August 7, 2020

Dear Graduate Students,

On behalf of the university, I am writing to respond to recent emails regarding graduate students. I want to thank all who brought their concerns to our attention. Please know that the Graduate School is committed to supporting student academic success and addressing student concerns. Today, I would like to address a number of the issues you relayed in your email. I also invite you to regularly visit our website, https://gradsch.osu.edu/ and see the most recent updates to policies that affect graduate studies and students at the university.

As we address concerns that have arisen specifically because of COVID-19, it is important to know that the Graduate School, in collaboration with the Council of Graduate Students, has always had an active petition process to address issues for students who need additional time to complete their degree due to unforeseen circumstances. Specifically, all graduate students have the opportunity to extend graduation past the 5-year post-candidacy deadline by submitting a petition through http://gradforms.osu.edu/ following rules indicated in the Graduate School Handbook section 7.7.7.

Questions concerning Graduate Associateships, staff appointments, and faculty appointments are part of a complex and ongoing discussion as Ohio State and institutions worldwide face COVID-19. If you have specific concerns around your appointment or Graduate Associateships, I suggest you speak with your program’s administration and/or send them to the leadership of the Council of Graduate Students, as they can help voice these recommendations as well.

I know that many students are concerned with issues related to returning to campus and how their choice will affect their ability to complete their degree. The Graduate School has already instituted a Matching Tuition and Fee Authorization program for students whose degree was delayed because of COVID-19. Please reach out to your unit to learn more. Returning to in-person activities at the university is complex, with many personalized variables for each individual. Please know that your academic units are the best place to start the dialogue about your situation. On a similar note, I am happy to inform you that the Graduate School has initiated a proposal for a Post-Candidacy leave policy that would permit students to take a break from the continuous enrollment policy with approval. This proposal will be brought to the Council for Graduate Students leadership for input as well as other university committees, including University Senate.

If you have larger concerns about opting out of in-person activities, the university has mechanisms in place for accommodations. To determine eligibility and feasibility of a flexible work arrangement for your position, please discuss the policy and specific process information with your program, graduate advisor and/or supervisor. Learn more at Flexible Work Policy 6.12. There are also COVID-19 specific leave options that designated employees for the university may consider. Graduate students should contact their unit (advisor, Graduate Studies Chair, HR, Dept Chair) regarding potential flexibility in assignments. The goal would be to accommodate GA requests when possible while recognizing the need for a level of in-person instruction to maintain regular educational, research and other scholastic activities this autumn.

With all of the changes taking place, we are striving to maintain a level of transparency in decision-making for the needs of all graduate students. The Graduate School held two town halls, with Q&As, for graduate students in June and July. I have attached the slide presentation from those meetings. We anticipate holding additional town
halls in August and on an as-needed basis as we work through new challenges that may arise. We regularly meet with and communicate to leadership at all levels, including student leadership, to consult on policy adjustments as those listed on our COVID-19 Updates for Graduate Students and Faculty page, which is updated frequently. Periodic updates are also published to the news area of the Graduate school website which can provide clarity on topics that impact our community.

The mental health needs for graduate students during these times are also a major priority for the Graduate School. We currently funded a GRA in Student Life who is specifically performing research in this area. This continued and persistent effort to support the well-being of graduate students is of upmost importance. We regularly produce messages to all graduate students, which are published as part of the Graduate and Professional OnCampus Weekly newsletter. Please see a specific initiative that was undertaken with graduate students in mind and published university-wide: The Graduate School Effort and Focused Tips for Wellness

The Graduate School has produced a message with wellness resources to supplement the university’s Keep Well website. The resource provides helpful hints on developing a daily routine, creating ergonomic workspaces, tips for personal expression, and staying connected with friends, family, and colleagues. The resource tips were designed with graduate and professional students in mind. Links are also provided to Counseling and Consultation Services and resources through Student Life. Even though designed for graduate students, these tips are useful for anyone who is teleworking or experiencing isolation due to the pandemic or other life events that effect personal wellness.

On all issues — including anti-racism — rest assured that the Graduate School is focused on supporting graduate students and invested in upholding the value of graduate education at Ohio State. For more information on the university’s approach to addressing issues of racial inequities, please see https://odi.osu.edu/focus-on-racial-justice.

I would invite all graduate students to visit our website, https://gradsch.osu.edu/, for frequently updated information for graduate students. Please reach out to our offices if you have further questions.

Warm regards,

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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

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