



## UPDATES REGARDING COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) AND GRADUATE STUDIES OPERATIONS

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April 28, 2020

Dear Graduate Program Chairs and Graduate Council,

It is hard to believe that we are in “prep week” with commencement less than two weeks away. Thank you for all that you have done to continue the semester and support your students. This unprecedented situation has challenged us all and you have risen to those challenges—thank you!. Below is information—including a new opportunity for UNO undergraduates about to graduate—that we think will be useful to you. If you have questions or feedback, please let us know.

A friendly reminder that 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. All Graduate Studies office functions continue to operate uninterrupted, albeit in remote mode. At this time, systems continue to be working well. Nonetheless, if you or your students/applicants experience any problems, please let us know so that we can help problem-solve or provide any needed assistance. Finally, a friendly reminder that open enrollment for the Fall semester has begun. As we are sure you are aware from the Chancellor’s recent email, we are actively planning for Fall 2020 semester. Please provide advising support to your students and encourage them to register as soon as they are able.

### **Jump Start Graduate Scholarship**

As mentioned in our previous update, UNO Graduate Studies has been working diligently in concert with UNO administration to identify mechanisms through which we can best support students in this Covid-19 era and to increase the likelihood of their ability to enroll for the coming semesters. As part of these efforts, we wish to announce an award for incoming students to support Summer 2020, Fall 2020, and Spring 2021 enrollment. The scholarship will support students tuition costs during their first semester enrolled in a graduate degree program. The amount of the award increases with the number of registered credits. The scholarship is designed specifically for UNO seniors graduating in spring, summer, or fall of 2020. In addition to this one semester scholarship, we are also providing new applicants for these application cycles with an application fee waiver. Students may obtain the code needed for the waiver by contacting Graduate Studies. Please click on the link below for more complete information about this scholarship including eligibility requirements.

[gradstudies.unomaha.edu/jumpstart](https://gradstudies.unomaha.edu/jumpstart)

### **Graduate Student Survey**

Graduate Studies has just completed a survey asking graduate students about their plans for the Fall semester. Thank you for helping to encourage students to participate, the participation rate was impressive with over 1,000 students completing the survey within the first week. Of the respondents, about 25% were newly admitted students, with the remaining 75% returning students. Respondents included students across every college and represented a wide range of degree and certificate

programs. The goal of the study was to learn more about students intentions to enroll in the Fall and provide them an avenue to voice their concerns about challenges they were facing that might prevent them from doing so. Among the important findings were that 81% were either already enrolled or planning to enroll for the Fall. Of the remaining, 6% were unsure and 13% were not planning on enrolling. Of the 13% who were not planning on enrolling, about a third were not enrolling because they are graduating this May. Illustrative of the challenging situations many of our students are facing, others who were not planning on enrolling cited feeling worried about their job, financial concerns, and concerns about how the pandemic would evolve. We are currently in the process of examining the complete set of responses, especially those to the question of whether there is something we can do that would help make it easier for them to enroll, so that collectively we can respond to the identified issues and support their ability to achieve their educational and professional goals. We will be sharing more detailed results and, when possible, program specific information, soon. Additionally, for those respondents who provided their emails with questions or comments, Graduate Studies staff are responding directly to each one.

### **Webpage Redesign**

Graduate Studies, with support from UComm, has recently completed a redesign of some of our key webpages. The goal of the changes has been to make the pages easier to navigate and obtain key information. We believe potential applicants in particular will find the new redesign useful for learning more about our wonderful doctoral, master's, and certificate programs. Please visit our new pages and let us know what you think!

<https://www.unomaha.edu/graduate-studies/index.php>

### **Chat Function Now Available**

As the aforementioned web redesign indicates, Grad Studies is constantly trying to improve the experience of those that visit our web pages in search of information. We recently added chat capabilities to make our most visited pages interactive and to more easily address questions. The chat feature will be staffed Monday – Friday from 8:30 – 5:00 pm. After hours and on weekends, visitors are invited to leave a message. Please look for the red chat box at the bottom right hand corner of the webpage and let your applicants/students know of this additional way of asking any questions they may have.

### **Virtual Commencement**

On May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020 UNO will celebrate the accomplishments of its graduates in a virtual commencement ceremony. In addition, graduating students are also invited to participate in the December graduation ceremony if they so choose. The virtual commencement ceremony video is scheduled to be available at 6:00 pm on May 8<sup>th</sup>. Additional information about the May 8<sup>th</sup> ceremony can be found at:

<https://www.unomaha.edu/news/events/commencement/schedule.php>

### **Student Immunization Records**

Please remind your students that for the time being Health Services holds will no longer be placed on student accounts as we wait for students to upload their immunization records. If students have not yet updated their health records they should do so as time and circumstances allow, but graduate students can enroll in courses unimpeded.

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

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April 20, 2020

Dear Graduate Program Chairs and Graduate Council,

We hope this message finds you healthy and continuing to do well during this period of working remotely. We know it is not easy, but it is apparent that all of your efforts are making a difference for your students, your program, and the campus community – we thank you for your dedication. This is the third of our periodic updates from the Office of Graduate Studies.

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 so that we can help problem-solve or provide any needed assistance. Finally, a friendly reminder that open enrollment for the Fall semester began last week. Please provide advising support to your students and encourage them to register as soon as possible.

**Jump Start Graduate Scholarship**

UNO Graduate Studies has been working diligently in concert with UNO administration to identify mechanisms through which we can best support students in this Covid-19 era and to increase the likelihood of their ability to enroll for the Fall 2020 semester. We are developing a new one-time award for incoming students to support Summer, Fall, and Spring new students. We will be sending more specific information as soon as it is available.

**Graduate Student Survey**

UNO Graduate Studies is surveying students about their plans for the Fall semester. We understand that making arrangements into the future may be tough at this time, but we want students to rest assured that UNO including Graduate Studies is here to support them in continuing to achieve their educational and professional goals. The survey, which will be sent out today, will help us to better understand their intentions and so allow us to serve them better. Their voice and responses are incredibly valuable.

Please help us by encouraging them to participate in this brief survey. The link to the survey is:

[https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_ex1fznlMxCajfXT](https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_ex1fznlMxCajfXT)

### **Virtual Commencement**

On May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020 UNO will celebrate the accomplishments of its graduates in a virtual commencement ceremony. In addition, graduating students are also invited to participate in the December graduation ceremony if they so choose. The virtual commencement ceremony video is *tentatively* scheduled to be available at 6:00 pm on May 8<sup>th</sup>. Additional information about the May 8<sup>th</sup> ceremony can be found at:

<https://www.unomaha.edu/news/events/commencement/schedule.php>

### **Testing Update**

We are continuing to monitor the evolving changes at the major testing companies. As a reminder, for international graduate applicants, in response to testing centers closing temporarily due to the coronavirus (COVID-19), the Office of Graduate Studies approved the temporary use of the Duolingo English Test in place of the TOEFL and IELTS English proficiency exams for Summer and Fall applicants. ETS is now offering students the opportunity to take the TOEFL iBT and General GRE at home (with the exception of Mainland China & Iran) with the use of ProctorU. In addition, IELTS has launched IELTS Indicator, an online English language test for test takers who are currently unable to take IELTS due to the COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) testing restrictions.

### **Student Immunization Records**

Please be advised that for the time being Health Services holds will no longer be placed on student accounts as we wait for students to upload their immunization records. If students have not yet updated their health records they should do so as time and circumstances allow, but graduate students **can enroll in courses unimpeded.**

### **Remote Learning Support**

Graduate Studies is offering 1:1 Zoom meetings for any student who has a question about Thesis/Dissertation Formatting and Submission. Resources on these topics can be found at the Graduate Studies website but students can also make appointments by emailing Brieland Fripp at [bfripp@unomaha.edu](mailto:bfripp@unomaha.edu) or [gradschool@unomaha.edu](mailto:gradschool@unomaha.edu).

The UNO Writing Center is also available to support graduate students on their writing projects and they have recently expanded their hours for virtual appointments. Students can make 1:1 Zoom meetings between 9:00 am – 9:00 pm M-F and 1:00 – 5:00 pm on the weekends. Further information on how to schedule a virtual appointment can be found at:

[https://www.unomaha.edu/college-of-arts-and-sciences/writing-center/appointment/make\\_an\\_appt.php](https://www.unomaha.edu/college-of-arts-and-sciences/writing-center/appointment/make_an_appt.php)

### **Helping Students Cope**

Students are invited to join Zoom meetings for the UNO community as counselors from Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) share resilience tips and answer questions on managing change and stress during this transition to distance education.

UPCOMING SESSIONS:

Wed, April 22, 11am-12pm

Mon, May 4, 1pm-2pm

To join any session, please RSVP [HERE](#). Prior to each meeting, a Zoom link and password will be shared by UNO email.

Any questions, please contact Katherine Keiser at [klkeiser@unomaha.edu](mailto:klkeiser@unomaha.edu).

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 Harmony, M.S.**

Director of Operations and Data

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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 15<sup>th</sup>. You may download SPSS for free by following the instructions at: <https://www.ibmbigdatahub.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](mailto: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](https://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](mailto: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 1<sup>st</sup>.

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

### **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).

<https://www.unomaha.edu/student-life/wellness/counseling-and-psychological-services/index>

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

Best,

**Deborah Smith-Howell, Ph.D.**

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Director of Operations and Data

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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](http://gradstudies.unomaha.edu/remote-learning)
- <https://www.unomaha.edu/academic-affairs/digital-learning/how-we-help/keep-teaching-digital-learning-incident-planning.php>

#### **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.

<https://www.unomaha.edu/news/coronavirus/index.php>

### **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](mailto: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.*

<https://www.unomaha.edu/office-of-research-and-creative-activity/covid-19.php>

### **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 12<sup>th</sup> and April 30<sup>th</sup>. 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 12<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto: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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