



THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Office of the Dean
Clio Hall
Princeton University
Princeton, NJ 08544
gradschool.princeton.edu

Sarah-Jane Leslie, Dean
Class of 1943 Professor of Philosophy

May 4, 2020

Dear Graduate Students,

Earlier today, [President Eisgruber wrote to the Princeton community](#) to share his perspective on the impacts of COVID-19, both operational and financial, on the University, and to lay out the steps we are taking to plan for the uncertain future we collectively face. As President Eisgruber notes, COVID-19 is not a one-time disruption that we can simply absorb and then dig out from—it is an unavoidable change to the environment in which we educate and conduct research, one that we must figure out how to live and work in. We believe it is our responsibility to help our graduate students navigate this new environment, and we are committed to doing so.

In order to meet that responsibility, we are committed to working with each graduate student, through the department or program to which you were admitted, to determine how to keep you on your scholarly track while addressing any individual disruptions to your work. Graduate work by its very nature is individualized, and our approach will be as well. The amount of time that Ph.D. students may take to complete their degrees is variable even in normal times. Other approaches, such as blanket extensions, do not make sense, especially given the nature of a pandemic and the fact that we will be living in a restricted environment for the foreseeable future.

That said, we understand that there have been real and immediate impacts from this crisis, and we are working to address them. The most important step we can take is to support students through their academic units to continue to make progress in their degree programs, which we are doing. Many students have been able to continue with their coursework and research online. Those whose research has been disrupted, either because of the closure of research facilities on campus or an inability to access research sites elsewhere, will be working on appropriate accommodations with their advisers and departments that include changes to research plans and extensions of funding. We are also working on appropriate accommodations and extensions for graduate students whose research has been disrupted because of unexpected caregiving responsibilities.

Where there have been more significant disruptions, we will work with the individual students to address their specific needs. All funding for graduate students flows through the academic units of departments and programs, and the University is committed to ensuring that these units have the resources they need to meet the needs of students whose work has been disrupted by the pandemic.

Graduate students always have the ability to work with their departments for extensions or other adjustments based on their circumstances, and many graduate students have already done so this semester. However, given the nature of this disruption, we will be formalizing that process across the Graduate School. Next week we will be sharing with graduate students in the humanities and social sciences a common application form for COVID-19-related funding extensions, which will allow them to provide information to their department regarding pandemic-related disruptions to their course of study if they feel their needs have not already been addressed. Graduate students in the sciences and engineering, who after their first year are primarily supported by faculty research grants, already routinely go through reviews each year with their advisers and programs, and these reviews will continue and can also incorporate necessary Covid-19 extensions.

We do not know when the pandemic will end, but we are confident we can meet this challenge. We are working to get our campus research facilities, including libraries and laboratories, up and running in a safe fashion as soon as the state lifts current restrictions. We are planning to have graduate students back to campus in the fall, while providing accommodations for international students who cannot make it to campus. And we are working with departments to provide additional teaching opportunities for students whose job searches were upended this spring. While we work to address these challenges, we ask for your continued good will and faith. Princeton is a leader in graduate education and in the support we offer graduate students, and that will not change because of Covid-19.

Best wishes,

Sarah-Jane Leslie
Dean of the Graduate School