

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES

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Graduate College and Department Policies

Memorandum ~ November 2019

In recent years, the Graduate College has been tightening its policies and oversight of graduate programs and individual students, in order to ensure that rules are followed within and across all campus units and to keep students moving forward toward graduation in a timely manner. Because many of these policies – documented in the [The Graduate College Handbook](#) (revised August 2019) – are unfamiliar to us, the most consequential have been outlined here. At the same time, the Executive and Graduate Studies Committees take this opportunity to remind faculty and students of the Department’s own policies (*) for measuring students’ progress, evaluating their work, and helping them to succeed.

Academic Standing

The Graduate College has recently constricted the [time limits](#) on each stage of the degree program. *** In general, these time limits reflect the rhythms of graduate study in STEM fields and do not match either the average time-to-degree in this department (7-8 years) or the average as reported by the American Historical Association (7 years). Students are therefore assured that the Department will provide adequate time to complete their degrees, and will support all necessary [petitions](#) to extend either the preliminary examination or deposit time limits.**

As mandated, these time limits are:

- students entering with a BA (“Stage I”) are expected to complete preliminary exams by the end of their 5th year in the program, and to defend and deposit the dissertation by the end of the 7th year;
- students entering with an MA (“Stage II”) are expected to complete preliminary exams by the end of their 4th year in the program, and to defend and deposit the dissertation by the end of the 6th year.

Good Standing

Good academic standing, as defined by the College, requires more than an acceptable cumulative and semester GPA (3.0, in the case of our Department). Graduate students must make satisfactory progress in all aspects of their program in order to continue as students and to graduate.

Probation Due to Low GPA

Students placed on probation have one semester to improve their standing, or they will be dismissed from the Graduate College. This means that a student who has a cumulative graduate GPA below 3.0 at the end of a fall or spring semester will be placed on academic probation and must raise the cumulative GPA by the end of the next semester of enrollment, or face dismissal from the Graduate College.

Probation Due to Exceeded Time Limit: Effective Fall 2020

Students who have exceeded the time to complete their degree must successfully petition the Graduate College to continue in the program. These students will be notified in advance by the Graduate College and will have up to three consecutive semesters to improve their standing. Students placed on probation due to having exceeded the time limit to complete Stage II (i.e. prelims) will have a semester to improve their standing. They, too, will be notified in advance by the Graduate College. **In both cases, students may also be exempted from academic probation if the program requests that for justifiable reasons.**

Probation Based on Program Recommendation

Programs monitor the academic progress of their students. Factors used to assess academic progress include, but are not limited to, performance in course work, satisfactory and timely completion of all milestones as determined by the program, satisfactory progress in research, overall graduate and/or program GPA, and performance on qualifying, preliminary, and other examinations. Failure to meet these requirements can result in the program recommending to the Graduate College that the student be placed on probation or dismissed by the Graduate College. The Graduate College will review the recommendation. If it is determined that the student will be placed on probation, the Graduate College will communicate the length of the probationary period and requirements for returning to Good Standing.

* The Department furthermore reserves the right to withdraw a student's funding or to recommend that a student be placed on probation if the student has not made adequate progress toward the improvement of their teaching, or if they have not performed their teaching duties responsibly. However, this will only occur if the student has been duly informed of the need for improvement and has been given adequate time and resources to address the issue.

* The Department also reserves the right to withdraw a student's funding for the coming semester if they have two or more Incomplete grades at the end of the current semester.

Grading

* Given that students must maintain the Department's required cumulative GPA of 3.0, the grades required to remain in Good Standing are: A+/A (4.0), A- (3.67), B+ (3.33), and B (3.0). This does not mean that other grades cannot be assigned: while Department faculty must remain mindful of the ways that grades are assigned in peer departments, to avoid major disparities, an instructor may assign a lower grade if it is warranted by a student's poor performance. Students who consistently perform below this level will be placed on probation by the Graduate College. If so, this should be a signal to their mentors and the DGS that the student needs special counseling.

* The grade of **Incomplete** should be assigned only sparingly and with caution. The Graduate College is now requiring that, **if no final grade is assigned by the deadlines described below, the grade becomes an F or U by rule**, depending on the grading mode of the course. Both the student and faculty instructor must therefore agree on a viable plan for completing the necessary work in a timely manner, preferably prior to the beginning of the next semester, to avoid exacerbating the situation.

I grades assigned in fall will become an **F** after Reading Day in the spring.

I grades assigned in spring will become an **F** on the 10th day of instruction in the following fall semester.

I grades assigned in the summer will become an **F** after Reading Day in the fall.

The College has also re-iterated its policy that the only faculty member who determines the grade of a student in any course is the instructor of record for that course. It is not appropriate for anyone to influence or pressure an instructor into assigning a different grade than the student has earned through their own efforts. Needless to say, the College also forbids faculty from submitting a grade (other than I) in advance of the student's completion of all the work assigned in a given course.

Leaves of Absence

Graduate Students are entitled to a total of two terms (fall and/or spring semesters) of academic leave in the course of a single degree program. Additional leaves of absence may be requested by petition, but are not necessarily granted.

- **Personal Academic Leave of Absence** may be requested for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to health reasons; for personal reasons; for active military service; or to take care of dependents or family members. Students who are on an approved Personal Academic Leave of Absence *are not expected to make progress* on the degree. In addition, students on Personal Academic Leaves of Absence should not expect that faculty will provide feedback on academic work, including proposals or drafts of theses.
- **Academic Progress Leaves of Absence** may be requested for instances of academic activity such as Study Abroad, when the student registers at another institution; or fieldwork, when the student is not using UIUC resources including faculty time, nor receiving financial support paid through the University. Students who are on an approved Academic Progress Leave of Absence *do use the Leave to make progress* toward completion of the degree, *but must not use campus resources*. Expectations of progress to be made during the Leave should be documented in the student's academic file.
- **Medical Leave of Absence** can be requested retroactively, so long as the student can provide the necessary documentation.

Student Status does not change during the period of an approved Leave of Absence. Standing that was in place at the time of the leave is not changed at the time of return as long as the conditions of the approved leave are met.

Timing and Limits: Academic Leaves (except for Medical Leave) must be requested before the term begins and cannot be requested retroactively, cannot be used to return to Good Standing, and cannot be used to extend the time to degree. These terms may be consecutive or approved individually.

The Graduate College policy on time to degree (see above) applies. If, by requesting a Leave, the student is going to exceed the degree program's approved time to degree during the Leave, then the student also needs to request a time extension for the degree through the Graduate College petition process at the time of the request for Academic Leave.

DRES Accommodations for Graduate Students

As part of ongoing efforts by the Department and the Graduate College to meet the diverse and developing needs of our graduate students, the College is now working actively with DRES (Disability Resources and Educational Services) in recognition of the fact that some graduate students require and deserve adequate accommodations to safeguard their health and ensure their success. Since this is very new territory for all of us, please let me know if you have an incoming or continuing student with a disability or medical condition who could benefit from a formal DRES accommodation. This process can be a lengthy one, and requires adequate documentation from healthcare professionals.

Mentoring Guidelines and Faculty Responsibilities

Both the Graduate College and the Department are currently reviewing guidelines and best practices for mentoring our students through the degree program, each stage of which entails different challenges.

Faculty who are fortunate to be mentoring students – whether as advisors, committee members, examiners, or instructors – are also taking on the responsibilities that come with those roles. Among these duties are:

- * prompt responses to email messages and other queries from students;
- * attentiveness to their mental health and well-being;
- * willingness to meet and consult with students, and to read and comment on their written work in a timely and constructive manner;
- * willingness to write letters of support for students applying for grants, fellowships, and job opportunities – which entails maintaining communication with students, becoming familiar with their developing projects, and dedicating the necessary time to composing suitable letters for them. If a faculty member does not feel capable of meeting a deadline, or does not have the time or inclination to write on a student's behalf, it is far better to inform the student of that than to make promises one cannot keep. It is also inappropriate for faculty to ask students to draft such letters on their own, for faculty to revise and sign.