Guidelines for Creating and Revising Expectations of Satisfactory Progress and a Process for Dismissal from Graduate Programs

Graduate programs should have student advising handbooks, which are distributed to all incoming students and posted on departmental websites. Handbooks must be consistent with the requirements of the current PSU Bulletin (now the 2013-2014 Bulletin), which already describes many requirements for graduate degrees. Handbooks should include program information, including the degree requirements stated in the Bulletin, departmental policies, and information on how to find university policies and procedures for graduate students.

The Bulletin provides that graduate students who “do not make satisfactory progress toward the degree (as determined by the department) may have admission to the degree program cancelled.” It is especially important that every handbook contain clear language about how the program will review student progress, what the program considers “satisfactory progress,” what other circumstances may lead to cancellation of admission, and what procedures the department will use to determine whether a candidate’s admission should be cancelled. Although dismissal is ideally a rare event, having these expectations clearly established in writing assists students in understanding program expectations and is important for programs when a dismissal may be necessary. Minimally, each handbook should include the following:

Clearly Stated Criteria:
• The PSU Bulletin already includes a number of grounds for dismissal, identified below. Individual programs may set additional criteria.
• Each program should identify measures of satisfactory academic progress in the handbook. Measures of satisfactory progress could be linked to a degree map or flowchart of typical progress through the program. Some measures are already identified in the Bulletin. Other possible measures could include:
  o successful completion of adviser approved coursework
  o continual progress on the dissertation once the proposal is approved
• Each program should state reasons for dismissal other than unsatisfactory academic progress. Other possible reasons could include:
  o failure to retain an academic adviser
  o certain violations of the Student Conduct Code
  o failure to meet the standards of the profession the candidate will be entering
  o failure to complete a thesis proposal within a time frame set by your program (where applicable)
Processes for Cancelling a Student’s Admission

- Written notice that a student is not making satisfactory progress and an opportunity to show improvement (such as the annual letter of progress or other communication), OR written notice that there is a reason other than unsatisfactory progress that could result in cancellation.
- Written notice that the program is considering dismissal, the grounds for such dismissal, and an opportunity to respond to the notice within a reasonable time.
- Written notice of any decision to dismiss the student after considering the student’s response.
- An appeals process, which may include a departmental review, but should also include the opportunity for a review by the Dean of the student’s college or school, and a review by the Dean of Graduate Studies. The Dean of Graduate Studies will seek input from the Graduate Council before making a recommendation to the Provost.

Important Note on Written Communication with Students:
Please keep in mind that all official communications with students should be from a pdx.edu email to a student’s pdx.edu e-mail.

Handbook Review:
When you are revising your handbooks, the Office of Graduate Studies is available to review them and offer feedback and suggestions. Please contact the Dean of Graduate Studies for assistance.

Relevant Requirements in the 2013-2014 PSU Bulletin:
- University graduate admission requirements (page 11)
- Summary of procedures for doctoral degrees (page 13)
- Graduate Studies criteria (pages 57-70)
- Individual program criteria

Criteria for dismissal from graduate programs in the 2013-2014 PSU Bulletin (page 62):
- Failure to validate admission by registering and paying for at least one credit.
- Failure to be registered for three years.

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1 Programs should be aware that their processes may result, at most, in cancellation of admission to the program. Under current rules, students remain students of Portland State unless they are expelled through the student conduct process.
2 Some events may result in dismissal without advance notice and opportunity to improve, because no improvement is possible. For example, in the case of a criminal conviction that might render the student an unsatisfactory candidate for a profession, the department need not provide an opportunity to “improve,” but should still offer notice that dismissal may occur and provide an opportunity to respond.
• Academic disqualification: Allowing a graduate GPA to fall below 3.0 and failing to raise the GPA above 3.0 in the next nine credits OR allowing a graduate GPA to dip below 3.0 a second time.
• Academic dishonesty.
• Failure to successfully complete a graduate course in the approved program of study for the degree.

Additional criteria for dismissal from doctoral programs:
• Failing all or a portion of the comprehensive examination.
• Failing the dissertation defense.
• Failure to meet the following time limitations:
  o No more than five years (for doctoral candidates who enter with a masters degree) or seven years (for students entering with a bachelor’s degree) may pass between admission and completion of comprehensive exams.
  o No more than three years may pass between completing the comprehensive exams and advancing to candidacy.
  o No more than five years may pass between advancing to candidacy and completing all graduation requirements for the doctoral degree.