

January 4, 2021

Dear graduate students, graduate coordinators and faculty:

I hope you have had a relaxing, refreshing holiday season and winter break. My best wishes for a successful and prosperous new year in 2021!

The purpose of this memo is to provide a summary of adaptations to graduate policies and procedures in response to the ongoing COVID-19 impact on WSU for the Spring 2021 semester.

NRC grading option for Fall 2020 and Spring 2021

Hopefully, graduate students are already aware of the No Record COVID (NRC) grading option that has been put in place for the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters. This grading option is available to graduate students with grades of C- and lower, or W. The full details and instructions for requesting this grading option are available through the Registrar's Office website: <https://registrar.wsu.edu/nrc/>.

The deadline to request this grade change for the Fall 2020 semester is **Wednesday, January 6, 2021**.

Spring 2021 assistantship appointments

In the past, no matter when the first day of instruction for the spring semester occurred, assistantship appointments began on January 1. This is the same for the Spring 2021 semester. Despite the first day of instruction being set a week later than typical of Spring semesters at WSU, spring assistantships will begin on January 1 and run through May 15. The processing of spring assistantship appointments normally starts in November, but this was delayed until after the transition to Workday in mid-December. Some students should see tuition waivers posting to their account as of January 4. Appointments that are new, renewals, or adjustments are being processed now, and posting of associated tuition waivers should be up-dated daily. If a student is having problems with their assistantship (stipend or tuition waiver), they should contact their graduate coordinator, who can work with the department finance personnel and the Graduate School as needed.

Exam procedures and scheduling

The policy will continue for Spring 2021 to allow Zoom-only exam meetings, thus continuing to set aside the requirement that at least one faculty member be in the room with the student during the exam. Previously, the Graduate School requested, when the student and faculty signed off on the exam scheduling form, that they indicated the location from which they were attending by Zoom. The intent was to facilitate gathering of final signatures for dissertations and theses. With the approval of these documents having moved to electronic signatures within myWSU, this location information seems to be no longer helpful. Thus, in Fall 2020 and moving forward into Spring 2021, if a student or faculty member is attending the exam via Zoom, no indication of location is needed.

There will be no traditional week-long spring break during the Spring 2021 semester. Instead, there will be four weekday academic breaks (class holidays) spread throughout the semester: Presidents' Day on Monday, February 15; Thursday, February 25; Wednesday, March 17; and Tuesday, April 13.

Graduate School policy has allowed students to schedule preliminary and exams on days that are class holidays (but not university holidays)—for example, the first three days of Thanksgiving week or during the week of spring break. This policy will not be changing for Spring 2021. However, students and faculty are encouraged to follow the spirit of the decision to provide breaks throughout the semester, and thus avoid scheduling exams on the academic break days listed above.

Extensions to time-to-degree-completion deadlines

In a [memo](#) dated May 22, 2020, I described a policy for automated extensions implemented for students whose completion deadlines were the Summer 2020 and Fall 2020 semesters. This automated extension process will not be continued for Spring 2021. However, I want to remind you of two important points about extensions from that memo.

- 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.

Thus, the barrier is relatively low for a first extension of the time-to-degree-completion deadline—essentially, there needs to be: 1) documentation of communication between the student and faculty mentor of the desire/need for an extension, and 2) a memo from the faculty mentor or director of the graduate program to the Graduate School requesting the extension. The vast majority of first extension requests are approved. The requirements for subsequent second and third extensions are progressively higher. Even so, the Graduate School philosophy is for leniency if there is clear documentation that the student is making progress and the faculty mentor and faculty in the graduate program are supportive.

Best practice for mentoring and being mentored

The impact of COVID-19 on graduate student research and scholarship has made it strikingly apparent how important effective communication is for a productive relationship between the student and faculty mentor. To that end, I am repeating a recommended best practice outlined in a previous memo.

- At the beginning of each semester, the student and advisor should have a detailed discussion of the expectations associated with assistantship duties and research credits.
- The conversation should address:
 - the duties and expected outcomes for the student to successfully complete the assistantship and be reviewed favorably for continued support.
 - the goals, results and milestones that the student must accomplish to earn a satisfactory (S) grade for research credits.
- The student/advisor discussions should then be summarized in a written document agreed upon by both parties.

Again, I wish you all a happy, fulfilling new year, including a productive and successful Spring 2021 semester. 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