Materials linked from the 10/23/09 Graduate Council agenda

Satisfactory Progress

Background

On October 27, 2008, the Graduate Council discussed university and departmental satisfactory progress guidelines and their relationship to dismissal of graduate students. [http://oregonstate.edu/senate/committees/gradcncl/min/20081027.pdf](http://oregonstate.edu/senate/committees/gradcncl/min/20081027.pdf). Following a survey of graduate program directors ([http://oregonstate.edu/senate/committees/gradcncl/agen/20090601_Satisfactory_Progress_by_Program.xls](http://oregonstate.edu/senate/committees/gradcncl/agen/20090601_Satisfactory_Progress_by_Program.xls)), the Council continued its discussion on June 1, 2009. The Council requested a proposal to consider at a subsequent meeting. In this document, a process for determining satisfactory progress and dismissing students who are unable to comply is described. Additional information in this document includes the current catalog language on dismissal, a document from the University of Arizona that provides assistance to units developing guidelines, and excerpts from language on dismissals for unsatisfactory progress at Colorado State University, the University of Washington, The Pennsylvania State University, and the University of California at Berkeley.

Process for programs to follow to determine and support satisfactory progress

- The program develops satisfactory progress guidelines.
- The program notifies students of the guidelines in a booklet or on a program web site.
- The program evaluates the progress of students regularly (at least annually, preferably more often).
- The program informs students who are deficient in meeting satisfactory progress guidelines of their deficiencies and explains steps needed to comply with the guidelines.
- If deficiencies persist, the program notifies the student in writing (letter, memo or email) that the student is being recommended to the Graduate School for dismissal.
- The Graduate School sets a registration hold on the student.
- The student may appeal to the program for reconsideration or may apply for admission to a different degree program. If the appeal is successful or if the student is accepted into a different program, the registration hold is removed.

Current Oregon State University catalog language on dismissals
[http://catalog.oregonstate.edu/ChapterDetail.aspx?key=38](http://catalog.oregonstate.edu/ChapterDetail.aspx?key=38)

“Advanced-degree students (regularly, conditionally, and provisionally admitted) are expected to make satisfactory progress toward a specific academic degree. This includes maintaining a GPA of 3.00 or better for all courses taken as a graduate
student and for courses included in the graduate program, meeting departmental or
program requirements, and participating in a creative activity such as a thesis.

If a student is failing to make satisfactory progress toward an academic
degree, as determined by the major department/program or the Graduate School,
the student may be dismissed from the Graduate School.

Any doctoral student who fails the preliminary oral examination with a
committee recommendation that the student's work toward this degree be
terminated may be dismissed from the Graduate School.

Any student who fails a final oral examination may be dismissed from the
Graduate School.

Academic dishonesty and other violations of the Student Conduct Regulations
may serve as grounds for dismissal from the Graduate School.”

Possible Criteria for Satisfactory Academic Progress (from the University of
Arizona)
http://grad.arizona.edu/mock.grad.arizona.edu/node/360

1) Specific (core) courses that
   a) Must be completed by a certain time and/or
   b) Must be completed with a certain GPA and/or
   c) May not be [repeated for grade replacement]

2) Internships/clinical experiences/practica that have evaluation beyond the grade
   or that must be completed by a certain time

3) Annual evaluation that goes beyond GPA, such as judgment by advisor (and/or
   others) as to research potential and/or specific skills (e.g., clinical, writing,
   laboratory)

4) Must have completed various milestones by certain times (e.g., approved
   prospectus, successful passing of qualifying exams, comprehensive exams,
   constitution of thesis or dissertation committee, capstone courses, clinical or
   internship requirements)

5) More stringent time to degree than Graduate College’s policy

6) Specific grade requirements such as
   a) Minimum GPA in major requires a higher than 3.0 GPA or
   b) No courses below a B in major, or specific courses
   c) Minimum cumulative GPA above the Grad College requirement

7) Rules for comprehensive exams (master’s and orals), such as
   a) When they must be taken
   b) Repeatable? Under what circumstances?
   c) Relation between written and oral, e.g.,
      i) How much time between
      ii) What constitutes a PASS for written
      iii) Whether or not writtens may be re-taken, if so, just failed questions or
          whole exam
   d) How/who grades exams. Criteria for PASS
   e) Any special program requirements (such as a grad rep, specified length, etc.)
“In addition, good academic standing requires satisfactory progress in the overall graduate program. Students’ individual graduate advisory committees may render judgments as to whether satisfactory progress is being made toward the degree, taking into account all aspects of academic performance and promise, not necessarily course work alone. A positive judgment is required to remain in good academic standing.”

Colorado State provides for a probationary period after which the student can be dismissed. Dismissal is also possible under some circumstances without first going through a term on probation.

“A student’s graduate advisory committee or an appropriate departmental graduate committee may recommend immediate dismissal upon a finding that the student is making unsatisfactory progress toward the degree and that satisfactory progress cannot reasonably be anticipated. Such a recommendation must be documented in writing with substantive justification for this action in lieu of probation. It must be referred to the Department Head for approval and the Vice Provost for Graduate Affairs for final action. The student may appeal such an immediate dismissal through the existing Graduate School appeals procedure. Departments which invoke this process must have published guidelines explaining the performance indicators which lead to immediate dismissals.”

“Admission to the Graduate School allows students to continue graduate study and research at the University of Washington only as long as they maintain satisfactory performance and progress toward completion of their graduate degree program. The definition of satisfactory performance and progress toward completion of the degree program may differ among degree offering units; therefore, it is imperative that each graduate unit has these requirements in writing, and distributes them to each graduate student. The following information should be included:

1. General expectations for graduate student performance within the academic unit, including, but not limited to, required coursework and length of time allowed for completion of various phases of the program.
2. The identification of persons in departments, colleges, schools, and groups who are responsible for both the evaluation of graduate student progress and for informing students about the fulfillment of these requirements, and when such evaluations are to be made.
3. Criteria by which performance and progress are to be evaluated, including areas which may or may not be negotiated.
4. Under what circumstances the graduate unit will recommend to the Dean of
the Graduate School the alteration of a student's standing--i.e., conditions
that warrant probation and final probation (see Suggested Guidelines for
Change of Status Action), and length of time the academic unit will tolerate
low scholarship or unsatisfactory performance and progress.
5. Procedures for appealing evaluations recommended to the Graduate School
by the graduate program.”

The memorandum spells out the required review process. Students with GPA at or
above 3.00 are to be reviewed annually. Students with low GPA or having other
difficulties are to be reviewed term by term. Examples are given of material that
should be reviewed. At the end of the review, the program has several options: No
action, Warn, Probation, Final Probation, and Drop. Recommendations for
probation, final probation or drop are submitted to the Dean of the Graduate
School. The Graduate School provides the student with a decision in a formal letter.

Penn State Procedures for Termination of the Degree Program of a
Graduate Student for Unsatisfactory Scholarship

“When a program chair or program committee determines that the program of a
graduate student must be terminated for unsatisfactory scholarship, the student
must be given advance notice, in writing, which in general terms shall advise the
student of the academic reasons for the termination. Examples of unsatisfactory
scholarship may include, but are not limited to, inadequate GPA, failure to obtain
satisfactory grades in required courses for the program, or failing the candidacy,
comprehensive, or final oral examination.”

Penn State lays out precise communication steps that are required before
unsatisfactory progress leads to termination of a degree program. After all required
steps are followed, the decision is submitted to the Graduate School. The student
may submit an appeal of the department/program decision to the Graduate Dean.
"The standard of review by the Graduate School is whether the decision to
terminate for unsatisfactory scholarship was arbitrary and capricious. The terms
"arbitrary and capricious" mean that the decision to terminate is not supportable on
any rational basis, or that there is no evidence upon which the decision may be
based. The Graduate School does not review faculty judgments as to the quality of
a student's academic performance, but only whether a program's decision was
arbitrary and capricious.” Additional communication steps are described by Penn
State before final degree termination takes place.

Departmental Review of Student Progress at the University of California at
Berkeley http://www.grad.berkeley.edu/policies/ggp/ggp.pdf

“Departments are responsible for monitoring their students’ overall progress toward
graduate degrees. Departments should evaluate graduate students at the middle
and end of their first year of graduate study and annually thereafter. The yearly
evaluation gives faculty an opportunity to review the performance of each student
and, more importantly, to provide students with timely information about the
faculty’s evaluation of their progress and performance. The Graduate Division further advises that the results of all evaluations be sent to the students in writing. A negative evaluation may be considered a letter of warning if it includes the information required by the Graduate Council (see “Warning Letters,” below) and a copy should be sent to the Graduate Division.

In fairness to students and to avoid problems later on, departments should let students know — by published materials, by written evaluations, or both — what the faculty considers to be satisfactory progress.

Criteria for evaluating student progress. The definition of adequate progress is intentionally flexible. With the approval of the Graduate Council, departments may establish progress requirements beyond those set by the Graduate Division. Such requirements may include:

1) a grade-point average above a 3.0;
2) no Incompletes or a fixed number of Incompletes;
3) specific courses completed in a timely fashion and at a given level of performance;
4) a master’s degree completed en route to a doctorate;
5) departmental preliminary exams passed before admission to the qualifying exam;
6) an acceptable thesis or dissertation prospectus submitted before advancement to candidacy;
7) acceptance by a regular faculty member who agrees to supervise the student’s research and to serve as chair of the dissertation committee; and
8) certain general requirements, such as passing the qualifying exam, completed within a clearly specified period.

Action regarding insufficient progress. If a department assesses a student’s performance as below standard, it may 1) send the student a warning letter, with a copy to the Graduate Division, apprising the student of his or her insufficient academic progress (see “Warning Letters” in the section directly below), or 2) write to the Graduate Division to place the student on formal probation, with the consequence that the student is ineligible to receive a fellowship or hold an academic appointment (see E1.8 “Academic Probation”). Placement of a student on formal probation is required before the student can be dismissed from the program except in instances when a student fails a comprehensive, preliminary, or qualifying examination.”

The Guide to Graduate Study at the University of California goes on to provide detailed explanations of the meaning of warnings and probation. Steps for dismissal are quite detailed and include a process for appeal of termination decisions.