

REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING
Thursday, January 17, 2019
3:30 – 5:00 p.m., 111 Student Services Building

Committee members present: Maria Stehle (Chair); Chad Black, Julie Bonom, Lars Dzikus, Freida Herron, and Jack Ryan (GSS Vice-President)

Other attendees: Mary Albrecht, Sara Bradberry, Rachel Fleming-May, Holly Mercer, Sarah Stone, Dixie Thompson, and Catherine Cox (Graduate School Liaison)

Student attendees: Catherine Greer and Kendra Slayton

Maria Stehle called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.

Dr. Stehle asked that with student representatives in our meeting that we go around the room and introduce ourselves. Dr. Stehle explained the role and responsibility of the Academic Policy Committee and how APC is a standing committee of the Graduate Council.

Agenda Items:

1. Proposal: Revise Embargo policy to:

- a.) *provide a six-year embargo option for students intending to publish their dissertations.*
- b.) *eliminate the current stipulation that requires students to renew the embargo each year.*
- c.) *establish policy for students who, in rare cases, may need to request additional time beyond six years.*

Proposal submitted by UT PhD candidates, Catherine Greer (German) and Kendra Slayton (English)

UT currently allows students to embargo their dissertations for a maximum of three years. Students are required to provide a rationale justifying the embargo and requests are granted in one-year increments. Students are required to renew the embargo each year. There is not a policy in place for exceptions and/or extensions that may be required in rare cases.

It is our belief that the above policy changes will 1) reduce the current administrative workload that requires a manual yearly renewal, 2) ensure that students' dissertations are protected throughout the entire embargo period, and 3) not impede recent graduates' attempts to secure book contracts, thus fostering their future professional success.

Current catalog language for Thesis and Dissertation Embargo Option

Thesis and Dissertation Embargo Option

Students with significant concerns related to sensitive or classified information, patents, and potential publishers' restrictions may request a 12-month embargo after the conferral of their degree to delay public release of the thesis or dissertation. The request must be approved by the student's major advisor and submitted to the thesis/dissertation consultant in the Graduate School no later than the thesis/dissertation submission deadline. Complete the Embargo Request section on the second page of the Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form. In the Embargo Request section the student checks the statement "I would like my ETD [electronic thesis/dissertation] to be held from release for one year from the date my degree is conferred." The student must indicate the reason for the embargo, sign the form and obtain the major professor's signature on the "Advisor Signature" line. All requests must be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. Upon special request, this embargo may be extended for two additional 12-month periods. The maximum embargo period is 36 months following the conferral of the graduate degree. Those students wishing to embargo their ETDs for longer than 12 months must submit an additional request at least two weeks before the end of the embargo period.

Rationale for Policy Changes

Open access to dissertations in the Humanities poses serious challenges to graduates who plan to revise the dissertation for publication as a scholarly monograph. For UT graduates who seek tenure-track academic jobs, a three-year embargo does not provide adequate time for revision of the manuscript, securing a book contract, and undergoing a publisher's review

process, given the current state of the academic job market. Even though dissertations undergo substantial change when revised into monographs, the dissertation itself may already contain work and ideas that contribute to the student's field in meaningful and original ways. Open access publication of the dissertation after three years therefore creates unnecessary challenges for students who plan to publish a dissertation-based monograph.

It is our hope that the policy changes proposed will help protect students' scholarly contributions until they can be published in an official, peer-reviewed manner. Our proposal is in accordance with the American Historical Association's 2013 statement encouraging universities to allow students to embargo dissertations for up to six years. The vast majority of UT's peer and aspirational peer institutions—in addition to the nation's top public research institutions—have policies in place that conform to these standards. For example, Louisiana State University, a peer institution, grants embargo options of one, three, or seven years, and allows additional extensions up to a maximum of twenty-one years. Purdue University, an aspirational institution, allows students to determine the embargo length with their advisor with no maximum specified.

No other peer institution that grants a PhD in Humanities disciplines requires yearly renewal of the embargo. Due to documented problems with UT's current embargo renewal process, at least two PhD students have had their dissertations released early, despite having completed all steps required to renew the embargo. The majority of all peer and aspirational peer institutions have policies that consider extensions and/or exceptions beyond the standard limits on a case-by-case basis.

DISCUSSION:

Ms. Greer: we feel the current policy: 1) imperils the publishing opportunity for students in the humanities, 2) does not conform to our peer institutions, our aspirational institutions, or our Top 25 Research Universities. Our monograph is based on our dissertations and three years does not give enough time to revise the manuscript, find a publisher, and go through the publishers review process. We believe three years is a constraint to secure a tenure-track position. Our fear is that our innovative work, valuable to our field, will be out there for the public to view before we have the opportunity to publish our book.

We would like those going into academia to have the option for a six-year embargo. We understand others may not want or need six years. We are proposing there be an option for a six-year embargo, which will eliminate the need to renew every year. We have over 50 signatures from faculty members who support our proposal.

From our handouts, peer institutions (from US News and World Report) shows 60 percent have embargo options over three years.

Holly Mercer, from the Libraries, communicated that with the submission process we use now, there are no options for each student to determine their own embargo option. It is possible that we could revise and have choices of maybe, 6 months, 3 years, or 6 years. Auburn changed their policy to allow a five-year embargo.

S. Stone: Currently, embargo extensions are a manual process.

- 1) The student emails Dr. Thompson (copy to their major professor and provides reason for extension) and requests the year extension*
- 2) Dr. Thompson approves the extension and copies Sarah Stone.*
- 3) Sarah logs into TRACE and manually extends the embargo. With our current system it takes a very long time for the upload (sometimes overnight). Therefore, if the student does the request right before the expiration then it could take a few hours for the update.*
- 4) I usually get about ten requests a year for the one-year renewal and very few requests two years.*

The current system does not have automatic notifications of when the embargo is expiring.

Committee discussion: Dissertations are not books. By the time students do the re-writes it is completely different from the dissertation. It is a misconception for graduate students to imagine that the dissertation and the published book are the same. The finished product will be radically changed from the submitted dissertation.

D. Thompson: This is an interesting discussion and we need to balance both sides. As a public institution, work that is done at UT should be available for the public. Even when theses/dissertations are embargoed, we should make the abstract available.

Discussion: It seems a good option might be to have students work with their major professor to determine the best embargo option for their dissertation discipline. Then, when the Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form is filled out the embargo will be indicated.

Maybe we could have a one-year, three-year, or five-year option listed on the form.

Can the embargo be lifted before the expiration date? We assume that is also an option.

We do not want to see the embargo being used by those who do not really need it. How do we avoid that situation? If we decide to go to a 1-, 3-, or 5-year embargo option, we really are going to have to do research with the faculty and the students. We will have to educate well on what it means and the implications of it. In addition, to understand how this copyright idea works, as presently, it is not well understood. It is complicated and is evolving.

We work with ORNL on thesis and dissertations that cannot be published due to the classified nature of the work. They send us a letter explaining the high level of security on the research and request that it never be published. So, there does need to be a higher level of standard on some requests.

Dr. Stehle thanked Catherine and Kendra for bringing their proposal to APC. We will take this as a discussion item to Graduate Council and get their feedback. We also invite you back to our next meeting for another review and discussion.

We will revise the embargo proposal to a 1-, 3- or 5-year option to go before Graduate Council as a discussion item.

The committee requested Catherine Greer to update the pie charts to add the rankings and institutions for the Graduate Council review and discussion.

2. *Proposal: Revise Leave of Absence policy to allow financial hardship as an extenuating circumstance to obtain a LOA.*

Proposal submitted by Dr. Rachel Fleming-May, from the School of Information Sciences.

Current catalog language for: Leave of Absence Policy

Leave of Absence (LOA) and Reinstatement Following a LOA

If extenuating circumstances arise that make it necessary for students to interrupt their studies temporarily, a Request for a Leave of Absence (LOA) for a maximum of two years may be granted by the Graduate School upon approval by the student's home department or program. All Graduate Student Leave of Absence Requests are reviewed and granted on a case-by-case basis. There are many situations for which a leave can be requested, such as the birth or adoption of a child, dependent care, a serious medical condition, military service, or other personal reasons. **A Leave of Absence (LOA) will not be granted with the sole reason of financial hardship.**

Graduate students are strongly encouraged to consult with their program, advisor, and Director of Graduate Studies of their academic unit in order to determine whether a Leave of Absence (LOA) is the most appropriate course of action, and international students must also consult with the Center for International Education in order to ensure compliance with Federal immigration policy. Prior to requesting a Leave of Absence (LOA), graduate students should always explore alternatives which would allow them to remain registered and make progress toward the degree, even if at a slower pace.

Students who are granted a Leave of Absence (LOA) by the Graduate School in accordance with this policy are eligible for Reinstatement provided they enroll no later than the term immediately following the expiration of the approved Leave of Absence, excluding summer (see Reinstatement policy below for more details). The term(s) and/or year(s) of an approved Leave of Absence (LOA) will not be counted toward time to degree, and milestone deadlines such as Admission to Candidacy will be adjusted accordingly. Having a Leave of Absence (LOA) granted does not imply a guaranteed continuation of funding options upon return.

Graduate students who are on a Leave of Absence (LOA) suspend their active study for one semester or more (up to 2 years), and while on a Leave of Absence (LOA) they are not able to make any formal progress toward their degree. In addition, they may not use faculty services and/or university facilities for the period of time that they are on a Leave of Absence (LOA).

Students are expected to return from a Leave of Absence (LOA). If they do not return to active student status by the end of the period of time stipulated in the approved Leave of Absence (LOA), they will be considered non-enrolled once their LOA has expired and lose their eligibility for Reinstatement. Graduate Students who have lost their eligibility for Reinstatement need to seek Readmission prior to being able to continue work in their graduate degree program (see policies below on Consequences of Non-Enrollment without Leave of Absence and on Readmission).

In order to return to an active student status, graduate students on an approved Leave of Absence (LOA) need to establish Reinstatement into their graduate degree program by the end of the leave period stipulated on their approved

Leave of Absence (LOA). Students on an approved Leave of Absence (LOA) need to complete and submit their Request for Reinstatements to the Graduate School no later than on the last day of classes of the semester prior to the semester for which they seek to be reinstated (also see policy below on “Reinstatement”).

Dr. Rachel Fleming-May will attend the meeting and provide background information for the proposal.

Background information:

The LOA was first approved at the April 10, 2014 Graduate Council Meeting (page G2297, 2299). It was the action and effort of graduate students working with the Graduate Student Senate that brought the policy forward to APC. GSS was involved from submitting the proposal, to writing the draft, and the approval process.

Discussion:

The policy indicates the sole reason for the LOA cannot be for financial reasons. If financial reasons becomes the sole reason then we are going to have many LOA's submitted for financial hardship. How are we going to decide on what kinds of financial records must be submitted and who makes the decision? How do we delve into that? Currently, we are lenient concerning student stress. If a student just says I cannot afford to pay my tuition, we can't approve that; but if there are extenuating circumstances that go beyond financial hardship, we can approve.

An option to help students may be to look at the Continuation Policy. Currently, when a Leave of Absence is granted the student no longer registers. When the LOA is up the student submits a Reinstatement for the semester indicated on the LOA form. There is no penalty during that time and your clock to graduate is extended. If you just stop coming, then you have to apply for readmission, plus back-register for the semesters you were out.

We have a handout that explains Continuous Enrollment, Exemption from Continuous Enrollment of Course 600 Dissertation, and consequences of Non-Enrollment with Leave of Absence.

D. Thompson: I propose that the Leave of Absence policy stays as it is written and that we get rid of the penalty to back register for those students who stop attending. This will remove the penalty for students who need to “drop out” for a period of time. The only financial consequence of this would be that the student would have to pay a \$30 readmission fee.

From the Graduate School perspective, if a LOA is granted solely on financial reasons, it is going to be a nightmare on how to weigh through financial documents to grant such approvals. It would be much better to get rid of the back registration penalty when students violate the Continuous Enrollment Policy. Then, students will not be penalized and jeopardized when they just stop attending and do not register.

However, this is not about doctoral students. Doctoral students will still have to continuously register for course 600, including summer.

If you like the idea of getting rid of the Continuous Enrollment, then I will write a proposal to revise the policy of “Consequences of Non-Enrollment without Leave of Absence.”

Committee consensus was to move forward with amending the Continuous Enrollment Policy. Dr. Thompson will write a proposal to bring forward at the next APC meeting for discussion and review.

Meeting adjourned at 4:45.

Respectfully submitted.

Catherine Cox
Graduate Council Liaison