

Graduate Students: Mitigating the impacts of COVID-19

Statement from the Graduate Council, Berkeley Division

May 4, 2020

Overview

Given their roles as students, researchers, teachers, and employees, the COVID-19 pandemic has had and will have multifaceted impacts on graduate students. The Graduate Council is committed to mitigating these impacts on graduate students and graduate education. For areas within the Council's authority, we will work toward flexibility in support of graduate student education, research, and teaching. For areas outside of our authority, we will advocate with the Senate and with the administration for solutions that support graduate education. Below is a review of changes made to date. The Council recognizes the need to reconsider and adjust policies as conditions develop. Please check the website maintained by Graduate Division for the latest information ([Covid-19 Information for Graduate Students](#)).

1. Extensions in time

- a. The Council supports a blanket extension of normative time by one-year. Graduate Division has approved a one-year blanket extension.
- b. The Council supports an extension of the maximum number of semesters a student can work in a teaching appointment from 12 to 14 semesters. Request sent to the systemwide Coordinating Committee for Graduate Affairs.
- c. The Council supports Graduate Division's request to the UC Office of the President to extend the waiver of the nonresident supplemental tuition fee for international PhD candidates by one year (from three to four years).
- d. The Council supports allowing students on Filing Fee in Spring 2020 to continue on Filing Fee status in Fall 2020.

2. Conduct of milestone exams

The Council supports the following policy regarding the conduct of milestone exams in graduate programs. These milestones include qualifying exams in PhD programs, comprehensive exams in MS programs, and the defense of position or field papers required in certain programs. These exams can be conducted using Zoom or similar video conferencing software. Exams need to be scheduled with enough advance notice so students can seek Disabled Student Program accommodations. As part of the logistics of the test, it is advisable to arrange locations for students to take the test in a location that is not excessively private and to be flexible in accommodating the students with regard to this issue. Given the concerns about proctoring exams, this policy has been reviewed and approved by the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost.

3. Graduate education in Fall 2020

The Council affirms its supports of the distance-learning alternatives for Fall 2020 (appended below).

Distance-learning Alternative for Graduate Instruction, Fall 2020
March 25, 2020

The issue

Graduate programs are in the midst of recruiting their 2020-21 admits. A key concern among potential students is their ability to start their education in Fall 2020 given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. One common concern is the ability of campus to hold large in-person classes. A particular concern for international students is that even if the emergency measures are lifted, they will not be able to acquire a student visa that would allow them to enter the United States during fall 2020 (student visas are given on a semester basis; students cannot therefore enter mid-semester).

The distance-learning alternative

To allow graduate programs to instruct students who are not able to be in residence in Fall 2020 for reasons outside their control, we are requesting that programs have the flexibility to temporarily deliver their on-campus courses via distance learning. Such distance learning might be needed to respond to both the direct (e.g., restrictions on campus density) and indirect (e.g., restrictions on travel) consequences of the emergency conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Importantly, there cannot be any permanent change to the content of the courses or modality of delivery. The distance-learning alternative is a temporary measure.

The process

Graduate programs that invoke this flexibility will need to submit their plan for providing distance learning instruction to Linda Song, Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs (lhsong@berkeley.edu), by August 3, 2020. Graduate Division will coordinate reviews of the plans with the relevant academic senate committees. Given the sufficient lead time, programs are expected to describe how they will implement distance learning for off-campus students in detail. Specifically, plans must outline how programs will maintain the quality of instruction and provide comparable mentoring to off-campus students as for on-campus students. Note that this flexibility is limited to graduate instruction (academic and professional masters and PhD) for the Fall 2020 semester. The distance-learning option is only available to students who cannot be in residence due to the direct or indirect impacts of the pandemic.