.)

Our conclusion from all this is that there will be in the visible future a hard core of some 50-odd students each year who will be hurt if they do not have these grades available. Many faculty apparently are in principle in favor of this policy, but the students even to have a more pragmatic view of it. Under the circumstances, we feel that student opinion should be the deciding factor.

### Current operation

In those subjects which contain large freshmen components, the "honors" grade is probably equivalent to an A. What's more, the "honors" grade might be initially restricted to any 10% of the students, we remind the faculty that A used to be an honor grade too; inflation of the "honors" seems inevitable.

In the end there is no way to escape the value judgment: we feel that the good outweighs the bad with pass/fail, and think that any return to a two-level grading system will mean the end of the good without enough compensating advantages. We believe that our last two recommendations will help correct some of the present difficulties with pass/fail, so that the more drastic action of returning to a three-level grading system is not needed.

### Freshman evaluations

These forms are filled out twice a semester by student and instructor, and were initially intended both to substitute for grades and to give a more meaningful evaluation than grades could.