

SEVEN-YEAR POLICY FOR PH.D. STUDENTS

June 2006

The Graduate School-New Brunswick has long stated that full-time Ph.D. students are expected to complete their degrees in seven years or less. This is a reasonable standard for a doctoral student. Many students, of course, have taken longer for a variety of reasons. While formally such students are supposed to apply for extensions of time, this process has largely lapsed. With new attention to both time-to-degree and completion rates, as well as the goal of funding students through to the degree, it is appropriate to give new consideration to the policies and processes that might be put into place to monitor students who have taken longer than the canonical seven years.

Recognizing the variations in disciplines, we feel it is essential that a norm be established in each graduate program regarding the length of time it should take for students to complete their degrees. While exceptions may be warranted, students who exceed the norm should be required to justify their extensions of time. These extensions of time should be approved by the student's committee and the program faculty through its own internal processes, preferably by committee review. The norm should be either five or six years for full-time students, more for part-time students in programs that allow part-time study. Our goal in establishing these norms is not to drive students away but to encourage timely and successful completion of the degree and prompt movement into their careers. Programs may feel it is appropriate to establish a shorter norm for students who join the Ph.D. program with advanced standing, such as with a Master's degree.

Doctoral programs already have (or should have) regular reviews of their students. It is our intention that any new process we devise should be integrated into the existing review processes to avoid duplication and excessive burdens on graduate program offices.

In considering whether or not to recommend an extension of time, programs will have considerable discretion. Students who have made good faith efforts to make progress but who have been impeded by unanticipated difficulties in their research or by personal difficulties beyond their control should certainly be accommodated. Part-time students will understandably take longer, on average, but still need to show progress in their studies and/or research. Students required to do a great deal of teaching, again, will need more time in many cases and this too should be taken into account. Programs should take care to clearly specify the reasons for extension requests.

The Graduate School will identify early each spring those doctoral students who have been (or will shortly be) enrolled for seven years and who have not filed for the degree. (Students who enter in January will not be separately monitored by the Graduate School, but programs are free to require that they apply for extensions at the end of seven years, rather than wait the additional semester.) The students will be notified and the names of those notified sent to the programs. Students must file requests for extension and programs must decide whether or not to recommend in favor of those extensions.

(Students who file for October degrees need not file for extensions.) In the case of students who have passed the 7-year mark, requests for extension must be forwarded within ninety days of the original notification to the Graduate School for approval. (A program that decides not to recommend an extension must, within ninety days of the original notification, either ask the student to resign or take formal action to recommend termination of the student's status in the program.) In each case, these applications will be accompanied to the Graduate School by statements by the student's committee, the graduate program director and the student justifying the request for an extension (these may be the review statements already collected by the program), and an estimate of the number of additional semesters required for the student to complete the Ph.D. degree.

Students may appeal decisions not to recommend extensions through the existing appeals process, as described in the catalogue.

In the event that an acceptable application for extension of time is not received for a student, the program and the student will be informed that the student is subject to suspension of registration until the extension is approved. Such approval must occur within ninety days to forestall suspension.

All students are expected to complete their degrees within 10 years. In the event that a student has been enrolled for 10 years without completing the degree, and the student's continuation beyond 10 years has not been approved under the foregoing process, the student will be informed that he or she has ninety days to show cause why he or she should not be dismissed from the Graduate School – New Brunswick. (For 2006-2007 only a grace period of one year will be allowed for these students, who will be required to show cause only in Spring 2008.)

This policy will go into effect immediately upon adoption.

Our goal is to help students complete their degrees in a timely fashion while reminding them that graduate school is a phase in their lives, not a permanent way of life. At the same time, we will work with graduate programs to insure that all students with documented and legitimate reasons for extended enrollment will receive the appropriate consideration.