



University of California, Merced
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GRADUATE DIVISION

March 11, 2020

Dear UC Merced graduate students, graduate group chairs, and faculty advisors,

While we are not aware of any confirmed cases in Merced County or at UC Merced, the campus is taking a number of preemptive measures to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to ensure the continued safety of all members of our community. Primary among these are social distancing protocols such as alternative delivery of courses and holding meetings, especially large meetings, online. As of March 11, the campus has directed the cancellation or postponement of all in-person events of more than 100 people and all non-essential meetings or campus visits of more than 15 people if these cannot be conducted remotely. It is important to note, though, that the campus remains open for business functions, including research, and that we are following University of California guidance on how COVID-19 may affect the campus community.

I know a number of questions and concerns have already arisen and would like to take this opportunity to address those affecting graduate students. I am very grateful to the Graduate Council for working with me in developing responses to these questions. Above all, we seek to ensure the safety and health of our community, and to maintain continuity and flexibility in stewardship of our students' physical, psychological, and professional well-being.

1. How will TA and GSR pay and workload be affected, especially if courses are taught remotely?

It is expected that TA workloads will not change, although how that work is conducted may differ. For instance, rather than meeting in person they may respond to student questions via email, hold zoom or chat discussion groups, or grade papers/exams in a different format than initially planned. Similarly, office hours should be held remotely so students can still connect easily with their TAs. In short, some flexibility may be needed as changes in format occur over the next few days and weeks, but we do not anticipate any change in TA hours or stipend.

Faculty should keep in mind that 20 hours of work per week for TAs appointed at 50% is the norm, but hours may fluctuate week to week depending on work assignments, so long as they remain within the parameters outlined in the collective bargaining agreement:

- A TA with a 50% appointment shall not be assigned a workload of more than 220 hours per quarter or 340 hours per semester. This standard shall apply proportionately to other percent appointments.
- In addition, a TA with an appointment of 50% or less shall not be assigned a workload of more than 40 hours in any one week or assigned to work more than eight (8) hours in any one day. The number of hours worked in excess of twenty (20) hours per week may not total more than 50 hours per quarter or 77 hours per semester.

The campus is still open for research and most GSR work is expected to continue as usual, with students receiving their normal pay.

2. *What do these potential disruptions mean for graduate students "running" research participants (for research course credit, dissertation requirements, and other funded research)? Graduate students may count on human participants for fulfilling the requirements of these projects, and are sometimes registered in 12 units of research-based coursework.*

At present, the campus is open for research and graduate students can continue conducting their research-based coursework. We encourage flexibility and consideration of changes in format where possible. For example, in some cases projects involving community-embedded research or other direct contact human subjects research may need to be delayed. Yet in other cases, there may be alternative means of interacting with research subjects. Such changes would, of course, need to be reviewed by IRB. Similarly, instructors and investigators may consider whether alternate research activities (e.g. analyses or simulations) may temporarily take the place of those that require in-person interactions. Where changes in protocol are not appropriate and the work must be delayed, a grade of I generally would be appropriate until the research can be completed.

Please be aware that additional systemwide or institutional guidance may be coming which will provide additional information around human subjects research during this period.

3. *Will the Grad-Excel peer mentorship program continue? Will mentors continue to receive their fellowship awards?*

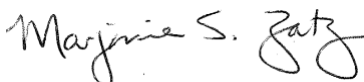
We expect peer mentors to stay in touch with their mentees via email or phone, and to log those interactions as usual. Their fellowships would not be affected.

4. *Graduate students are concerned about making progress through their programs while observing social distancing protocols. This is particularly true of graduate students who work with human subjects. It would be great if your office and/or Graduate Division could provide some guidance to these students, calming their worries that educational assessment will be blind to the impacts of this emergency.*

Delays in academic progress due to the COVID-19 emergency will not count against students. Graduate group chairs and advisors may need to monitor delays, however, so they can be taken into account when recruiting next year as delays may affect capacity to fund new students. We do not know yet if annual reviews will need to be delayed this spring, but whenever they are held, any such COVID-19 related delays should be noted, as well as revised estimates of expected progress towards the degree.

Please feel free to contact me if anyone has further questions. Stay healthy, wash your hands often, and please remember to be kind to one another.

My best to all,



Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Education
Professor of Sociology

