

March 3, 2006

TO ALL GRADUATE STUDENTS, FACULTY**RE: MFA and PhD Programs: Minimum Standards for Graduate Student Mentoring**

Over the last year the Graduate Council has requested and collected information from all academic units about the communication of policies to graduate students. The Council established a subcommittee to evaluate the wide range of responses received.

Given the variety of graduate programs on the campus, and the possible complications resulting from inadequately advised students, on March 2, 2006 the Council approved a set of minimum standards for communicating degree requirements, time-to-degree policy, and individual student progress toward the degree. The practices outlined below are now official policy. They are largely included in documents such as the Office of Graduate Studies *Graduate Advisor's Handbook* http://www.rgs.uci.edu/grad/staff/grad_hdbk.htm and *Graduate Students' Rights and Responsibilities* http://www.rgs.uci.edu/grad/staff/grad_rights.pdf. All programs should implement these practices if they have not done so already:

1. Develop a graduate program handbook, made available to graduate students upon or before their arrival on the campus. This should be updated annually;
2. Hold an orientation for all new graduate students, where program requirements, including normal time-to-degree, are clearly outlined and provided in writing. It is expected that these requirements will be included in the student handbooks as well;
3. Assign a graduate advisor to each graduate student at the time of first enrollment;
4. Require a minimum of one meeting – in person whenever feasible - between each graduate student and his/her advisor each quarter in which the student is enrolled; and
5. Require an annual assessment of each graduate student's timely progress by the student's advisor. For students with less than satisfactory progress a follow-up discussion should be held by an appropriate faculty group (e.g., a standing or *ad hoc* committee or a regular faculty meeting.) This faculty discussion should result in a written evaluation and recommendation to the student, to be sent to the student and his/her faculty advisor. A copy should be retained in department records. There should also be an established departmental or program process for guidance and follow-up when concerns are raised in a student evaluation.

There are several avenues – formal and informal - for students to file a grievance vis-à-vis these or other campus policies. It is recommended that an informal avenue for resolving such grievances be sought first, including through a program director, department chair, associate dean, or academic dean. More formal appeals processes include the Office of Graduate Studies. These as well as due process guidelines can be found in the documents cited above.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please address any questions regarding implementation of this policy to Carol Sokolov, Coordinator for Graduate Academic Affairs, in the Office of Graduate Studies (csokolov@uci.edu).

On behalf of the Graduate Council,

Jutta Heckhausen, Chair
Graduate Council

David van Dyk, Chair
Subcommittee on Graduate Program
Structure and Student Mentoring

cc: William Parker, Dean, Graduate Studies