March 17, 2020

Dear Graduate Students,

The Office of the Dean of the Graduate School has received a number of questions from departments and programs about the appropriateness of academic adjustments to graduate program requirements in light of the University’s response to COVID-19. Earlier today we distributed guidance and answers to the most common questions we have received, grouped by topic. We are sharing this information with you as well, so that you are aware of the guidance that departments and programs have received on the issue of academic adjustments.

If you have questions about your program requirements or associated timelines, your director of graduate studies and/or adviser are your best points of contact. Staff from the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School are also here to assist you. For students’ academic progress issues, Geoffrey Hill is the primary contact for the humanities and social sciences, and Christine Murphy for the sciences and engineering. I am also available to answer any general policy questions, to receive any suggestions, and to help Geoffrey and Christine troubleshoot individual cases that are particularly difficult.

Additionally, at the conclusion of this communication, there is information about virtual office hours that the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School will be hosting this week. Staff from our office will be available to answer your questions about academic, student life, financial, and any other issues that are on your mind during this challenging time and that we can appropriately address.

**Ph.D. Final Public Orals (FPOs) and Associated End of Enrollment**

All FPOs should be conducted by videoconference for the remainder of the spring semester and until announced otherwise. No individual approvals for this are necessary. All final paperwork should be submitted electronically to the Graduate School by students (or by departments, on students’ behalf). We have already shared more detailed guidance on this topic to graduate program administrators, and similarly detailed guidance is now posted on the Graduate School’s website in the FPO section.

Ordinarily Ph.D. students who are enrolled at the time of FPO have their enrollment ended the first of the month following their FPO. Depending on the circumstances, we may be able to offer some flexibility to this timeline, up to the point the degree is awarded. Departments have been instructed to be in touch with Geoffrey or Christine if they have a student in compelling circumstances who may benefit from flexibility in the timeline.

**Ph.D. General Exams**

The April-May general exams period is nearly upon us, and many Ph.D. students are scheduled to sit for general exams during this period. In order for faculty to make the best educational decision for their programs and their students in light of the current situation, we have stated that we can accept any of the following three
adjustments for general exams this spring:

1. Administer the general exams remotely or by videoconference, with whatever adjustments to format faculty deem appropriate based on mode of delivery. No approval from our office for remote or videoconferenced administration will be necessary.

2. Move students’ general exams to a summer administration, outside of a normal exam period. Remote or videoconferenced administration will continue to be allowed if necessary. If general exams are administered and successfully passed in June or July, for degree progress purposes we will record them as having been successfully completed in the spring term of the 2019-20 academic year. If they are administered and successfully completed in August, then for degree progress purposes we will record them as having been successfully completed in the fall term of the 2020-21. This is because of the new academic calendar, which for graduate student enrollment purposes will begin as of August 1.

3. Delay students’ general exams to the fall exam period in the 2020-21 academic year. At this point we hope that normal, in-person general exams will be possible in the fall, but we will adjust if necessary.

In most departments students should complete the general exam by the end of the second year to be on track and in good standing, and Graduate School rules state that no Ph.D. student may be reenrolled into a fourth year without having successfully passed generals. Due to the exceptional nature of this spring semester, if a department or program determines that a move of generals to summer or a delay of generals until the fall semester is appropriate, the Graduate School will accept this determination. Such a move will in no way affect a student’s standing or reenrollment. We strongly encourage departments and programs to offer flexibility and appropriate adjustments to students who may be affected by illness, caregiving, unexpected childcare obligations, relocation, or other stressors in this current environment.

Department- or Program-Specific Requirements

Graduate program requirements vary considerably across the University. Given this variability, we defer to faculty in departments and programs on whether and how best to adjust the timelines for their own requirements. With the mandated move to online courses for the remainder of the spring semester, most students should still be able to complete coursework according to normal timelines, regardless of their location. Recorded rather than live options may be necessary for some students for a variety of reasons, including unexpected childcare obligations and time-zone differences, and we have noted this to faculty.

Students in exceptional circumstances may require incompletes (INCs) or adjustments to course loads such that they may need to complete course requirements one semester later than is normal for the program. This second option will in most cases apply only to Ph.D. programs, which have semesters of enrollment dedicated to research that continue after coursework is normally competed. Other requirements, such as qualifying exams or prospectus defenses, may need to be administered remotely or be delayed by one semester, depending on the program. Faculty with departments and programs have been encouraged to review their requirements and make and communicate to you appropriate decisions about format changes or timeline delays, up to a one-semester delay.

We are not at this time able to extend enrollment beyond a degree program’s regular program length, so master’s degree programs that are primarily course-based may need to rely more on remote options and INCs that extend into the summer in order to accommodate students. Master’s degree students in their final year who are accommodated in this way could then as necessary appear on the September degree list. We have indicated that we are happy to consult with faculty as they consider appropriate options for their programs, and we again have strongly encouraged departments to offer flexibility to students who may require it in this current
environment.

**Reenrollment and Standing**

At this point we still plan to open the reenrollment process to graduate students as of April 15. Prior to opening it, the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School will confirm with departments and programs any notable changes to program requirement timelines they have made based on the guidance above. This will ensure that reenrollment for students is not adversely affected by such decisions. In addition, because graduate students have been encouraged where possible to relocate to other residences in order to help minimize risk for those who must remain here, expectations for degree progress – especially dissertation research progress – may need to be adjusted accordingly. Any student who falls ill or who must perform caregiving or unexpected childcare responsibilities as a result of COVID-19 during this semester may also make slower than normal progress. The Graduate School’s position is that such students will not see their enrollment or standing jeopardized, given the exceptional situation in which we find ourselves.

While extraordinary accommodations may be necessary in the current environment, students whose progress has been delayed prior to the start of the spring semester should still be assessed according to normal timelines and requirements that were in place up to the start of the spring semester.

**More Information and Virtual Office Hours**

Additional adjustments to this guidance may be necessary as we navigate the weeks ahead. If any changes are made, we will make sure to notify faculty and students in a timely manner. Your directors of graduate studies and program advisers remain your best point of contact for information about your degree requirements. For additional updates on University operations, please visit the Princeton COVID-19 website.

Staff from the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School will be hosting virtual office hours to address questions or concerns you may have that we are in the best position to answer. Details about the virtual office hours, which will be hosted via Zoom, are listed below. Assistant Dean Nicole Barkley from our Student Life team is the organizer. If you have questions about virtual office hours, please be in touch with Nicole.

**Wednesday, March 18, 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. – Virtual Office Hours for General Questions, All Welcome**

**Thursday, March 19, 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. – Virtual Office Hours for Humanities and Social Sciences Students**

**Friday, March 20, 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. – Virtual Office Hours for Natural Sciences and Engineering Students**

Join Zoom Meeting

[https://princeton.zoom.us/j/6644330596](https://princeton.zoom.us/j/6644330596)

Meeting ID: 664 433 0596

One tap mobile
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+1 646 558 8656 US (New York)
+1 253 215 8782 US
+1 301 715 8592 US
+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)
+1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)
Meeting ID: 664 433 0596
Find your local number: https://princeton.zoom.us/u/acBzVUGkqy

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162.255.37.11 (US West)
162.255.36.11 (US East)
221.122.88.195 (China)
115.114.131.7 (India Mumbai)
115.114.115.7 (India Hyderabad)
213.19.144.110 (EMEA)
103.122.166.55 (Australia)
209.9.211.110 (Hong Kong)
64.211.144.160 (Brazil)
69.174.57.160 (Canada)
207.226.132.110 (Japan)
Meeting ID: 664 433 0596

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