

To: Head Graduate Advisors and Graduate Student Advising Officer

## Temporary Policy Revision Regarding Part-Time Enrollment for Graduate Students

Dear Colleagues,

We write to inform you of an additional step that we are taking to provide students with increased flexibility and support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Typically, graduate students in full-time programs are only permitted to be on part-time status in certain, limited circumstances, and graduate students who are taking fewer than 12 units in a given semester must be granted an exception to be eligible to hold an Academic Student Employment (ASE) appointment (e.g., graduate student instructors, readers, and tutors) and to receive university fellowships. These circumstances are usually related to DSP accommodations.

For the 2020-2021 academic year, the Graduate Council has decided to widen the scope of allowable exceptions given the challenges posed by the pandemic. Specifically, graduate students who have increased caretaking duties can be approved by their department to transition to part-time status for the Fall 2020 and/or Spring 2021 semesters and receive a waiver equivalent to half of the tuition for those terms. We note that students in programs whose requirements are under the purview of outside accrediting bodies (such as Law and Optometry) are unlikely to be able to take advantage of this option. Graduate students should consult with their program advisor in order to find out whether part-time status is possible within their program.

This change will allow students with additional caregiving duties due to COVID-19 to be enrolled in **up to** six units at one-half the tuition rate (including NRST and PDST). Student Services and Campus Fees will still be assessed at 100%, as per systemwide policy. Part-time graduate students are allowed to hold Academic Student Employee positions, but systemwide policy limits these appointments to “no more than one-half the maximum appointment available to full-time students” (see FAQs for additional explanation). During the semester(s) for which they are enrolled part-time, students are eligible to maintain whatever fellowship support that they were scheduled to receive. Please note that students with external fellowships or funding should check the policies of the relevant sponsors or agencies regarding part-time enrollment. Students who avail themselves of this option are not guaranteed any additional funding support beyond what was detailed in their initial offer letter.

Departments who wish to petition for an exception so that a student may take a reduced course load (i.e., fewer than 12 units but more than 6) while holding an ASE appointment or fellowship continue to do so in the same way. For students who receive an exception to take a lower-than-full-time load but who are still taking more than 6 units, tuition remains at the full-time rate.

The transition to part-time enrollment is limited to graduate students taking course work and to PhD students who have not advanced to candidacy. Systemwide policy defines all graduate students who have advanced to candidacy as full-time students. Graduate students beyond course work inherently have more flexibility as to the precise nature and pace of their academic progress, and so - as always - we rely on faculty being mindful and generous when setting expectations and providing guidance for all of their advisees. We encourage faculty to be particularly considerate during the 2020-2021 academic year, as many students might be facing unexpected responsibilities, commitments, or demands because of the effects of the pandemic.

As departments consider requests for part-time enrollment, we implore the leadership to take into account the following matters. It is essential that the department and the student have a mutual understanding of all the details associated with transfer to part-time enrollment before forwarding the request to the Graduate Division:

- 1) For most students in professional Master's programs, or anyone paying for their education with personal funds or through loans, enrolling as a part-time student for some or all of the 2020-2021 academic year will almost certainly mean that the overall time to degree, and so the total cost of the degree, will be higher. Because part-time students can only be enrolled in up to six units, some units will have to be made up in future semesters, which will of course involve additional tuition costs, as well as additional living expenses.

Transition to part-time enrollment (and the precise number of units in which one enrolls) can affect both one's eligibility for loan funding and the amount/disbursement schedule of one's loans. Students should discuss these implications with a financial aid counselor when considering the part-time option.

- 2) It is important that the department and the student agree on a revised academic plan so that the student receives faculty advice on courses to prioritize during the semester(s) on part-time status as well as broader mentorship so that the student has a clear path for continuing to make progress in their program, both during and after the period of part-time enrollment.
- 3) For PhD students who have a multi-year funding package, departments need to be absolutely clear and equitable about what effects a switch to part-time status in 2020-2021 will have on that student's future funding. As per systemwide policy, "prior to candidacy part-time graduate students will acquire time to the degree under the Normative Time to Degree Policy at one-half the rate of full-time students." Thus, those students are likely to remain in their program for a longer time overall. Students who move to part-time status for any period of time are not guaranteed additional funding beyond what was detailed in their initial offer letter, but departments are of course free to commit additional support to a student who goes on part-time status, since they will be necessarily moving through the program more slowly. All requests should confirm in

writing and keep on file the financial agreements. Specifically, any additional financial support committed by the department should be described. If there is no additional support, this fact should be confirmed. These commitments need to be completed before forwarding the exception request to the Graduate Division.

- 4) International students considering part-time enrollment must discuss their plans in advance of dropping below full-time enrollment (12-units) with the Berkeley International Office to determine whether it is permissible under their current visa status.

We have updated the [form](#) that programs regularly use to request appointment exceptions to include hardships related to the pandemic. To ease the process, we have waived the requirement for a supplementary memo from departments documenting the plan for part-time enrollment. However, we still require that Head Graduate Advisors approve of the exception request before it is sent on to the Graduate Division.

Please share this memo with your graduate students and relevant colleagues.

Sincerely,



Lisa García Bedolla  
Vice Provost for Graduate Studies and  
Dean of the Graduate Division



John Battles  
Chair, Graduate Council, 2019-2020



Michael Boots  
Chair, Graduate Council, 2020-2021

## **Frequently Asked Questions:**

*Since there is already a mechanism for departments to request that graduate students taking a reduced course load still be allowed to hold appointments and receive fellowships, what exactly is this policy change changing?*

Graduate students who are approved for reduced course loads by Graduate Division are not necessarily given a tuition reduction. In some cases, students request a course reduction so that they might take one fewer course in a given semester, and students who take, e.g., 9 units instead of 12 are not eligible to pay one-half tuition.

Currently, there are only two categories of graduate students who are typically eligible to be enrolled part-time with the attendant reduction in tuition (excluding, of course, students in those few graduate programs that are designed as part-time). The first group are those part-time students in full-time programs that have already received approval by the Graduate Council to admit part-time students on a regular basis. For a number of reasons, this is extremely uncommon on campus (only one program has requested such approval since the policy went into effect in 1981). The second group are students who have DSP accommodations that allow them to take a reduced course load. This temporary policy revision creates a third category of students who are eligible to request part-time status for 2020-2021: graduate students who have significantly increased caretaking duties because of the effects of the pandemic. Requests from students in this third category require departmental approval, unlike requests based on DSP accommodations -- which *must* be allowed by departments so that the university is in compliance with state and federal law.

*For the purposes of this policy, what are “caretaking duties”?*

We expect that most individuals who choose to request part-time status will be student parents who have significantly increased childcare duties because so many primary and secondary schools are operating remotely at present. But we encourage departments to interpret this term expansively so that it might cover other kinds of family responsibilities and forms of caretaking.

*In concrete terms, what does it mean that a part-time student can hold academic appointments equivalent to “no more than one-half the maximum appointment available to full-time students”?*

In typical circumstances, full-time graduate students can hold appointments up to 50% FTE without need of an exception (either single appointments or the combination of appointments). Any graduate student appointments (or combinations thereof) between 50% and 75% FTE

require the approval of the program's Head Graduate Advisor. Any graduate student appointments (or combinations thereof) above 75% require approval from an Associate Dean in the Graduate Division (exception requests for appointments above 75% are only approved in limited circumstances). Thus, the "maximum appointment available to full-time students" is 100%, although only with exceptional approval. Part-time students can hold appointments at "no more than one-half the maximum," hence 50% (although appointments above 25% would require exceptional approval, adapting current campus policies described above). In order to simplify matters, Graduate Division grants a blanket exception for part-time students to hold academic appointments up to (and including) 50% FTE for the 2020-2021 academic year.

*Why does this policy change only affect graduate students in course work?*

Systemwide policy states that all graduate students who have advanced to candidacy "shall be considered full-time under the normative time policy."

*I have asked my department or college to be able to enroll part-time in 2020-2021, but they replied that they have made the decision that the academic structure of the program does not allow for part-time students, except in legally required circumstances (such as DSP accommodations). Are they allowed to do this?*

Yes. The temporary revision in the Academic Senate policy for 2020-2021 provides a blanket exception for programs to *provide an option* for part-time enrollment for graduate students who have significant caretaking responsibilities due to the effects of the COVID pandemic. It does not *mandate* that a department construct a part-time version of its full-time graduate program. Graduate programs are carefully constructed and many have fixed schedules and paces, such that part-time enrollment, even for a single semester, simply cannot be accommodated within the structure of that academic program.

*What are the potential revenue or budgetary implications for individual academic units?*

The following is based on the assumption that the number of graduate students who request this option will be relatively small. For doctoral programs, one major consideration will be whether and how to revise a student's funding package based on the semester(s) that the student is enrolled part-time. Considering that the student will be permitted to keep their full fellowship funding in those semester(s), but will also be making slower academic progress, will the department provide an additional semester(s) of funding in the future, utilizing -- in part -- the tuition/fee savings realized during the semesters the student was enrolled part-time? Will it be made clear to the student that the terms of their original funding package continue to hold even if the student requests a semester(s) on part-time status?

If a student who goes on part-time status for some or all of 2020-2021, then either

a) that student will be obliged to pay one-half tuition for that period but the full Campus and Student Services Fees and the full health insurance fees; or

b) the funding source that is paying that student's tuition and fees will be charged one-half tuition (but full Campus and Student Services Fees and the full health insurance fees). For a student receiving a tuition and fee remission as a benefit of an eligible ASE or GSR appointment, the funding source will be charged one-half tuition for the relevant semesters.

Tuition and fee awards and remissions (whatever the funding source) are not convertible to cash, and a student is not entitled to whatever savings are realized when a University source is charged for one-half instead of full tuition in either or both semesters, because the award or the remission is tied to assessed fees. Departments are free to use the savings to offer that student further support in future years, but that decision is entirely within the department's discretion.

*What are the potential financial implications for students who request and are granted part-time status in 2020-2021?*

For graduate students self-paying or relying on loans to fund their education, they will be assessed full fees and a waiver equal to 50% of Tuition, and if applicable, 50% of the Non-Resident Supplemental Tuition, will be applied to their account. However, because they will only be eligible to enroll in up to 6 units during that period, they will likely have to remain enrolled for more total semesters than originally planned, thus increasing their overall cost.

For graduate students whose tuition and fees are paid by a University source (i.e., where award amounts are tied to assessed fees), there will be no immediate financial implications either way: since they are not paying for their tuition in the first place, they will not realize any savings by being part-time enrolled. If the graduate student keeps the same academic appointment and fellowship as originally planned -- even as they are enrolled in 6 or fewer units -- they will receive the same salaries or stipends as expected. However, if it takes more time overall for a student to complete their degree because of their reduced pace in 2020-2021, then the student might exhaust the funding guaranteed to them in their original offer letter before they have completed the degree, and departments are under no obligation to provide supplementary funding to compensate for semesters during which the student was enrolled part-time.

*Why was my loan reduced? Why do I have an invoice in CalCentral for part of my loan?*

Students will be assessed the full amount of tuition for the term. Once approved for a reduced course load for the term, a corresponding tuition waiver equivalent to half of the tuition for that term will be applied to the charges. Your tuition waiver is considered a resource and must be included in your financial aid package per federal regulation.

The sum of all of your resources may not exceed your total Cost of Attendance. If your loans pay *prior to* the incorporation of the tuition waiver into your award package, your loans will be reduced, and may create an invoice, to ensure that your total resources, including the tuition waiver, do not exceed your Cost of Attendance.