

To: Graduate Students, Faculty, and Staff
From: Thomas F. Rosenbaum, Provost
Cathy J. Cohen, Deputy Provost for Graduate Education
Date: February 25, 2010
Re: Response to graduate education committee reports

At our request, the Committee on Advanced Residence and Time-to-Degree and two subcommittees of the Committee on Graduate Student Teaching spent the 2008-09 academic year researching, deliberating, and drafting recommendations for improvements to graduate education. Their recommendations were submitted to us at the end of spring quarter 2009, and we spent summer and fall quarters meeting with a wide range of students, faculty, and staff to understand their perspectives on the committees' recommendations. Not surprisingly for the University of Chicago, the passion around the disparate views has been both challenging and refreshing, and there is no general consensus on many of the recommendations. Based on the work of these committees, on our understanding of practices at peer institutions, and on our own conversations held over many months with students, faculty, and staff, this memo responds to the committee reports, discussing those policies and initiatives we will implement and also touching on those recommendations that we are not able to pursue at this time.

We are very grateful to the members of the committees, whose reports have generated a healthy campus-wide discussion and allowed us ultimately to reflect on the power of the departments and divisions to shape the University's world-renowned graduate programs while seeking to provide support through University-wide policies and expectations. Please note that the original reports are available on the reports section of the website of the Office of the Provost (<http://provost.uchicago.edu/news.shtml>).

Over the last few years we have concentrated on the funding and organizational framework for doctoral education and on the need to collect and analyze data so as to make informed decisions about the most impactful improvements. This has involved structural changes in stipends, health care, summer support, dissertation fellowships, and teaching expectations and remuneration. At the heart of our efforts to improve graduate education is an understanding that changing the culture of graduate education—for example our expectations of how long it should take students to complete a degree—is both challenging and vitally necessary. Ongoing re-examination of our practices is a challenge that we all must undertake. Students and scholars come to the University of Chicago from around the world because of the promise that they will be able to engage in path-breaking, innovative work that is stimulated by our distinctive educational environment. In order to fulfill that promise and ensure top-quality graduate education, we must constantly examine our efforts, and we as a community must constantly strive for higher and higher expectations of ourselves—students, faculty, departments, divisions, and schools.

Without attention to students' progress from the first day they arrive on campus and throughout their entire time in their programs, we will not be able to support our graduate students' successful and timely completion of their degrees. Thus the reports received from the Advanced Residence Committee, the Pedagogical Training Subcommittee, and the Teaching Roles and Responsibilities Subcommittee and our response to all three reports suggest interventions that

address students early in their graduate careers as well as students already in Advanced Residence. In considering the recommendations of the AR Committee we have paid special attention to the challenges faced by doctoral students not covered by the GAI. Of course, no one group will be completely satisfied with all the recommendations we are accepting. Our goal, however, is to make full use of the resources available to the University to improve the overall educational environment, including but not exclusively graduate education.

In the current economy, when resources are scarce because revenue sources have declined, we have had to make difficult decisions about how best to adopt the spirit of these recommendations. At the same time that we want to attend to the direct financial support of students, we also have to support the entirety of the graduate experience, which includes devoting resources to our libraries, laboratories, technology, and most importantly the hiring and retaining of the outstanding faculty that are needed to maintain the high-caliber programs that define University of Chicago graduate education. All budgeting involves tradeoffs, and our goal is to strike a balance in terms of the distribution of available resources to all aspects of graduate education.

The recommendations we are endorsing at this time are detailed below and include the phased elimination of Extended Residence status, a normative time to candidacy, the extended freezing of Advanced Residence out-of-pocket tuition, allowing flexibility in the timing of students' last year of Graduate Aid Initiative funding, institution of a centralized system of teaching applications and processing, and working with the divisions and schools to implement best practices from our own institution and peers. It is our sincere hope that these policies and initiatives, while each on its own may not be agreed upon by all, will as a whole be cause for everyone responsible for graduate education, including students, faculty, and staff, to reflect on their role in the graduate endeavor and to recommit themselves to excellence.

Tuition

Doctoral students in Advanced Residence (AR) status have a significant portion of their tuition paid for by their divisions each year. We ask doctoral students to contribute financially to their education by paying for a smaller share of their tuition. Some AR students have advocated that this portion, the AR "out-of-pocket" tuition, be completely eliminated, and the AR Committee's first recommendation was to lower the out-of-pocket cost of AR tuition. We understand the financial implications of AR out-of-pocket tuition on graduate students and the need to ensure that a University of Chicago education is affordable to all. Although in the current economic climate we cannot eliminate AR out-of-pocket tuition entirely, we have decided to freeze the AR out-of-pocket contribution at its current level for the next two academic years: 2010-2011 and 2011-12. We hope that by freezing the out-of-pocket contribution of doctoral students for the next two years, advanced students will have a clearer sense of their upcoming financial obligations and will be better able to make decisions about financial budgeting, when to work, and most importantly how to allocate resources toward the completion of their degrees.

We ask students to remember that prior to 2008, AR tuition and the out-of-pocket tuition contribution of students increased annually at a rate of five percent. In 2008-09 we made the decision to freeze AR tuition, allowing for no increase that year. In 2009-10 we allowed AR

tuition to increase as determined by each division and school and approved by the Board of Trustees, but we did not increase the student out-of-pocket contribution. At the end of the 2011-12 academic year, having kept AR out-of-pocket tuition at the same rate for four years, we will have saved many individual students approximately \$1,350. To make up for the lost revenue to the divisions that arises from holding AR out-of-pocket constant over a four-year period, the central administration will contribute an additional cumulative cost of nearly \$2 million toward doctoral education.

Student financial stress

In the past few years, the University has dedicated significant effort and resources to improving the experience of doctoral students. The Graduate Aid Initiative, announced in 2007 and expanded in 2008, committed \$52.3 million over six years to support graduate student funding. In 2008, we announced a \$2.3 million increase in summer fellowships and dissertation-year fellowship awards, and we have increased remuneration for graduate student teachers by approximately \$2.8 million annually. We have also continued to increase stipends for most doctoral students in line with many of our peers.

Even given the substantial financial contributions from the University to support our doctoral students, the issue of financial stress continues to be raised by graduate students as an impediment to doing their best work. Fundamentally, we believe that a fair level of support should be provided to all graduate students so that they may concentrate on their studies and make progress through their programs. We also believe that doctoral students themselves must be prepared to contribute financially to their graduate education just as undergraduates, masters and professional students contribute financially to theirs. In considering how best to improve the quality of the graduate student experience, especially when it comes to financial support, we believe the following initiatives will help.

First, doctoral students with five years of funding have traditionally only been allowed to receive their funding during the first five years of their academic careers. At the discretion of departments and in coordination with divisions and schools, students may now have the flexibility to postpone their final year of stipend funding until Year 6, if they feel that allocating financial support in the 6th year would better facilitate the completion of their dissertation in a timely manner. This means that a student can decide to take no stipend funding in their fifth year and instead receive their last year of stipend funding in their sixth year when they might be better prepared to enter into the last stages of research and writing the dissertation. Again, the decision to allow for the use of the last year of stipend funding in the sixth year is at the discretion of the department or program and the division or school and only applies to the delay of stipend funding.

Second, there currently are a variety of different internal funding awards, such as dissertation fellowships. Some of these awards do not include coverage of out-of-pocket tuition and health insurance. Moving forward, all newly created dissertation write-up funding awards will be required to cover the cost of out-of-pocket tuition and health insurance. The specifics of already-existing fellowships cannot be changed, and we are not able to apply this new policy retroactively.

Third, we have asked Campus and Student Life to develop and hold regular workshops for graduate students to help them with financial planning, work-loan strategies, and time management for timely degree completion. Master's degree students, doctoral students, and professional students all can benefit from financial planning, and we expect the departments, divisions, and schools to encourage and possibly require their students to attend some of these workshops early in their graduate careers. It is important that doctoral students budget for the costs of their education over the course of their entire graduate experience.

Fourth, the AR Committee recommended that the Graduate Aid Initiative (GAI) be extended to all relevant doctoral students across the University. The GAI initially covered graduate students in the Humanities and Social Sciences. In 2008, we extended it to the Divinity School. We are committed to continuing to work on expanding the GAI, but will not be able to expand it further immediately because of the current economic situation.

Graduate student teaching

Teaching experience is an important part of graduate training, and it can also provide much-needed financial support. As we heard from numerous students, teaching, while beneficial, can also require a considerable time commitment and therefore result in delayed academic progress. We ask that departments and programs clearly outline in writing the teaching expectations for all of their students, including suggested time frames for completing teaching requirements. We also strongly suggest that departments consider putting a limit on the number of courses a student can teach in any one year in order to facilitate adequate academic progress. Unless programmatically important, we recommend that students under the Graduate Aid Initiative not teach until their third year in the program, giving them time to complete course and exam requirements.

In order to facilitate equitable access to teaching positions and to streamline the teaching application process, we are leading an effort with a wide variety of campus stakeholders including the divisions, schools, and departments to build a transparent, University-wide system that will serve as a central listing and processing site for all teaching positions open to graduate students. Although it will take time to create, we plan to develop a Web-based system for applying for teaching positions and processing applications. We believe that such a system will increase efficiency in assigning graduate teaching positions and may help to distribute teaching positions more equitably across the graduate student population.

Given that all departments will be expected to participate in the campus-wide system of listing and processing graduate teaching positions, we strongly encourage departments to centralize their assignment of graduate teachers, moving away from systems where individual faculty members have full discretion over which students receive teaching assignments. We believe that teaching is a central programmatic component of graduate education and all students should be given the opportunity to improve their pedagogical skills by working with faculty in the classroom and on some occasions teaching their own classes.

As we move to a system that will more efficiently and equitably assign teaching positions, we also encourage units when possible to make year-long teaching assignments so that students will

know well in advance when they will be teaching. If such a process of annual assignments can be utilized, students should be expected to accept position assignments in a timely manner and suffer consequences if they abdicate their responsibilities at the last minute. We encourage departments and divisions to work with the College to develop needed policies in this area.

One additional recommendation with regard to teaching that was put forth by the AR Committee involved the redistribution of teaching aid. Currently, out-of-pocket AR tuition is paid by the divisions for the quarter in which a graduate student teaches. The AR committee recommended that this “teaching aid” be eliminated, and the funds be directed to support all graduate students instead of only those with teaching positions. While the idea of using the reallocated aid to lower tuition for all AR students is appealing, it became clear from the responses received from the College, divisions, and departments that such a policy might create a hardship in trying to recruit graduate student teachers, especially those in AR. Many students also indicated that elimination of teaching aid would place further financial burdens on graduate students. Given these substantial reasons, we will not change the method of providing tuition aid to graduate students in the quarter in which they teach.

Extended Residence

Currently, doctoral students in their 13th year and beyond are required to register in and pay tuition for Extended Residence (ER) status. In three years, beginning in the 2013-2014 academic year, ER will be eliminated, and all students in ER at that time will no longer be permitted to enroll at the University. We are eliminating ER not to punish students who have been delayed in their progress, but instead to make clear the idea that we believe a doctoral degree can and should be completed in 12 years or fewer.

Under the new system, students will still be allowed to graduate past the 12th year with their department’s and division’s permission as detailed below. Those students removed from their programs at the end of Year 12 who go on to complete their dissertations will be allowed to petition their departments to re-enroll in order to submit their dissertations, defend their dissertations, and demonstrate current knowledge of their fields. (Each department can define acceptable means of determining current knowledge, but options may include re-taking a preliminary exam, writing a paper, or passing an oral field exam.) Assuming their department approves, these students will be required to register and pay tuition in the quarter(s) they finish their degree requirements, graduate, and receive their degree. In order to ensure as few students as possible find themselves removed from their programs at the end of Year 12, students at the beginning of Year 10 of their programs will be required to submit a degree completion plan, endorsed by their dissertation chair, to their departments and deans of students.

This policy will be implemented in the 2013-2014 academic year, allowing students currently in ER to develop plans to finish over the next three years and to help the divisions and schools to adjust to the additional costs. Every department with students currently enrolled in ER should contact those students immediately to make them aware of the new policy and develop a strategy for the completion of their degree if that is their desire and plan.

Time-to-candidacy

As noted earlier, part of our challenge in thinking about how we can improve graduate education is to review our assumptions about the different components of the graduate experience. Fundamentally, we have to examine the cultural assumptions of our graduate programs, including our expectations about time-to-candidacy. We are focusing on time-to-candidacy because we realize that attempts to help students complete their dissertation in a reasonable time must focus on early markers of progress. Given that attention to early markers of progress in doctoral programs can make the difference between timely and untimely degree completion, we expect divisions and schools to establish clearly defined policies for acceptable time-to-candidacy for its doctoral students. We are defining candidacy as the moment a student is certified to have met all requirements for the Ph.D. except the dissertation defense. In adopting requirements for a normative time-to-candidacy, we will be joining many of our peers in recognizing that guidelines about the time-to-candidacy are beneficial to students in terms of keeping them on track. In order to ensure the enforcement of this requirement, we ask the deans to identify and implement strong measures to ensure timely completion, including penalties for departments and students that fail to meet normative time-to-candidacy.

Supporting students' academic success

Since the University's earliest beginnings as a leader in graduate education, our academic divisions and schools have held primary responsibility for graduate education. It is understandable that within a highly decentralized environment, there is considerable variety in the form and content of student support, but the high quality of the graduate student experience regardless of field of study should remain paramount. Our role in the Office of the Provost is largely to facilitate the sharing of information across units and to identify and communicate effective initiatives for implementation across the University at the discretion of departments and divisions. The Committee on Advanced Residence and Time-to-Degree and the two subcommittees of the Provost's Committee on Graduate Student Teaching identified several key areas—academic advising and mentoring, programmatic and financial requirements, pedagogical training and mentoring, and community building—where there are opportunities for improving the graduate student experience. We enthusiastically support the committees' recommendations in these areas and will work with departments, divisions, and schools to ensure that they are aware of specific steps we recommend they take to support better the academic success of their students.

We want to underscore that the AR Committee report has outlined a number of areas where the implementation of such policies represents the adoption of best practices in the field (recommendations 9-14). We will hold our departments and divisions to such standards in evaluating their requests for additional financial support in the area of graduate education. We understand that some departments have already implemented various forms of the best practices outlined in recommendations 9-14, and we similarly understand that not every recommendation will or should be adopted by our programs and departments. Overall, however, we will continue to have the highest standards for our graduate programs and will work with divisional deans and deans of students to ensure that the appropriate policies and procedures for each unit are considered and adopted as suitable.

For example, we believe that prospective students should be given as much information about the department and program as possible, including median time-to-degree, placement patterns, and all programmatic requirements for completion of the degree. All such information should be available on the unit's website and reviewed with students periodically, including the point at which they matriculate. Students should also be notified in writing on the rate with which they are meeting the milestones of progress in their program.

It is also clear from talking to faculty that many are unaware of numerous components of our graduate system of education. We agree with the AR Committee in recommending that departments and programs should periodically review with all faculty the programmatic and financial requirements of the unit as well as how we compare to our peers on measures such as time-to-degree, placement, and the progress of varying populations (e.g., international students, women, and students of color).

We understand that implementing these policies will incur additional work from the staff and the faculty. It is our goal to aid in that process by, for example, building a centralized database on graduate education at the University that can provide divisions, schools, and departments with information to assess more easily and systematically the quality of their specific graduate programs. We will also continue to work with the academic deans and deans of students to identify ways that the central administration can support divisions and departments with monitoring and improving our graduate programs.

Grievance policy

Just as each division and school is responsible for its students' academic success, there is also no centralized University-wide grievance policy. In response to the second recommendation of the Subcommittee on Roles, Responsibilities, and the Monitoring of Teaching of the Committee on Graduate Student Teaching, we therefore ask divisions and schools to communicate and publicize to graduate students the grievance procedures for each unit. In general, graduate students are encouraged to address issues and concerns when appropriate with faculty, their directors of graduate studies, departmental chairs, and the deans of students. The University student ombudsperson is also available to provide resources and support.

Opportunities for interdisciplinary networking and support

In addition to recommending that departments encourage networking as part of the best practices mentioned above (see AR Committee recommendation 11), we have asked Campus and Student Life to continue their efforts directed at increasing interdisciplinary professional development and networking. The Office of Graduate Student Affairs has significantly expanded its series of workshops that support graduate student progress and academic networking skills, targeting students from all disciplines. Several offices in Campus and Student Life recently sponsored GradUCon, a half-day graduate student professional development conference, and the Grad Social Series, created last year in response to a Graduate Council survey, has proven widely popular. The new Family Resource Center in the lower level of Ida Noyes Hall offers an on-campus drop-in space for graduate student parents to find community and support with other graduate student parents. We will continue to collaborate with partners in Campus and Student

Life as well as the divisions and schools to expand informal and formal opportunities for graduate students to learn with and support each other.

Graduate students are critical players in the University of Chicago's vibrant and distinctive academic environment. The quality of their educational experience—from application and admission to degree completion—is a top priority. We are committed to continuing dialogue with students, faculty, departments, divisions, and schools about how we can best support graduate education, working together to continue the exceptional tradition of providing the highest caliber of graduate education.