

22 May 2020

Dear graduate students, faculty, and graduate coordinators:

This memo describes a Graduate School procedure to deal with time-to-degree deadlines in response to the difficulties resulting from COVID-19 and the “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” mandate in Washington.

Let me start with some background, to make sure we’re all on the same page as to current policy—before I change it. For full details, please see the Graduate School policies and procedures manual <https://gradschool.wsu.edu/documents/2019/03/2019-20-ppm.pdf/>

For general academic requirements, see Chapter 6.E; for master’s and doctoral degrees, Chapter 7.A and 8.A., respectively.

There are two time-to-degree clocks:

- From the semester of the earliest coursework on the approved Program of Study (PoS). This is six years for master’s students and ten years for doctoral students. If a master’s student has a course from Fall 2014 on the PoS approved by the Graduate School, the student must complete all degree requirements by the end of the Fall 2020 semester.
- For doctoral students, a second clock starts upon successful completion of the preliminary exam (advancement to candidacy), with a three-year limit. If a student advanced to candidacy in the Fall 2017 semester, all degree requirements must be completed by the end of the Fall 2020 semester (this does not include the interim exam period at the end of each semester).

As described in Chapter 6.F, the Graduate School does have policies and procedures in place for students and their faculty advisory committees to request exceptions to policy to extend these time-to-degree deadlines. Extensions are granted on a one-year basis.

- The request for a first extension is relatively straight-forward, requiring a memo from the chair of the student’s committee after input from the committee. Typically for doctoral students, this need for an extension is triggered by the second clock, based on the preliminary exam date, and generally doctoral students would be starting their fifth or sixth year, depending on the program.
- The process for requesting a second and third extension requires more levels of review, including a detailed timeline from the student (approved by the committee) and a vote of the graduate training faculty in the student’s graduate program.

The purpose of the extension process is not about weeding out and dismissing students who are unable to meet their time to degree clocks. The philosophy behind the extension process is to make sure that the student, the faculty mentor and the faculty advisory committee are in communication and that the student is thinking about and receiving guidance on how to move forward productively and efficiently in completing all degree requirements.

Obviously, the events of the last two+ months have impacted students’ ability to complete degree requirements, particularly for thesis master’s and doctoral students. I have been asked if the Graduate School can just give automatic extensions to everyone. My answer has been no. Firstly, because with different clocks, different start dates, etc. there is no way to automatically revise everyone’s degree completion deadline. Secondly, it may not be appropriate for every student, and it takes the decision out of the hands of the faculty mentors and committees that are tasked with guiding the student to an appropriate time-to-degree. Yet clearly, some relief is appropriate for those students closest to completion deadlines or currently on an extension. To that end, **the Graduate School team has developed a procedure to automate extensions on a semester-by-semester basis.**

Short version: The Graduate School will provide automatic extensions to students, depending on their status. This will mean a decrease in memos and paperwork processing. This does not mean that faculty mentors and the advisory committees do not have to meet with the student and provide mentorship and guidance on the goals of degree completion.

The details of the plan are listed below, and are applicable to students with current degree completion deadlines in the Summer 2020 and Fall 2020 semesters. As life in the time of COVID-19 unfolds, the Graduate School will revisit the plan and adjust as needed for students with later completion deadlines.

1) Students who are approaching their original degree completion deadline in Summer 2020 and Fall 2020 and have not yet applied for an extension.

Students will be automatically granted a first extension. There will be no requirement for an exception to policy requesting an extension. IF a student does not complete all degree requirements within this one-year first extension, they must apply for a second extension according to the procedures described in Chapter 6.F.2.

2) Students on a *first extension* that will expire in Summer 2020 and Fall 2020

Students will be automatically granted a one-semester extension of their first extension. For example, if the first extension ends in Fall 2020, the student will have until the end of the Spring 2021 semester to complete degree requirements, without submitting a request for an exception to policy and an extension. IF a student does not complete all degree requirements within this one-semester extension, they must apply for a second extension according to the procedures described in Chapter 6.F.2.

3) Students on a *second extension* that will expire in Summer 2020 and Fall 2020

Students will be automatically granted a one-semester extension of their second extension. For example, if the second extension ends in Fall 2020, the student will have until the end of the Spring 2021 semester to complete degree requirements, without submitting a request for an exception to policy and an extension. IF a student does not complete all degree requirements within this one-semester extension, they must apply for a third extension according to the procedures described in Chapter 6.F.3.

4) Students on a *third extension* that will expire in Summer 2020 and Fall 2020

These relatively rare situations will be handled on a case-by-case basis. A formal request will be required from the faculty mentor and the department chair for an exception to policy for a further extension with documentation of the extenuating circumstances.

Students in each of these categories will receive specific emails from the Graduate School, stating their revised deadline for degree completion. For students who have already applied for an extension, their request will be adjusted accordingly to reflect the policies stated above.

As always, if you have questions or need assistance, the Graduate School staff and leadership team are here to help you.

Best regards,

LMG

Lisa M. Gloss
Dean of the Graduate School