

Policies and Recommendations to Improve Time-to-Degree in UCLA's Graduate Degree Programs

EFFECTIVE FALL TERM 1993

UCLA Graduate Council

Overly long times-to-degree are costly to students and the University, decrease the influx of new ideas that come with new students, reduce the productive work-life of holders of advanced degrees, diminish our capacity to meet anticipated faculty renewal needs, make it more difficult to diversify our graduate students and ultimately our faculty, and surely discourage some undergraduates from ever considering graduate study. Within limits, a shorter time-to-degree is neither synonymous with high quality graduate education nor antithetical to it. However, timely progress is a sign of intellectual vigor, competence, and commitment.

Many graduate programs at UCLA have fine records with respect to time-to-degree, and many have excellent approaches to carrying out graduate education. To promote both timeliness and excellence in all graduate degree programs, the Graduate Council has adopted two policies and twenty-two recommendations, all of them describing practices that enhance graduate education.

The policies and recommendations adopted by the Graduate Council involve many different groups who can affect the timeliness and quality of graduate education at UCLA. The policies are addressed to departments and interdepartmental programs (IDPs) offering graduate degrees. The recommendations are addressed to several groups: departments and IDPs offering graduate degrees, disciplinary deans, Academic Senate committees, the Graduate Division, the Development Division of University Relations, the UCLA Administration, and the UC Administration.

The two policies and twenty-two recommendations are presented in the remainder of this document. For each one, the first line is a brief descriptive phrase. The second line gives a unique number for the policy or recommendation and in parentheses are indicated to whom it is directed (several involve more than one group) and the degrees to which it applies. Beginning on the third line is the full text. The policies and recommendations are presented in seven sections, one section for each group to whom recommendations

are addressed. When a recommendation involves more than one group, it is repeated for each group to whom it applies. It retains the same phrase, number, and text throughout. Material taken directly from other sources is quoted; the full reference is below.

References

Association of American Universities and the Association of Graduate Schools (AAU/AGS). (1990, November). *Institutional policies to improve doctoral education*. University of California, Office of the President (UCOP). (1990, October). *Factors affecting completion of doctoral degrees at the University of California*. A report prepared in response to Senate Concurrent Resolution 66 (Hart, 1989). Oakland, CA.

Policies and Recommendations to Departments and IDPs Offering Graduate Degree Programs

POLICIES

Promoting Progress

Policy 1 (To Depts & IDPs) (All degrees)

Each department and IDP shall develop its own model of timely progress, annually review students' progress with respect to this model, and, if needed, take steps to encourage better progress. The stages and requirements of each degree program shall be identified and reasonable times for achieving each of them established (e.g., coursework completed within six quarters, successful defense of the dissertation proposal by the tenth quarter). Where appropriate, incentives for making timely progress and consequences for failing to do so should also be established. All students and faculty must have a current statement of the model, incentives, and consequences. Each student's progress shall be reviewed every year, with reviewers allowing sufficient flexibility with respect to individual cases. Results of the review shall be communicated to the student and placed in his or her file. Where problems exist, from either the student's or faculty's perspective, provision shall be made for review by more than one faculty member.

Faculty Adviser

Policy 2 (To Depts & IDPs) (All degrees)

Throughout his or her entire graduate program, every graduate student shall have a faculty adviser (or faculty advisory committee) whose interests are as similar as possible to those of the student. At the beginning of the program, the adviser may be assigned by the department or IDP or in some way selected by the student. Thereafter, as the student's interests develop, he

or she must be able to change advisers easily and to select appropriate thesis and dissertation committee members and chairs who may or may not be or have been advisers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Faculty Adviser Activities

Recommendation 1 (To Depts & IDPs) (All degrees)

“Faculty advisers should assist students...{in four key areas} to:

- select coursework that matches the students’ needs and interests, and recognize that curricular options which broaden academic experience may also extend the length of graduate programs;
- participate early in seminars, laboratory work, or other activities that engage students in research and assist them in the expeditious development of dissertation topics;
- define [project, thesis, or] dissertation topics of realistic scope that can demonstrate a student’s ability to make independent contributions to the field without encouraging projects of excessive magnitude requiring several years to complete;
- develop a clear sense of professional responsibility and ethical standards of conduct in teaching, research, and scholarship.” (AAU/AGS, 1990, p. 13)

Apprenticeship Opportunities

Recommendation 2 (To Depts & IDPs, Grad Div) (All degrees)

Students should be provided apprenticeship opportunities in those faculty activities, presumably primarily research and instruction, in which they are expected to become proficient. Early apprenticeship in research is especially desirable. In an apprenticeship relationship, the student learns by being involved with a faculty member in his or her own work. Teaching assistantships, research assistantships, and course credit are usual ways of recompensing the student during this type of “on-the-job” learning. Departments, IDPs, and the Graduate Division should strive to provide funding to support apprenticeships in both research and instruction in every graduate program, and faculty should be rewarded for their work in apprenticeship relationships.

Qualifying Examinations

Recommendation 3 (To Depts & IDPs) (All doctoral degrees)

“Students should be adequately advised about preparation for qualifying examinations; the examinations should not be so open-ended {or extensive} that students are driven into excessive coursework in preparation for them.” (AAU/ AGS, 1990, p. 15)

Thesis/Dissertation Assistance

Recommendation 4 (To Depts & IDPs) (All research-oriented degrees)

Besides providing apprenticeship opportunities, departments and IDPs should take other steps to ensure that the research-oriented thesis or dissertation does not contribute to an unnecessarily long time-to-degree. These include the following:

- “Graduate students should be encouraged to begin early to learn the research and scholarly techniques of their discipline and to begin preparing for and carrying out [thesis or] dissertation research as early as possible; faculty should not permit students’ research to prolong unnecessarily the time-to-degree.”
- “Departments and...[IDPs] should develop mechanisms such as research seminars, laboratory work, and student-adviser consultations that lead to the timely development of [thesis or] dissertation topics.”
- Advisers should take care to determine, to the best of their ability, that the research-oriented thesis or dissertation “is a realistic project that can be completed in a reasonable period of time; departments [and IDPs] may wish to consider establishing a recommended upper limit to the length of the [thesis or] dissertation; in those cases where a [thesis or] dissertation of exceptional scope is being considered, the advisers should make certain that the student is making a fully informed choice.”
- “Universities and departments [and IDPs] should make every effort to assure that students have sufficient financial support to permit full-time attention to their [theses or] dissertations once the work is in its final phase.”
- “Departments [and IDPs] should consider organizing seminars or other appropriate group discussions which provide feedback to students working on their [theses or] dissertations.”

(AAU/AGS, 1990, pp. 10-11)

Inform Faculty

Recommendation 5 (To Depts & IDPs) (All degrees)

Departments and IDPs should develop and distribute written information for faculty about the program’s expectations and standards

for advising, mentoring, chairing dissertations, and the like. The material should not reiterate the kind of information about rules and regulations provided in the advisers' handbooks published by the Graduate Division.

Reward Faculty

Recommendation 6 (To Depts & IDPs, Deans, CAP, UCLA Admin) (All degrees)

All those involved in personnel actions should look favorably on evidence that a faculty member has been engaged and effective as an adviser and mentor of graduate students and/or as a provider of apprenticeship opportunities. Such faculty work should contribute to students' timely acquisition of the knowledge and skills valued in their degree program and is worthy of reward.

Scheduling

Recommendation 7 (To Depts & IDPs) (All degrees)

Departments and IDPs should review the scheduling of courses, examinations, and other requirements, identify places where scheduling makes it difficult to fulfill a degree requirement in a timely fashion (e.g., a required course is offered infrequently), and remove any such impediments.

Faculty Leave

Recommendation 8 (To Depts & IDPs) (All degrees)

"The schedule of anticipated faculty leaves and absences should be publicized within the graduate student community, and departments {and IDPs} should assure the continuity of advising during absences as well as a known schedule for the teaching of 'key' graduate courses." (AAU/AGS, 1990, p.13)

Multi-Year Support

Recommendation 9 (To Depts & IDPs, Grad Div) (All degrees)

Departments and IDPs should devise ways to offer multiyear support packages to incoming graduate students. The Graduate Division should assist them in developing strategies to achieve this. Over the years, an increasing proportion of incoming students should receive such multi-year offers.

Enrollment and Support

Recommendation 10 (To Depts & IDPs, Grad Div) (All degrees)

In setting graduate enrollment levels, departments, IDPs, and the Graduate Division should consider the availability of graduate student support (in the form of teaching assistantships (TAsbips),

graduate student researcher (GSR) appointments, fellowships, project work, loans, etc.). Programs with time-to-degree problems and with students who are not adequately supported during their studies should gradually trim enrollments and increase support options so that the proportion of supported graduate students increases over time. All programs should establish as an ideal model that students are adequately supported throughout the period that is realistically considered normative time-to-degree for each program.

External Funding

Recommendation 11 (To Depts & IDPs, Deans, Grad Div, Devel) (All degrees)

For those departments and IDPs that traditionally experience more difficulty obtaining extramural funding for graduate students (usually because of scarce extramural funding for research), special attention should be given to developing a fund-raising program that will increase external sources of graduate student support. The development effort should be a cooperative venture involving the department or IDP, the responsible dean, the Graduate Division, and the Development Office.

Inform Admits

Recommendation 12 (To Depts & IDPs) (All degrees)

When an individual is admitted to graduate study, the department or IDP should inform him or her of the estimated annual costs, the expectation of continuous enrollment in the program, and the potential sources of support for attainment of the targeted degree.

Postdoctoral Fellows

Recommendation 13 (To Depts & IDPs) (All degrees)

Postdoctoral fellows may represent an excellent resource for training and mentoring graduate students, and such activities may enhance the teaching and research skills of the postdoctoral fellows themselves. Departments and IDPs should examine the roles of postdoctoral fellows and institute whatever practices seem appropriate to establish relationships that are mutually beneficial to both graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

Recommendations to Disciplinary Deans

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Recommendations to Academic Senate Committees

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Teaching

Recommendation 14 (To Grad Council, CCGA) (All degrees)

The UCLA Graduate Council, the other UC Graduate Councils, and the CCGA should work together "to develop a coherent policy for graduate student teaching, which considers the financial support situation for students, the necessity of teaching experience for future job placement, and the relationship between time spent as a TA and time-to-degree." (UCOP, 1990, p. 57)

Study Time Commitment and Continuity

Recommendation 15 (To Grad Council, Grad Div) (All degrees)

During 1992-93, the Graduate Council and the Graduate Division should conduct a thorough study of the possibilities for increasing time commitment and continuity in graduate degree programs. There should be three goals: (1) for all students, promoting as close

to full-time (defined as 12 quarter units or the equivalent) and continuous involvement in graduate study as reasonable and possible; (2) determining if there is a subset of students for whom full-time and/or continuous involvement can and should be required and, if so, requiring either or both; and (3) identifying particular types of students (e.g., parents of young children, employees on company scholarships) and particular degree programs (e.g., professional degrees in public health or education) for whom something other than full-time and/or continuous enrollment is appropriate. By the end of 1993, the Graduate Council should reconsider the issues surrounding effort and continuity and adopt any policies and/or recommendations that then seem warranted. These would go into effect fall 1994.

Recommendations to the Graduate Division

Apprenticeship Opportunities

Recommendation 2 (To Depts & IDPs, Grad Div) (All degrees)

Students should be provided apprenticeship opportunities in those faculty activities, presumably primarily research and instruction, in which they are expected to become proficient. Early apprenticeship in research is especially desirable. In an apprenticeship relationship, the student learns by being involved with a faculty member in his or her own work. Teaching assistantships, research assistantships, and course credit are usual ways of recompensing the student during this type of "on-the-job" learning. Departments, IDPs, and the Graduate Division should strive to provide funding to support apprenticeships in both research and instruction in every graduate program, and faculty should be rewarded for their work in apprenticeship relationships.

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Time-to-Degree Assistance

Recommendation 16 (To Grad Div) (All degrees)

The Graduate Division, each year, should select a small number of departments and IDPs (perhaps three) whose Ph.D. students have unusually long times-to-degree and assist those departments and IDPs in identifying means of shortening the time-to-degree for all their graduate degree programs.

Study Funding/Progress Relationships

Recommendation 17 (To Grad Div, UC Admin) (All doctoral degrees)

The Graduate Division and the UC administration should conduct a study of the recruitment, retention, and time-to-degree of graduate students with different types of funding packages and funding histories, taking account at a minimum of their disciplines, demographic characteristics, and prior preparation. The goal of the study should be to provide empirical evidence about how best to use different types of student support (e.g., fellowships, teaching assistantships, loans), different combinations of support packages, different levels of support, and different chronological patterns of support to recruit and retain the best, most diverse graduate students possible and to keep their time-to-degree as short as possible.

Increase Fellowships

Recommendation 18 (To Grad Div, Devel, UCLA Admin, UC Admin) (All doctoral degrees)

The Graduate Division, the Development Division, and the UCLA and UC systemwide administrations should increase the number and competitiveness of **all** fellowships available to graduate students, including those targeted to underrepresented minorities and women. The UCLA administration should keep the Chancellor's Fellowship, the premier fellowship at UCLA, especially competitive, in terms of stipend level, tuition, and other benefits, from year to year with the most attractive support packages offered by comparable institutions and programs. Similarly, the UC administration should keep the UCOP President's Affirmative Action Award and the UCOP Dissertation Fellowship competitive with the best such support nationwide.

Increase Research Assistantships

Recommendation 19 (To Grad Div, Devel, UCLA Admin, UC Admin) (All degrees)

The Graduate Division, the Development Division, the UCLA administration, and the UC system-wide administration should seek out more financial resources that could be used to support additional GSR positions, particularly for women and minorities in those fields where fewer such opportunities exist. The level of support offered by all such assistantships should be commensurate with the level of support for teaching assistants, fellowship holders, and graduate student researchers.

Increase Dissertation-Year Fellowships

Recommendation 20 (To Grad Div, Devel, UCLA Admin, UC Admin) (PbD)

Additional new resources need to be identified and allocated towards dissertation-year fellowships and made available for students who would benefit most from such assistance (e.g., students in disciplines in which extramural research funds are more difficult to obtain, students for whom GSR positions are not often available).

Recommendations to the Development Division, University Relations

External Funding

Recommendation 11 (To Depts & IDPs, Deans, Grad Div, Devel) (All degrees)

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Recommendations to the UCLA Administration

Reward Faculty

Recommendation 6 (To Depts & IDPs, Deans, CAP, UCLA Admin) (All degrees)

All those involved in personnel actions should look favorably on evidence that a faculty member has been engaged and effective as an adviser and mentor of graduate students and/or as a provider of apprenticeship opportunities. Such faculty work should contribute to students' timely acquisition of the knowledge and skills valued in their degree program and is worthy of reward.

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Increase Dissertation-Year Fellowships

Recommendation 20 (To Grad Div, Devel, UCLA Admin, UC Admin) (PhD)

Additional new resources need to be identified and allocated towards dissertation-year fellowships and made available for students who would benefit most from such assistance (e.g., students in disciplines in which extramural research funds are more difficult to obtain, students for whom GSR positions are not often available).

Recommendations to the UC Administration

Study Funding/Progress Relationships

Recommendation 17 (To Grad Div, UC Admin) (All doctoral degrees)

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Increase Graduate Student Research Assistantships

Recommendation 19 (To Grad Div, Devel, UCLA Admin, UC Admin) (All degrees)

The Graduate Division, the Development Division, the UCLA administration, and the UC system-wide administration should seek out more financial resources that could be used to support additional GSR positions, particularly for women and minorities in those fields where fewer such opportunities exist. The level of support offered by all such apprentice researcher positions should be commensurate with the level of support for teaching assistants, fellowship holders, and graduate student researchers.

Increase Dissertation-Year Fellowships

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Additional new resources need to be identified and allocated towards dissertation-year fellowships and made available for students who would benefit most from such assistance (e.g., students in disciplines in which extramural research funds are more difficult to obtain, students for whom GSR positions are not often available).

Study Research Assistantship/Mentorship Program

Recommendation 21 (To UC Admin) (PhD)

The Research Assistantship/Mentorship Program should be periodically re-examined; if the level of support is not commensurate with that for teaching assistants, other research assistants, or fellowship holders, the UC administration should decide whether the disparities are appropriate and take action accordingly.

Study Graduate Opportunity Fellowship Program

Recommendation 22 (To UC Admin) (MA & PhD)

The rationale for the Graduate Opportunity Fellowship Program should be re-examined. The benefits accruing from using the

program to recruit a larger number of diverse students who are supported for a shorter time versus a smaller number supported for a longer time should be studied, the trade-offs discussed, and the program accordingly either maintained as is or altered to achieve agreed-upon goals.