

# Graduate School Guidelines for Student Academic Progress and Success and Procedures for Dismissal

## I. Purpose

The Graduate School and the graduate programs at the University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) are committed to fostering the academic progress and success of each student in graduate education. Establishing supportive advising relationships and providing transparent information regarding academic requirements are important steps in helping students to succeed.

The [Graduate School Rules](#) provide minimum policy standards for student academic progress and student dismissals. The [Academic Affairs Policy for Professional Rights and Responsibilities of Faculty Members and Roles and Professional Responsibilities of Academic Leaders and its accompanying procedures](#) (PRR) establish professional standards for academic leaders and faculty, including roles and responsibilities for graduate student advising.

This document is intended to provide consolidated guidelines to assist graduate programs with implementing existing policy requirements with the goal of enabling faculty, staff, and students to more clearly understand the expectations for adequate student academic progress throughout a student's academic career and the procedures for dismissal when warranted.

## II. Advising

Each doctoral student must have a faculty advisor (often referenced simply as "advisor"), though the timing and process to establish an advising relationship may vary by program. The unit should provide written guidelines to students about how the process of selecting a faculty advisor (or assigning, where necessary) typically works within the graduate degree program(s). The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) should provide assistance to the student throughout the process, and the student must follow all existing processes and procedures to establish an advising relationship within their unit. Guidance should also be provided to explain the procedure surrounding a student's or advisor's request for a change in advising relationship. In cases where an advisor has not yet been assigned, or where a previous advisor-advisee relationship has ended (following the appropriate procedural steps indicated by the program), the DGS shall serve as advisor, unless the graduate program has established a different procedure (committee, temporary advisor, etc.) for identifying the interim advisor.

The advisor/advisee relationship is essential and can also be complex. The Graduate School encourages the use of an individual development plan (IDP) or advising plan, where advisors and advisees can establish milestones, communication preferences and timing, and more. Where

conflict or a disparity of expectations occurs between advisor and advisee, the DGS should serve as a resource to both parties. In addition, campus-wide resources are available and encouraged to be used to help mitigate these disagreements. In particular, the Ombud's Office is a confidential resource where faculty and students alike can discuss concerns. They can offer suggestions for resolution or better communication and can even provide mediation if both parties agree. Informal resolution should always be sought before ending an advisor/advisee relationship.

While each student must do all due diligence outlined by their unit to obtain an advisor, they do not ultimately hold sole responsibility to do so. According to the PRR, as administrator of the academic unit, "The academic leader [i.e., the unit's chair or director] is responsible for: ... arrangement and assignment of duty for advising students" just as they are responsible for other teaching assignments<sup>[PRR]</sup>.<sup>1</sup> In cases where an advisor steps down or a student requests a change in advisor, the DGS should assist the student in establishing a new advising relationship. There may be opportunities for co-advising or team advising of the student, establishing a relationship with an advisor outside the home department, flexibility in the composition of a committee, etc. As is the case in an instructor-student relationship, a student may need to adjust their research or dissertation topic. In rare cases, the academic leader may need to assign an advisor for a student.

Consequently, the lack of an advisor should not be a factor when evaluating a student's academic progress and should not impede them from taking preliminary examinations or completing other academic requirements. The loss of a faculty advisor is not grounds for academic dismissal.

For a funded student who is making adequate academic progress and whose advisor steps down or who requests a change in advisor, the unit should make a reasonable attempt to continue to fund the student. While the student is seeking a new advisor, the Graduate School recommends that a program provide at least one semester of bridge funding wherever possible. When the student transitions to a new advisor/group/lab etc., effort should be made to fund the student where such funding is available.

### III. Evaluation of Student Academic Progress

Graduate students are subject to academic requirements and standards for adequate academic progress specified both by the Graduate School and by their graduate program. Program-specific requirements and standards must be above and beyond (not less than or in conflict with) Graduate School or CU Boulder university minimum standards. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the policies and requirements of the Graduate School and their

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<sup>1</sup>See Part III.C.2.g., PRR. [2022 Professional Rights & Responsibilities of Faculty Members and Roles and Professional Responsibilities of Department Chairs](https://www.colorado.edu/bfa/resources/prr). <https://www.colorado.edu/bfa/resources/prr>

graduate program. Graduate School campus-wide requirements and program-specific requirements are tracked in different ways, as explained below.

#### a. Graduate School Tracking

Graduate School Rules detail general academic progress standards that apply campus-wide, and the Graduate School centrally evaluates student progress related to those requirements. The Graduate School will contact and work with the student and graduate program in cases where these minimum university standards are not met.

##### i. Cumulative GPA

In cases where the student does not maintain a 3.0 cumulative GPA, the Graduate School academic warning process detailed in the Graduate School Rules applies.<sup>2</sup> In cases where a student's GPA is between 2.5 and 3.0 (and the student was not previously on academic warning), students will be placed on a standard two-semester academic warning with required conditions to meet in each semester. In cases where a student's cumulative GPA is below 2.5 or the conditions from a previous academic warning semester were not met, graduate programs will be asked to recommend whether the student should continue in the program on academic warning or be dismissed. A recommendation to continue in the program must include an academic plan with conditions for the student to meet to return to good standing and documentation of the potential consequences of failure to meet those conditions. If the program decides to recommend dismissal, steps a, b, and c in the dismissal process (section V) should be followed, and the recommendation for dismissal should summarize specifically the student's cumulative GPA history, including any previous academic warning semesters or correspondence if applicable.

##### ii. Examinations

Per Graduate School Rules, students who fail a comprehensive or final examination may attempt it once more after a period of time determined by the examining committee.<sup>3</sup> This should take place within one calendar year. The advisor and/or committee should provide written feedback to the student regarding the failed exam and should make the student aware of the consequences of a second failed examination. Upon receipt of two examination report forms showing failed attempts, the graduate program should initiate dismissal by making recommendation for dismissal to the Graduate School. Steps a, b, and c in the dismissal process (section V) should be followed, and the recommendation for dismissal should summarize specifically the two attempts at the examination as reflected on the examination report forms previously submitted.

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<sup>2</sup> See Article II Section 5, Graduate School Rules. <https://www.colorado.edu/graduateschool/faculty-staff/graduate-school-policies-procedures>

<sup>3</sup> See Section II Section 6, Graduate School Rules. <https://www.colorado.edu/graduateschool/faculty-staff/graduate-school-policies-procedures>

### iii. Time Limit

Students are expected to complete all degree requirements within the time limit associated with their degree, as outlined in Graduate School Rules.<sup>4</sup> As part of the yearly evaluation process explained below, each student should understand their progress in relation to this limit. To continue beyond this time limit, the student must file a petition for an extension of the time limit with the Dean of the Graduate School. Such petitions must be endorsed by the student's advisor and the unit's DGS and may be granted for up to one year at a time. In cases where a student does not have an advisor, the DGS may endorse the petition as advisor. The advisor and student should discuss and document well in advance the progress the student will need to make for their unit to support a request for extension and the potential consequences if the conditions are not met for continued progress. If such conditions are not met and the program decides to recommend dismissal, steps a, b, and c in the dismissal process (section V) should be followed, and the recommendation for dismissal should summarize specifically the student's lack of adequate academic progress as related to the student's time limit, including documentation from previous progress reports.

### b. Program-Specific Tracking

Within documentation made available to all graduate students (such as a handbook, website, or posted materials), each graduate program should define program-specific requirements and explain what is necessary to maintain adequate academic process throughout a student's career. This information should include both Graduate School and program-specific benchmarks, and any associated timeframes. (For example: the preliminary exam must be passed by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester, the comprehensive exam must be passed by the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> semester, student must complete the degree within 6 years, etc.).

Expectations for adequate academic progress should be made clear early in a student's career. Upon beginning a degree program, each student should be notified of any specific requirements that must be met during their first year and should also be notified of the future benchmarks and timeframes for coursework, examination(s), and research/creative work/dissertation. The DGS is encouraged to give students the opportunity to ask questions and discuss requirements, benchmarks, and timeframes to support student awareness and understanding.

## IV. Yearly Evaluation and Progress Report

Each doctoral student's progress should be evaluated once per year to determine whether the student is making adequate academic progress as it relates to program-specific requirements. The DGS should ensure that the student's faculty advisor and, where appropriate, other faculty (such as the student's committee and/or the unit's graduate committee) complete an evaluation and document it in a progress report for each student each year. In cases where a student does not have a faculty advisor, the DGS should complete a progress report for the student.

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<sup>4</sup> See Article II Section 11, Graduate School Rules. <https://www.colorado.edu/graduateschool/faculty-staff/graduate-school-policies-procedures>

To complete the annual progress report, the graduate program may use the general progress report provided by the Graduate School as a starting point, or may use an existing program-specific form, provided that it includes Graduate School benchmarks, program-specific benchmarks, and any required timeline for completion. This should include, but is not limited to:

- Required courses and total coursework credits required
- Examinations (Comprehensive, Final Exam/Defense)
- Dissertation or project research
- Program-specific requirements (e.g., preliminary/qualifying exam if required, conference papers, journal submissions, etc.)
- Assessment and determination of whether the student is making adequate academic progress

The progress report should also include a planning section, so that the student and advisor may plan for the upcoming year at the end of each annual evaluation.

It is optional, but recommended, that the progress report include the degree program's learning outcomes. Tracking students' progress toward meeting learning outcomes may help the graduate program both to more precisely assess the student's academic progress and to assess the efficacy of the structure of the degree program as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

#### a. Determination of Adequate Academic Progress

If the annual evaluation determines that the student is making adequate academic progress, the progress report will reflect a satisfactory result. The student and advisor should discuss plans and benchmarks for the coming year, which should be included as part of the progress report. The progress report should be maintained at the unit level and a copy (or a summary) should be provided to the student via their colorado.edu e-mail address.

#### b. Determination of Inadequate Academic Progress

If the annual evaluation determines that the student is not making adequate academic progress, the progress report will reflect an unsatisfactory result and will address the specific benchmarks from the previous year that were not met.

The advisor should inform the DGS of the unsatisfactory result and discuss plans and opportunities for the student to return to good standing. The advisor and the DGS of the program should meet with the student and inform them of the unsatisfactory evaluation and the reasons. The advisor and student must create an [academic recovery plan](#) (ARP) with specific benchmarks and timeframes by which the student may return to adequate academic progress. The time allowed in the ARP for a return to adequate academic progress should be reasonable in relation to steps needed, but the ARP should allow for a minimum of one semester. If the student is also beyond their time limit, they must also submit a request for extension of time limit, with the same benchmarks included on the extension request form.

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<sup>5</sup> While each degree program should have associated learning outcomes, in 2024-2025 the Office of Data Analytics will be working with each unit to establish outcomes for each degree program which doesn't yet have them.

As part of the ARP, the advisor and student should discuss available resources and establish mechanisms for support and periodic check-ins throughout this time. They should also document potential consequences if ARP plan is not achieved satisfactorily, up to and including loss of funding and/or dismissal. The unsatisfactory progress report and the ARP will be maintained in program records and sent to the Graduate School, and a copy should be provided to the student via their colorado.edu e-mail account.<sup>6</sup>

### c. Academic Progress Follow Up

At the end of the timeframe established in the ARP, the faculty advisor and DGS (and committee as appropriate) should again evaluate the student's performance to see if the benchmarks have been met. If they have, the student will be considered to be making adequate academic progress; a new progress report should be completed with a satisfactory result, outlining the plan for the upcoming year. If the student has not returned to making adequate academic progress, the advisor should complete a new progress report with an unsatisfactory result as described above. In this case, there are two options. If there is a pathway to completing the conditions and benchmarks within a reasonable amount of time, the advisor could again work with the student to create an updated [ARP](#) to return to good standing. In cases where there is not a clear pathway toward a return to good standing within a reasonable amount of time, the advisor should consult with the DGS regarding a recommendation of dismissal from the graduate program. If an updated plan is created, the unsatisfactory progress report and new ARP should be provided to the Graduate School and student as described in Section IV.b above.

## V. Dismissal Based on Lack of Adequate Academic Progress

In cases where the student's cumulative GPA is below 3.0, the student has failed the comprehensive or final examination twice, or the student has not completed their degree within the required time limit, steps a, b, and c below should be followed. Additional information is included in Section III.a.i-iii above.

### a. Program's Dismissal Recommendation

The DGS, upon consultation with the student's faculty advisor, may recommend to the Dean of the Graduate School that a student be dismissed from a graduate program after:

- The student was informed in writing of a lack of adequate academic progress
- A written ARP was created with specific benchmarks and timeframes
- The student was notified of potential consequences including dismissal
- Subsequently the conditions of the ARP were not met within the established timeframe

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<sup>6</sup> The advisor and the DGS may also discuss possibilities of changing tracks or degree plans with the student, for example it may be possible to switch from a doctoral degree program to a Master's degree program.

In such cases, the following procedures should be followed:

- The DGS or graduate program assistant should reach out to the Graduate School informally to discuss the situation and address any concerns. The DGS should then write a formal letter of recommendation for dismissal to the Dean of the Graduate School that summarizes previous evaluations and plans and the outcomes or results of such plans. The letter should include information about the timeline and process for reconsideration of the recommendation (see section V.b below). Before sending the recommendation to the Dean of the Graduate School, the faculty advisor and the DGS should reach out to the student to inform them of their recommendation and must share a copy of the formal recommendation document with the student via their colorado.edu e-mail address. The dismissal recommendation should be sent promptly to the Dean of the Graduate School after the faculty advisor and the DGS have communicated the recommendation for dismissal to the student and no later than 10 business days following the conferral date of the semester in which the student has been informed of the recommendation.
- Any additional information about the student's progress not already on file with the Graduate School (e.g., previous unsatisfactory progress reports, ARPs, and relevant correspondence) should be attached to the letter. Should the student's faculty advisor disagree with the dismissal recommendation of the DGS and there is no path for consensus, the advisor may choose to include a letter with their dissenting view along with the recommendation from the Director.

If the student prefers to withdraw before formal dismissal occurs, the graduate program should work with the student to withdraw through established university procedures.

#### b. Reconsideration of Program's Dismissal Recommendation

The student may request that the graduate program reconsider their recommendation for dismissal. The request for reconsideration must be made in writing and submitted to the DGS within 5 business days of the issuance of the program's recommendation to the Graduate School. If the student requests reconsideration of the dismissal recommendation, the academic program must inform the Graduate School within those 5 business days. The DGS will allow the student to submit any additional information within 15 total business days and will then reconsider the recommendation (within another 15 business days whenever possible) and provide a written decision to the student. The DGS's written decision and any additional information provided by the student should be sent to the Dean of the Graduate School.

#### c. Dean's Dismissal Decision

If the student does not file a program-level request for reconsideration within 5 business days, the formal recommendation will be reviewed by the Dean of the Graduate School, who will issue a decision within 15 business days. If the student does request reconsideration, and the graduate program continues to recommend dismissal after reconsideration, the Dean of the Graduate School will then review the first and second formal recommendations along with any additional information provided by the student and will issue a decision. The Dean of the Graduate School will send their decision via email to the student, the advisor, and the DGS.

#### d. Appeal of Dean's Dismissal Decision

If the unit's recommendation is based on the student's cumulative GPA or failing a comprehensive or final examination twice, and the procedures referenced in the above sections were followed, the student may not appeal the Dean's decision; these are academic decisions rendered by an academic program that can be properly judged only by specialists with content-area expertise.

If the recommendation is based on factors other than the cumulative GPA or second failure of an examination, the student may request that the Dean of the Graduate School reconsider their dismissal decision. The request for reconsideration should be made within 15 business days of the issuance of the Dean's decision. The student may provide any additional information for the Dean's consideration, and the Dean will review and issue a final written decision to the student within 15 business days. Any dismissal is to be effective for the upcoming semester (will not be effective mid-semester), and dismissal will be noted on the transcript.

## VI. Avenues for Addressing Non-Academic Matters

In many cases, concerns related to a student's continuation in a graduate program are not academic in nature and should be handled through appropriate avenues. A non-exhaustive list of potential issues and avenues is provided to assist with resolution of such matters.

Termination of student employment (e.g. graduate appointment): In cases where a student's employment performance is unsatisfactory, the appropriate non-academic processes should be utilized to address the specific concern. The Graduate School recommends that units develop a termination policy and communicate it to graduate assistants upon hiring. Refer to the [Graduate Student Appointment Manual](#).

Conduct: If the cause for concern is not academic but is based upon conduct, advisors and advisees are encouraged to address their concerns through the proper channels.

- a. Student conduct: If the advisor develops concerns about an advisee's behavior or conduct those should be brought to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution ([SCCR](#)). If the advisor is also concerned that an advisee is in distress those concerns should be brought to Student Support and Case Management ([SSCM](#)).
- b. Faculty advisor conduct: Advisees who have concerns about unprofessional conduct by their advisors should bring those concerns forth to the advisor's supervising administrator (typically the department chair) to be addressed under the [PRR](#) <sup>7</sup>.

Academic Integrity: University-wide, allegations of student academic dishonesty are handled as explained in the [Honor Code](#). Faculty are advised to report all such allegations through existing processes to Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (SCCR). In the context of courses, instructors have exclusive authority to apply academic sanctions (i.e. grades). However,

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<sup>7</sup> See Part IV, PRR. [2022 Professional Rights & Responsibilities of Faculty Members and Roles and Professional Responsibilities of Department Chairs](#). <https://www.colorado.edu/bfa/resources/prr>



suspension and expulsion for academic dishonesty are considered non-academic sanctions and can only be placed by SCCR.

Research Misconduct: The University of Colorado's definition of [research misconduct](#) includes a number of categories. Alleged violations should be reported to the Boulder campus Research Integrity Officer.

Discrimination and Harassment: Any allegation of protected-class discrimination or harassment, sexual assault or other forms of sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence (including dating or domestic violence), stalking, etc., or related retaliation must be reported to the [Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance](#) (OIEC), whether raised by the student or by the graduate program.