Rationale for establishing a temporary S/U Policy for UTEP:

The Covid 19 surge in El Paso has amplified student stress and created challenges for even students with strong academic records. Many faculty have expressed concern that student progress is being affected by the community circumstances. More specifically,

* students are either directly affected by the disease or are caring for family members to are ill
* students have taken on work schedules to alleviate economic circumstances caused by the pandemic
* many students are essential workers and are regularly exposed to the virus due to the high positive rate in the community
* some students are caring for school age children who are learning virtually at home

Due to these issues, the Student Government Association has requested the Faculty Senate to consider recommending a temporary S/U policy for the fall of 2020. An informal survey of faculty during the last Senate meeting suggested that the S/U option is desired by the majority of respondents.

The Faculty Senate first considered re-establishing the temporary S/U policy implemented in spring of 2020, which required individual faculty to consider offering the option, section-by-section, request it through the curriculum office, and explain it to their students. Unfortunately, while this helped some students, it also created confusion and inequity.

* Students in different sections of the same course had different grading options, creating a perception of unfairness and even bias.
* Some faculty felt uncomfortable with how they would be perceived by their colleagues if they offered or did not offer the option.
* Grade modes for a course are determined through the faculty curriculum process by course (not by section) and Banner is aligned with that process, such that triggering that option for a course affects ALL sections of that course. There is no mechanism for managing grade modes by section, which resulted in a complex manual cross-checking process that was wrought with errors for both students and faculty. Errors in grading records threaten the academic integrity of the institution.
* Students had difficulty tracking which courses had the option available and which did not and faculty often thought they had elected the option when they had not.
* The double election of the option (first by faculty and then by student) is simply not viable at this point in the fall semester.

Rather than follow this same course of action, the Faculty Senate recommends that UTEP establish a simpler and more streamlined policy, which was tested and used by UT Austin and many other schools in the UT System and across the nation last spring, where:

1. All courses have the S/U option available, unless accreditation requirements limit that possibility.
2. Students consult carefully with faculty and advisors to check that their selection of this option would not create difficulty for their progress or for graduate school plans.
3. Faculty can make the decision for the S-option based on the nature of the course and the knowledge that an S will fulfill requirements. Thus, if fulfilling requirements for that course requires a certain grade, they should grade accordingly.