

From: Michael Grotewiel
Sent: Thursday, April 9, 2020 12:17 PM
To: Michael Grotewiel <michael.grotewiel@vcuhealth.org>
Cc: Harold Greenwald <harold.greenwald@vcuhealth.org>; Mary Rosenthal <Mary.Rosenthal@vcuhealth.org>
Subject: COVID-19: SOM graduate student training guidance

Dear SOM Graduate Students,

The School of Medicine recognizes that many graduate students have been adversely and significantly impacted by COVID-19. Discussions with department chairs, program directors, the SOM Dean's office, the Dean of Student's office and the Graduate School led to the guidance below which is aimed at supporting graduate students to the greatest extent possible. Please review the information carefully as there is a lot here. Note that not all guidance will apply to all students and that guidance will be updated as we learn more.

For students planning to complete degrees or certificates in the spring 2020 semester

- The Graduate School and the SOM are committed to being as flexible as possible regarding policies and due dates. A request for an exception to a standard policy or due date should proceed through a student's graduate program director and would require standard review/approval in SOM and in the Graduate School. Note that restrictions may apply. Possible exceptions for students impacted by COVID-19 include but are not limited to:
 - Waiving the requirement to be registered for credit in the semester in which students complete their degrees
 - Students being allowed to finish their training in the summer 2020, after which they would graduate in spring 2020
 - Students being assigned grades of "incomplete (I)" in spring 2020 thesis or dissertation research courses with the work being completed and assigned a final grade in summer 2020
- Electronic thesis and dissertation (ETD) approval forms are now due at the Graduate School on May 22 (a two-week extension). Students should initiate routing of the approval form by May 18. This is the new standard due date for spring 2020 and a request for an exception is not required.
- The last day for MS and PHD defenses in SOM is now May 5 (a two-week extension), although earlier is strongly recommended.
- The SOM academic calendar on the [Graduate Student Resource Page](#) will be updated with these and related dates.
- Advisors and graduate advisory committees are encouraged—at their discretion and without sacrificing academic standards—to work with MS and PHD students to revisit expectations for planned data collection and analysis that were disrupted by COVID-19. For example, if the impact of COVID-19 made it impossible for a student to perform studies originally anticipated to be in a thesis or dissertation, the advisor and graduate advisory committee can guide the student to include critical literature reviews, analysis of data collected for other projects, or detailed descriptions of proposed novel experiments as alternative content.

For students regardless of anticipated degree completion semester

- Support for stipends, tuition and fees for doctoral students will continue as before for students making satisfactory academic progress.

- Students experiencing challenges with technology, health including their family's health, housing or other issues that put them individually at a disadvantage regarding engagement with or performance in remotely delivered courses are strongly encouraged to reach out to their course directors.
- Course directors are strongly encouraged to be as flexible as possible with students impacted by COVID-19 without sacrificing the academic rigor of courses or individual student assignments.
- A student should not use VCU laboratory or other space unless their research has been designated as essential through a formal process involving their advisor, their advisor's department, and their advisor's school/college, and the student agrees with that designation. Students should coordinate with their advisors on research activities that can be performed remotely. Students should feel free to avoid research or other activities that they believe could put themselves or those around them (roommates, family members, etc.) at risk.
- Recipients of F31 doctoral fellowships can request an extension. See the "Delays in Research Progress" section within the [NIH COVID-19 FAQ](#).
- The Dean of Students office has launched the [VCU Student Emergency Fund](#).
- There is also a [Student Life and Learning Fund](#) which provides grants and loans to students impacted by COVID-19.
- Graduate students can [change their grading option](#) and [University Counseling Service](#) is available as indicated previously.
- Additional messages and guidance are available on the [SOM graduate student resource page](#).

Looking ahead, guidance for students planning to complete their degrees in the summer of 2020 as well as for students needing to register for summer 2020 courses is being developed and will be distributed ASAP. And of course please continue reaching out to your advisors and graduate program directors, as well as my office, if concerns arise.

Many thanks for your continuing resiliency, patience and commitment.

Sincerely,

Mike Grotewiel, Ph.D.
Associate Dean for Graduate Education
School of Medicine
Virginia Commonwealth University