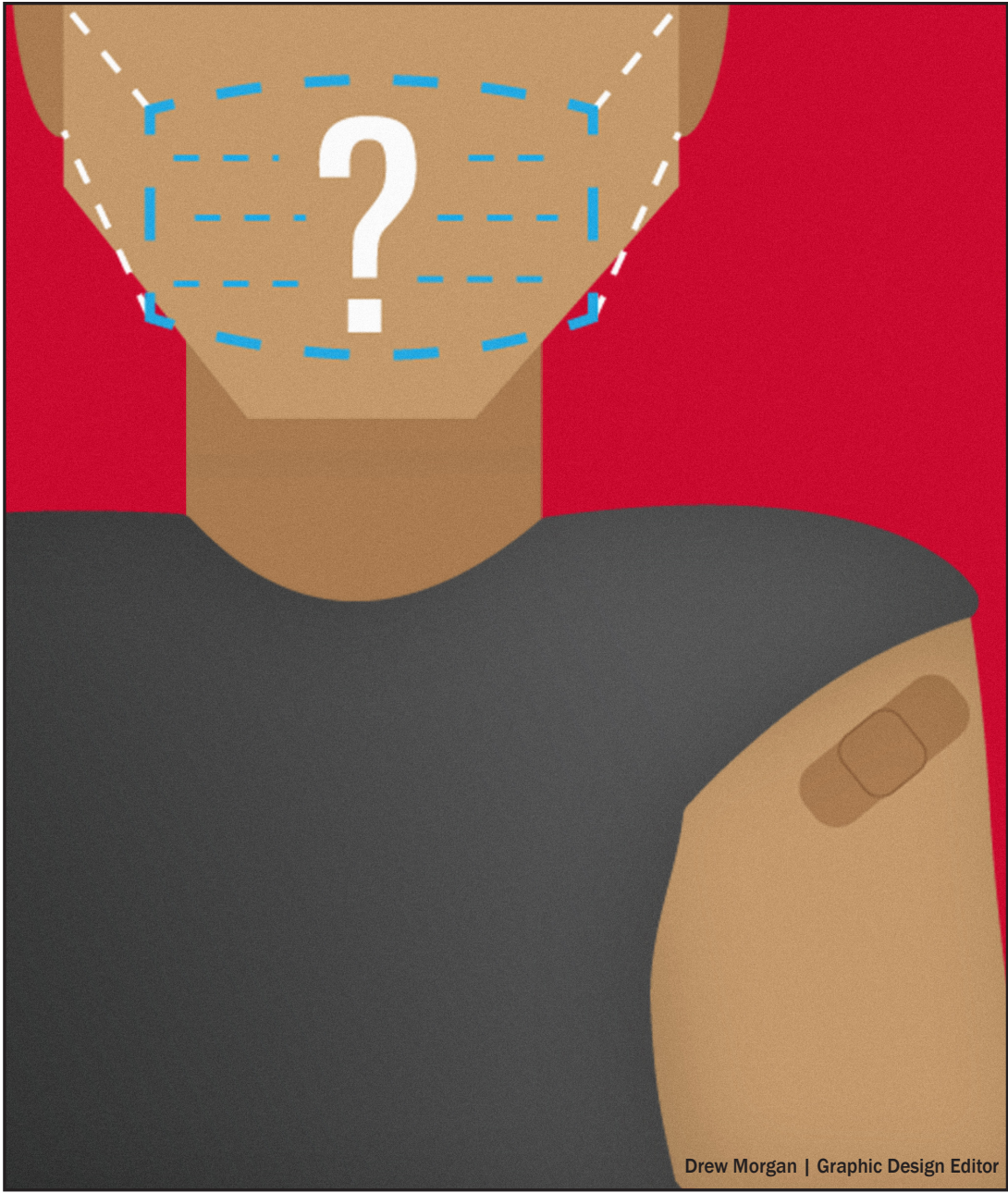




PHOTO. 4B
Take a look at the Festival of Colors event!

Mask mandate to stay in place at A-State, campus prepares for full in-person activity
Gov. Asa Hutchinson lifts mandate for Arkansas but masks still to be worn on campus



KRISHNAN COLLINS
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Arkansas State Chancellor Dr. Kelly Damphousse announced A-State would be returning to full in-person and on-campus activity for summer 2021 sessions and the fall 2021 semester. The chancellor also announced A-State would keep its mask mandate in place while Gov. Asa Hutchinson has lifted the mask mandate in Arkansas. Damphousse pointed to a declining number of cases on campus and the increase of vaccines across campus as reasons for a return to full on campus activity this summer and fall. As of Tuesday afternoon, there were a total of nine active COVID-19 cases at A-State. “We have been monitoring the conditions very carefully for the past 13 months and what’s happening here,” Damphousse said. “As the number of people in our state and our campus getting vaccinated increases, it’s led us to be more confident in our capacity to control the spread of the virus on our campus.”

Returning campus spaces to normal

Part of the return to normal includes converting socially distanced classrooms back to

their normal capacity along with tons of other changes to campus to get A-State looking like it did before the pandemic. This includes measures like taking down capacity limits of different rooms, returning temporary classrooms back to their original function, picking up social distancing stickers on floors across campus, moving furniture pieces back to where they were before the pandemic and much more. Damphousse said it took the university a long time to create COVID-19 capacities for every room on campus along with marking off chairs and putting signage up. So, it will also take a good bit of time to return those measures to normal. “We have to decommission some sites we developed,” Damphousse said. “We have some nontraditional classroom sites we have to decommission by taking chairs out of them. For example classrooms that were put in gymnasiums and places like that. That will take some time.”

The chancellor noted A-State will concentrate on opening traditional spaces first. “Also recommissioning the traditional spaces that we have been using,” Damphousse said. “Getting back to a more traditional capacity in those

rooms as well. So that’ll be taking down taping off of chairs, moving furniture back to more traditional settings, taking down signage and so on, stickers off the floors.”

Once traditional spaces have returned to normal, nontraditional spaces can be returned to their original purposes as well. “It’ll take a lot of time,” Damphousse said. “It’s not something you can do overnight. That’s one of the reasons we’ve decided not to change our Return to Learn plan for the rest of the semester. It’s just not that easy to turn around the Return to Learn plan and the spacing and the signage and so on. It’s probably going to take several weeks to get that done.”

Damphousse said the process of returning those things back to normal will probably start right after the spring semester ends. The focus at first will be the classrooms that will be used in the summer.

Mask mandate to stay in place at A-State, vaccines offered to students

Gov. Asa Hutchinson announced March 30 that Arkansas’ mask mandate had been lifted.

CONTINUED
MASKS, 4A

Credit/No Credit option will not be extended for the spring 2021 semester

COURTNEY EDWARDS
NEWS WRITER

The Credit/No Credit option for students to request a change from an assigned letter grade into a credit/no credit score will not be available to students for the spring 2021 semester. Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Alan Utter announced March 15 the CR/NC option will not be extended. The option was introduced during the spring 2020 semester to allow students to either receive credit or no credit for a course without it affecting their GPA. The spring 2020 semester was cut short when Chancellor Dr. Kelly Damphousse announced A-State would transition to all online after spring break. Not long after the break, he made the announcement about the CR/NC option. It was extended for the fall 2020 semester, which offered a hybrid of online and on campus courses. Although the spring 2021 semester has implemented more on campus courses and activities, many courses are still either

completely online or hybrid. According to the Office of the Registrar, 9.10% of students utilized the CR/NC option for spring 2020. The percentage of undergraduate students that utilized the option stood at 14.26% and 0.22% of graduate students utilized the option. For fall 2020, the number of students utilizing the option dropped to 7.77%. Undergraduate students who used the option also dropped to 12.26% but graduate students who used it increased to 0.47%.

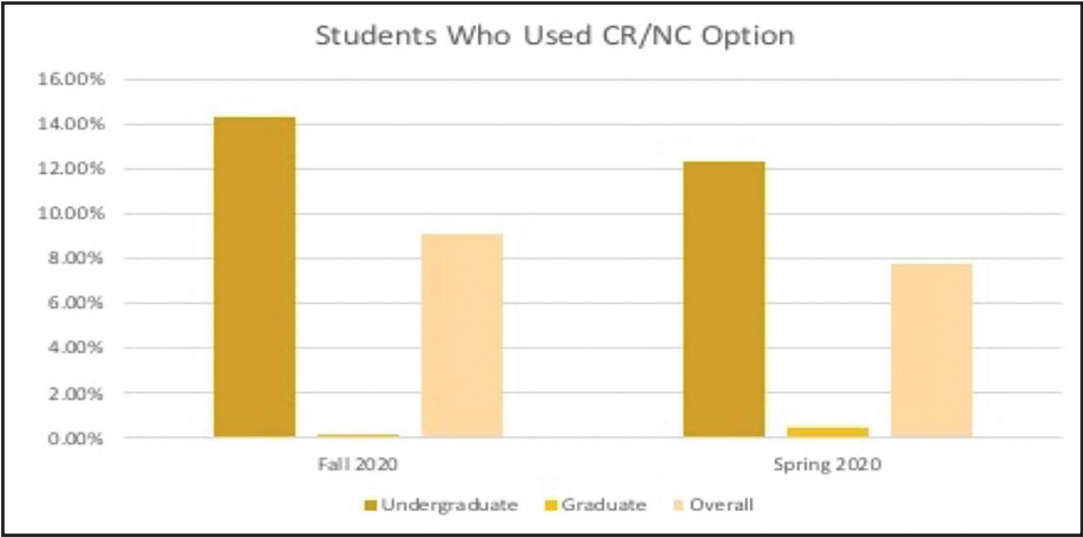
Although 9.10% of students decided to take the CR/NC option in spring 2020, only 4.92% of student’s grades were changed. In fall 2020, 4.20% of student’s grades were changed. It may not seem like many students benefited from the option, but many students said the option would still be useful to them.

Morgan Presley, a senior majoring in studio art, said she used the option last spring. After students were sent home, she said it was difficult to do some of her work because she didn’t have the right materials. “I’ve seen a lot of online classes substitute the lack of

face-to-face time with more busywork, and it builds up really quick,” Presley said. “I think it would just be fair to allow the credit/no credit option for situations like that.”

A freshman studio art and creative media production double major Jayden Hannah said the online aspect was difficult to adjust to, especially as a freshman. Hannah said this semester was especially draining to the same extent if not more than last semester. “Along with online school just being confusing and subject to tech issues, pandemic precautions have reduced the capacity to a lot of the resources such as limited studio capacity for students,” Hannah said. “While I completely understand these precautions, it does make things much more difficult for students. Studio access and hands-on learning is important for my major.”

Jacob Keene, a junior majoring in creative media production, said the choice not to extend the option is going to have a negative impact on students’ GPA’s. Keene said he used the CR/NC



option every chance he got. “Personally speaking, this semester has been one of my hardest motivation wise since the pandemic started,” Keene said. “I’m fully vaccinated and the number (of cases) are going down, but everything is still online for the most part and the issues of the last two semesters are still here.”

Yajaira Flores, a senior majoring in creative media production said she’s struggled this semester with illness, and it’s caused her to get behind in her work. She said she’s noticed many students

struggling with mental issues this semester as well. “People are still being affected by COVID-19. People are still not doing very well with how it’s all going even though it’s a lot better than it was,” Flores said. “Nobody really knows how to do online school well. It’s been a lot harder for me to learn considering I’m not in class.”

Although many students feel the option should still be offered, some disagree. When the option was first introduced, it was proposed as a “temporary CR/NC option for the spring 2020 semester only”

according to Damphousse’s announcement. It was extended for the fall 2020 semester. Ben Johnson, a senior English major, said he doesn’t mind the option being taken away. He said he’s never had to use it, but he did sign the petition for the option when the pandemic first hit, and little was known about what would happen over the next year. “We’ve had about a year to adapt to the whole COVID pandemic, so I feel like at this point we should be able to move on from the credit/no credit option,” Johnson said.