March 27, 2020

Dear Graduate Program Chairs and Graduate Council,

We hope this message finds you healthy and doing well during this time of transition. This is the second of regular updates the Graduate Studies office will be providing to make sure that you, your colleagues, and students are aware of key information during this evolving situation. All of our updates are available to you at the link entitled “Updates on COVID-19 and Graduate Studies Operations” in the Graduate Faculty Resources tab within the Graduate Studies website. As a reminder, all Graduate Studies office functions are continuing uninterrupted, albeit in remote mode. At this time, systems seem to be working well. If you or your students/applicants experience any problems, please let us know. We recognize that the current situation means that lots of questions/issues will arise that normally are handled through established processes. If you are unsure how to proceed with any complications that come your way, please contact us to help problem-solve or to provide any needed assistance.

Encouraging Faculty to Reach Out to Students
Interpersonal connections during this period of remote instruction and supervision are especially important. We would like to encourage you to keep connected with your classes and graduate students in as much as possible. Reaching out to students regularly can help alleviate stress and anxiety for all involved and will allow you to learn of issues that students may be dealing with as early as possible.

Hiring GAs
Earlier this week the university released an official communication informing the campus that there would be a hiring pause effective immediately for non-essential positions. Please be aware that this does not apply to dedicated, existing GA lines. You may extend offers as normal for previously allocated program GA positions.

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)
IBM has decided to make SPSS available on a free trial basis to everyone through June 15th. You may download SPSS for free by following the instructions at: https://www.ibmibmbigdatahub.com/blog/ibm-spss-statistics-free-trial-extended-through-june-15-due-pandemic

If you encounter any issues with using the free trial software (for example, if you are wanting to use it on an iPad, this can sometimes present issues), NU ITS is setting up a small environment for SPSS virtual access. For students (or faculty) who have any issues with obtaining/using the free trial, they should contact the UNO Help Desk at 402.554.4357. They will need their NU ID number to be granted access into this environment.

I-20 Issuance
The Office of Graduate Studies recognizes that some colleges/universities in areas impacted by COVID-19 may be closed temporarily. While our current practice requires official course-by-course transcript evaluations or transcript and degree certificates with an English translation prior to I-20 issuance and enrollment (the course-by-course evaluation/transcript requirement is dependent upon the program that someone applied to), we do realize that institutional closures may cause a delay in the Office of Graduate Studies receiving these documents.

If you are working with any newly admitted graduate students for Summer or Fall 2020 who have expressed concern with their ability to request official documents due to university closures, please have the student contact the Office of Graduate Studies at gradschool@unomaha.edu so that we can work directly with them regarding options to continue their admission and enrollment.

Assuming that all other documentation has been received and the student’s file is otherwise complete, we can exercise a one semester extension on submission of official evaluations/transcripts and degree certificates for Summer and Fall 2020 admits. For instance, if the student is admitted for Fall 2020 and their file is complete, with the exception of official evaluations/transcripts, we will issue the I-20 and a hold will be placed on the student’s account for Spring 2021. This would allow the student to enroll for their first semester, but future registration would be prevented until we received the official documents. Requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Additionally, if you are working with a student who has been admitted for Summer or Fall 2020 and they need to defer their admission to a later start date, please contact the Office of Graduate Studies so that we can work with the student and your department to defer admission.

We appreciate what everyone is doing to assist applicants, newly admitted students, and current students. Please let us know if you have any questions, or if you are hearing of other concerns from applicants and students that we may be able to help address.

**Remote Learning Resources**
Just a reminder that we have added a Remote Learning Services webpage with some resources specifically for graduate students may find helpful at this time (see link below), including the availability of 1:1 Zoom sessions for students wanting assistance with thesis and dissertation formatting and submission.

- gradstudies.unomaha.edu/remote-learning

We also encourage you to use and share the following resources:
- Keep Teaching: https://unomaha.instructure.com/courses/33506
- Keep Learning: https://unomaha.instructure.com/courses/34804

**Commencement and Student Marshal nominations**
We understand that Commencement is an important day for our students and the entire Maverick community. The university has not yet made any final decisions about commencement. Additional information will be released on the Commencement website (see link below) as it becomes available. Please continue to email Richard Larson (rglarson@unomaha.edu) with nominations for student marshal. We will still honor the selected students for their accomplishments. Nominations are due March 31st. The deadline for applying for graduation has been extended to April 1st.
Self-Care
Self-care, nurturing our internal and external needs for overall wellness and happiness, is as critical now as ever. Promoting self-care for ourselves and for our students is mutually beneficial. Our ability to best serve our students will follow those steps we take to ensure our own well-being. We know that a lot is happening in a short period for everyone so, in as much as possible, take the time to do things that will help relieve some of your major stressors. Be sensitive also to students who may be having difficulties, especially if they communicate their challenges to you. Please alert them that campus resources remain available to assist them. For example, for those struggling with food insecurities, the Maverick Pantry remains open. For students who would like to speak to a counselor, please remind them that Counseling and Psychological Services are still available (see the link below).

As always, our thoughts continue to be with everyone affected. Take care and stay safe.

Best,

Deborah Smith-Howell, Ph.D.
Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs &
Dean of Graduate Studies

Juan F. Casas, Ph.D.
Associate Dean for Graduate Studies

Nicole Kersten
Assistant to the Dean

Brittney Knowlton, M.A.
Director of Enrollment Services

Richard G. Larson, M.P.A.
Director, Graduate Recruitment & Marketing

Penny Harmoney, M.S.
Director of Operations and Data

March 18, 2020

Dear Graduate Program Chairs and Graduate Council,

As you are all well aware, the impact of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) on higher education has been far-reaching. We understand the transition to remote learning is not easy. Graduate Studies is committed to continuing to provide all programs, faculty, staff, and students with the complete range of supports you would receive under normal circumstances during this change to a remote learning environment. As much as possible, all office functions will continue uninterrupted (albeit in a remote mode).
With this in mind, we write with some information that hopefully addresses some of the questions you may have at this time. We encourage you to reach out to us with any concerns you may have moving forward and ask that you instruct all faculty, staff, and students to do the same. We have added a Remote Learning Services webpage with some resources graduate students may find helpful at this time (see first link below), including the availability of 1:1 Zoom sessions for students wanting assistance with thesis and dissertation formatting and submission. As everyone is aware, this is a fluid situation we are facing so being flexible in adapting to changing circumstances will be important for all of us. We will keep you posted of new developments that could affect graduate programs or your students. We encourage you to regularly check the UNO Keep Teaching webpage for additional official updates (link two below). In order to keep these email updates easy for you to access, they will be archived on the Graduate Studies webpage in the tab labeled “Graduate Faculty Resources.”

- gradstudies.unomaha.edu/remote-learning

General Campus Information
Please remind students that at the present time, our campuses will remain open to serve all those who rely on our services, such as health and counseling services, dining services, residence halls, student pantry, and available campus study spaces. Students who reside on campus, and are able to do so, are encouraged to return to their place of permanent residence because there are advantages for social distancing. For those students living on campus who are not able to go home or who have work or other commitments in Omaha, UNO will continue to support our students in residence halls and dining facilities where appropriate social distancing and enhanced preventative public health and hygiene measures will be actively encouraged. As this is a developing situation, everyone should be encouraged to check on a daily basis the official UNO Coronavirus (Covid-19) webpage that contains complete and up-to-date information and available resources.

How do we handle Graduate Studies forms processed by physical paper?
A majority of paperwork can be accepted electronically, with the exception of the Application for Residence Classification for Tuition Purposes (only the original notarized application will be accepted). Please utilize digital signatures or email chains with the appropriate approvals when possible so that we can process paperwork at the earliest opportunity. Paperwork can be emailed to graduate@unomaha.edu.

What about Graduate Assistants?
GAs are/should be part of the program planning for continuity of operations. As feasible, there should be plans for how they might continue to support the faculty/students as we move to an e-learning environment including over the spring break. Since we don’t actually have GAs report their hours (like a student worker would), there may be some variations in the expected hours per week. The program and faculty may also be able to develop alternative projects that would allow the GAs to do meaningful work in the remote learning environment. We are going to be flexible and adaptable and ask that you do the same. In the case of research GAs working in labs, we understand their presence on campus may be unavoidable at times but be very careful about social distancing—in as much as possible, we should not have multiple people in small spaces. You may be able to have a person work in a lab alone at times but
it would be important to remind everyone to be cognizant of safety procedures including having someone who is always nearby in case of an emergency. For more information about ORCA related Covid-19 information please click the link below. Please reassure GAs that they will continue to be paid for as long as their assistantship is in place.


What about Comprehensive Exams, Proposal and Theses/Dissertation Defenses:
For those previously scheduled between March 16 – March 29, SVC Kopp has provided guidance indicating that, with the expanded spring break, faculty should not be holding classes or assigning homework or quizzes. For those who have scheduled comprehensive exams during this time, we recommend rescheduling for after spring break or preferably making arrangements for the exam to be taken remotely if possible. For comprehensive exams and defenses after spring break, please think through strategies to allow these to be done remotely or in an alternative format. For those that require an on-campus option, please follow all social distancing, group size, etc guidelines. If you are making a substantial change (not just format) for a comprehensive exam, please contact the Office of Graduate Studies.

What about Graduate Student Conference Travel Support
As you are aware, the University has suspended all non-essential domestic and international travel between March 12th and April 30th. As a result, we will not be funding any student graduate travel requests for conferences taking place between those dates. Students that applied for support for conference travel taking place prior to March 12th may still be awarded some funding support. Decisions on these earlier funding requests will be made soon but will depend on other budgetary considerations.

What about International Students?
International students on F and J visas are welcome to stay at UNO. They are encouraged to not travel out of the state of Nebraska unless it is necessary or urgent. If they plan on traveling they should contact the international advisors before they plan their travel or purchase tickets. If they have questions about travel issues, they should contact an international advisor at (402) 554-2293 or via email at UNOintladvising@unomaha.edu.

Will commencement be impacted?
At this time, no decision has been made regarding Spring 2020 Commencement ceremonies scheduled for Friday, May 8. We understand that Commencement is an important day for our students and the entire Maverick community. The university is exploring a variety of options and contingency plans at this time. Additional information will be released on the Commencement website (see link below) as it becomes available. Please continue to email Richard Larson with nominations for student marshal. Regardless of plans for the ceremonies, we will still honor the selected students for their accomplishments. Nominations are due March 31st. The deadline for applying for graduation has been extended to April 1.

https://www.unomaha.edu/news/events/commencement/index.php

We welcome your feedback and questions on what you need to best support UNO graduate students. Please let us know what will be useful to you. We will be in regular communication and will explore remote options for to remain connected and informed. Please do not hesitate to reach out to
us with your questions and concerns. We appreciate being aware of the issues each of you are facing. If we know, perhaps we can help facilitate crowdsourcing best practices.

As always, we thank you for your efforts on behalf of graduate students at UNO and we look forward to working with you to make the best of this challenging environment as we finish out the semester. If there is anything we can do, please let us know.

Our thoughts are with everyone affected. Take care and stay safe.

Best,

Deborah Smith-Howell, Ph.D.
Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs &
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