

Honors/Satisfactory/Fail Student Learning Assessment

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Why does Washington State University (WSU) College of Pharmacy (COP) PharmD Program utilize an Honors-Satisfactory-Fail (H/S/F) student learning assessment model?

WSU COP adopted an H/S/F assessment model or grading system for the following reasons:

- The College of Pharmacy faculty members believe that the focus of a professional Doctor of Pharmacy Program should be on the mastery of all essential knowledge and skills which prepares graduates to become competent pharmacist practitioners rather than on the attainment of over-all course grades.
- The H/S/F student learning assessment model clearly links demonstration of competency to achievement of well-defined learning objectives and course outcomes. For some students this new grading model may vary from their past educational experiences. Traditional grading models, which are commonly used in undergraduate or pre-pharmacy education, sometimes utilize “grading on the curve”, which evaluates student performance relative to the performance of other students in the course. In the H/S/F model, all students are expected to achieve a pre-defined level of competency that is not dependent on the performance of other students.
- While traditional grading models might include a mid-term and final exam, the H/S/F testing model allows students to focus on attaining mastery of course content frequently throughout the semester. This approach facilitates learning by creating a testing structure with smaller amounts of material included on each assessment and highlights areas for needed improvement through alignment of learning assessments with stated learning objectives.
- Students are admitted into the WSU College of Pharmacy Doctor of Pharmacy Program with the expectation of successful completion of the program. The H/S/F model facilitates this by helping faculty to identify opportunities to support students in the areas where they may be struggling. The re-tests for specific content and skills are specifically designed to ensure students have the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of all subject matter.
- Initial research indicates that an H/S/F curriculum model may reduce student stress, anxiety and depression and may decrease an atmosphere of competition by shifting the focus from attainment of grades to demonstration of competency.

- The H/S/F assessment model supports WSU College of Pharmacy educational and human health focused mission... *“To advance human health through excellence in collaborative research, scholarship, and clinical education and to develop outstanding healthcare professionals and scientists.”*

2. What is block testing?

- Block testing: A block test is when all core courses administer a test during the same scheduled testing time. Each block test is designed to assess a smaller amount of content in comparison to a traditional grading model. Each block-tested course will test content covered during the previous 2 weeks.
- The block testing schedule can be reviewed at the following link:
<http://www.pharmacy.wsu.edu/currentstudents/pharmacycalendars.html>
- Not all courses participate in block testing. These “non-block” tested courses often include labs and other courses that are not amendable to the frequent testing model. The course syllabus will indicate if a course is block tested or is “non-block” tested.

3. How is competency defined for block tested and non-block tested courses such as laboratory courses?

Satisfactory: The student **demonstrates** attainment of knowledge and skills relevant to the defined learning outcomes by achieving **at least 80%*** on the outcomes/learning objectives assessed, unless otherwise more stringently specified by the course syllabus.

Fail: The student **fails** to demonstrate attainment of knowledge and skills relevant to the defined learning outcomes by achieving **at least 80%** on the outcomes/learning objectives assessed unless otherwise more stringently specified by this course syllabus.

**Some courses or course learning assessments require a competency that is higher than 80%. This is noted in the course syllabus of these courses.*

4. How many attempts are provided for students to demonstrate competency?

- **PY1-PY3 (non-lab based) Courses for block and non-block tested formats**
 - Students will be provided **three attempts** to demonstrate competency on **individual** assessments.
 - Competency will be determined in electives as outlined in the course syllabus.

- **PY1-PY3 (lab based) Courses**
 - Students will be provided with a *variable* number of attempts based on the type of activity/assignment because the nature of activities in these courses can vary substantially. The course syllabus will specifically state expectations, requirements for competency, and remediation opportunities for each activity
- **PY1-PY3 Introductory Pharmacy Practice Experience (IPPE)**
 - Utilizes a competency-based grading system which is described within each IPPE syllabus.
- **PY4 Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience (APPE)**
 - Utilizes a competency-based grading system which is described within each APPE Rotation Handbook.

5. What is the testing plan that provides three attempts to demonstrate competency for block-tested courses?

The testing plan includes an initial test, re-test and extended learning experience (ELE) test. Each test is described below.

- **Initial Test (first attempt):**
 - Tests will be given every two weeks during the designated Monday testing block (see weekly testing schedule).
 - Student pharmacists will be informed of exam results within 2 days of taking the exam.
- **Re-Test (second attempt):**
 - A mandatory re-test will be given to any student who does not pass the initial test (i.e. does not score at **least 80% or higher** if indicated by the course syllabus). Re-tests will occur the Friday of test week.
 - Before taking the re-test, students are encouraged to consult with faculty in order to clarify content and/or to get additional instruction.
 - *The purpose of the re-test is to ascertain that the student has sufficient knowledge of the academic material to meet the established standard of proficiency/competency. It is not intended to provide the opportunity to increase a passing score to a higher level. Accordingly, the maximum score recorded for any re-test will be 80%*, regardless of the actual score student received.*
- **Extended Learning Experience (ELE) and ELE Test (third attempt):**
 - Any student who does not successfully achieve a passing score (80%*) on any re-test is required to attend an end-of-semester ELE session. ELEs are scheduled for Week 15 and Finals Week (see weekly testing schedule)

- Prior to the ELE, the student will be given the opportunity to work with his/her instructors to prepare for the ELE test
- The ELE Test is the third and final attempt for a student to demonstrate competence.
- *The purpose of the ELE and accompanying re-test is to ascertain that the student has sufficient knowledge of the academic material to meet the established standard of proficiency/competency. It is not intended to provide the opportunity to increase a passing score to a higher level. Accordingly, the maximum score recorded for any ELE Test will be 80%*, regardless of the actual score received.*
- **Students who do not pass any ELE Test(s) associated with this course will be assigned a failing grade for the course.**

**Some courses or course learning assessments require a competency that is higher than 80%. This is noted in the course syllabus of these courses.*

6. How do I earn an honors grade in a course?

An honors grade (H) is available for some, not all, courses. Achievement of honors is determined on a course by course basis. A description is included in the course syllabus. Examples from some courses regarding how the honors grade may be achieved include a requirement the students to earn a certain cumulative course average percent in the course or completion of a separate project that meets a certain quality.

7. How long has WSU COP been using the H/S/F grading model?

The H/S/F curriculum and grading model was implemented with the Class of 2017 (entered fall 2013). As of Fall 2015, PY1 – PY4 professional years of the curriculum are using the H/S/F grading model.

8. How will course grades appear on my official university transcript in the H/S/F system? Will I receive a cumulative grade point average (GPA)?

Course grades will appear on the official transcript as H (honors), S (satisfactory), F (fail).

Cumulative GPA will not be officially calculated through the University.

9. How will academic achievement be recognized and communicated?

For each cohort of PharmD students, a course average percent (CAP) will be calculated each semester for each student. Any CAP that is greater than or equal to the 75th percentile will be ranked each semester.

Individual CAP and rankings provide objective measures of academic distinction for the purposes of scholarships, Rho Chi (Pharmacy Academic Honor Society), Dean's List each semester and residency or employment applications.

Individual CAP and class ranking procedures are outlined specifically in the Student Handbook which can be found on the COP website.

<http://www.pharmacy.wsu.edu/currentstudents/pharmacyclassschedulesandtools.html>

10. What is the PharmD Honors Program?

The Honors Program is an intensive research program in which students begin to work with a research mentor in the spring of the PY1 year, culminating with a presentation of the research in the spring of the PY3 year (therefore approximately a 2 year project). The Honors designation upon graduation is not dependent on the number of honors grades a student receives.

The Pharm D Honors program provides opportunities for student pharmacists to explore areas of interest that complement and enhance their experiences in the PharmD program through developing and conducting formal research projects. This research component allows a student pharmacist to strategically align his or her personal pharmacy interests and future career goals by providing deeper expertise in that interest area. A detailed overview of the PharmD Honors Program including how to apply may be found on the COP website.

11. Will the H/S/F grading system affect my chances of getting into a post-graduate residency program?

The COP is committed to supporting students as they prepare and apply for post-graduate residency programs. For more information about pharmacy residency programs including how to prepare and apply, please contact COP Student Services at 509-368-6605 or admissions@pharmacy.wsu.edu.

12. Who can I talk to regarding the H/S/F student learning assessment model?

College of Pharmacy student services at 509-368-6610 or admissions@pharmacy.wsu.edu .