SFU GRADUATE STUDIES AND
POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS

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MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION	Senate	DATE	November 19, 2015
FROM	Wade Parkhouse, Chair of Senate Graduate Studies Committee (SGSC)	NO.	GS2015.17, GS2015.20
RE:	Maximum Time for Completion and Readmission (GGR 1.12)		

At its meeting of November 9, 2015, SGSC approved the attached GGR revisions to 1.12 and the creation of 1.4.4⁸ and 1.4.5⁹. The revisions to this regulation are the result of extensive review and feedback from the members of SGSC and the individual academic units over a period of two to three years. This gives rise to the following motion, effective **Fall 2016**:

Motion
That Senate approve the revisions to GGR 1.12 (Maximum Time for Completion and Readmission) and the creation of GGR 1.4.4 (Reactivation) and GGR 1.4.5 (Readmission) effective Fall 2016.

_1.4.8_   _1.4.9_

Rationale for revising GGR 1.12 (Maximum Time for Completion and Readmission)

The policy regarding maximum time for completion of degree requirements is being addressed to clarify the expectations for timely degree completion and to align our policies with other institutions across Canada. Some of the challenges that accompany students who take a longer time to complete their degree are: inadequate supervision, unclear completion requirements, and lack of funding. Another concern is that some reports have shown that longer completion times may raise stress levels and increase mental health issues for students. A longer completion time increases the cost of the program for the student and at the same time delays their availability to earn income. Students who take longer to complete their degree may also be limiting their career options because longer completion times may not be viewed in a positive way by employers. The negative effect on students and possibly their career opportunities has led to a change in policy to help facilitate shorter completion times. Although the time limits have been reduced, the extension policy has also been revised to allow for more flexibility across programs and for individual cases.

Graduate Studies initiated a series of initiatives to address factors that may be impeding student's timely degree progress and changes to GGR 1.12 was one of them. Other institutions have similarly been addressing their own regulations related to maximum times for degree completion. Initial discussion of the broader issue, and specifically this graduate regulation, took place at an SGSC retreat in April 2013. In preparation for that meeting, an environmental scan of other institution's graduate policies regarding maximum degree completion times and associated policies (e.g. leaves, extensions, readmissions, and reactivation) was performed. Internally, IRP provided data to SGSC on individual unit completion times that have now been developed into annual reports available on the Graduate Studies website.

This initial review of other institutions clearly indicated that SFU was an outlier in terms of the maximum number of years allowed to complete a credential. As well, our policy of allowing students three years to return and defend in one semester after the maximum time limit, and our lack of an extension policy, needed to be addressed. It was also clear that our leave of absence and readmission regulations needed updating. SGSC intentionally moved very slowly and thoughtfully working collegially with the Faculty Graduate Studies Committee Chairs, consulting broadly and repeatedly with the academic units, GSS and student representatives in terms of the proposed changes to GGR 1.12 Maximum Time for Completion and Readmission. The revisions to this regulation are the result of extensive review and feedback from the members of SGSC, individual academic units and students over a period of years. The revisions encourage timely degree completion while allowing for discipline-specific factors and individual situations requiring extensions. They also ensure that our policy aligns more closely with other institutions maximum degree completion time policies.

The readmission policy, GGR 1.12.4, is being addressed to clarify and align policies related to readmission, reactivation, and extensions. Currently these policies are covered in a single regulation which can cause confusion for students, academic units, and the Graduate Studies office. The proposed changes have been informed by reviewing both the practices across institutions and by adjusting our policies to address problematic issues facing students, administrators, and the institution in a fair and balanced way.

An example of the confusion arising from this regulation is that graduate program chairs frequently request extensions for students, who have surpassed the time limit, beyond the allowed one additional term. In one situation an academic unit sent a list to the Graduate Studies office every term with names of students requiring an extension. Frequently students do require extensions beyond the time limit, but since there

currently is only one term allowed, students will continue to work on their thesis without being registered, and then apply for readmission when they are ready to defend. Under the current policy, students have nine terms to apply for readmission, but questions arise as to whether the student will have access to the necessary materials to complete their credential, and what the role of the supervisor and supervisory committee should be in these situations when the student is continuing to work on their thesis but is not enrolled. As well, the current policy of allowing students to readmit for one term is not consistent with the previously approved regulation requiring continuity of enrolment for all graduate students.

To address these concerns and to clarify matters for both students and academic units, as well as address other situations surrounding readmission relative to time limits, we are deleting 1.12.4 and placing the information regarding reactivation and readmission in the enrolment section (GGR 1.4) of the graduate general regulations.

NOTE: If the proposed changes to time limits, extensions, reactivation, and readmission are approved, the new regulation regarding time limits and extensions will only apply to new students, but the regulation regarding the reactivation and readmission process will apply to all currently enrolled students regardless of when they started their program. It is expected that these changes may result in an increase to the number of extensions and reactivations (formally readmissions) to be processed per term. A process will be implemented to allow academic units to submit this information to the Graduate Studies office either by spreadsheet or an online form to help reduce the administrative workload.

Specific Revisions

GGR 1.12.1 Time Limit
- A time limit of 9 terms for students in a certificate or diploma program was added. Previously there was no time limit for a graduate certificate or diploma program.
- The time limit for students in a master's program was reduced from 12 terms of enrolment (or 18 terms for students in a per unit fee program) to 9 terms from the start of the program. With the addition of the proposed extension policy in 1.12.2, an extended time limit will allow for a maximum of 15 terms in total. The reference to a maximum of 6 calendar years for students who are in a per unit fee master's program has been removed due to the approved revision to 1.4.3, which requires all students to maintain continuous enrolment regardless of whether the program charges tuition per term or per unit.
- The time limit for students in a doctoral program was reduced from 24 terms to 18 terms from the start of the program. With the addition of the proposed extension policy in 1.12.2, an extended time limit will allow for a maximum of 24 terms in total.
- The time limit applies to the entire program, including internships that may be required for a program. It is expected that students in a double or joint degree program at SFU should be able to complete the program requirements within these time limits based on the current design of these programs.
- Information regarding the leave of absence regulation (see 1.8.4) was updated.
- All other changes are editorial.

GGR 1.12.2 Extensions

- GGR 1.12.2 is currently entitled Master's Degree. The information in this section will be covered by the revised GRR 1.12.1. In its place, a new section 1.12.2 "Extensions" is being added. This category has been created to give students, who have maintained continuous enrolment and are at the end of their program, some additional time to finish their program. A single extension may be for one to three terms, and students may be granted more than one extension for a maximum of 6 terms of extended time.
- Previously students were only able to request an extension for one term, although academic units often allowed extensions past the one term. This change gives academic units more flexibility than the current limit of one term.
- In some cases students were continuing to work on their thesis while not being enrolled and then returning for one term to complete. This revision clarifies that students need to be continuously enrolled throughout the extension time.
- An extension is not available to students who were withdrawn when they reached their time limit as it must be planned.
- Most other institutions reviewed do allow for extensions.
- Final approval is by the dean of graduate studies.

GGR 1.12.3 Doctoral Degree

- This section is being deleted, as the topic is covered in the revised 1.12.1.

GGR 1.12.4 Readmission

- This readmission regulation has been separated into three categories (i.e. reactivation, readmission, extensions). Information regarding reactivation and readmission was moved to the enrolment section (1.4) of the GGRs because the information fits well in the category of enrolment; therefore 1.12.4 should be deleted.

1.4.8

GGR 1.4.4 Reactivation

- This category has been created specifically for students who are discontinued after not enrolling (or on leave) for one term and have not reached their time limit. This change recognizes that some students may forget to enroll and be mistakenly discontinued, or make a decision to not enrol but shortly thereafter change their mind and decide to continue their program. It allows for a quick reactivation of their program without having to go through an extensive readmission process.
- Final approval is at the academic unit level.

1.4.9

GGR 1.4.5 Readmission

- Information regarding readmission was revised and moved from GGR 1.12.4 to GGR 1.4.5. The main revision to this policy is the requirement for students to apply for readmission through the same admission application process as new students. Currently students pay a fee and submit a readmission form to the academic unit and dean of graduate studies for approval.
- Students who would like to be readmitted to their program, and who are within the time limit for their program plus six terms of extended time, will have to compete with other new students for a spot. This will also allow for the program and circumstances to be reassessed by the department in

terms of the regulations in force at the time of reapplication. This process is consistent with other institutions (i.e. Alberta, Calgary, Toronto, and Waterloo).

- It is clarified that the time limit for a readmission does not change from the original time limit. The clock does not stop while the student is not enrolled.
- Final approval is by the dean of graduate studies since the readmission will be submitted as an admission recommendation.

NOTE: The advantage of readmission over regular admission for students is that the tuition rate will remain the same as the original program; everything completed previously (e.g. courses and research) will apply towards their program; advance credit with regular admission can only be considered for courses completed within 3 years of starting the new program (GGR 1.7.6); there is a better chance of the student being readmitted than admitted to the same program with a new time limit.

Review of average completion times within SFU

The table below is a summary of average completion times (from data collected over the period of 2011-2014) within each faculty for students in different types of programs. The completion time is separated into two categories: elapsed terms refer to the total number of terms from admission to completion; active terms does not include on leave terms or terms of no enrolment. For average completion times by program, go to: http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/blog/gradstudies-news/gradprograms-statistics-2015.html

Faculty	Master's per term tuition (elapsed terms)	Master's per term tuition (active terms)	Master's per unit tuition (elapsed terms)	Master's per unit tuition (active terms)	PhD (elapsed terms)	PhD (active terms)
FAS	8.1	7.9	10.6	8.1	16.4	16.2
FASS	6.8	6.2	8.2	6.2	17.3	16.2
BUS			5.3	5.0	18.3	17.5
ENV	10.0	9.3			19.1	17.7
EDUC	8.3	7.4	8.4	7.0	18.6	16.0
FCAT	8.7	8.4	7.6	5.7	20.3	18.7
FHS	7.8	7.4	7.6	6.9	15.5	15.3
SCI	8.8	8.6			17.6	17.2

Institution Review

Institution	Master's time limit	Doctoral time limit	Extensions	Readmission process
University of Waterloo	6 terms (full-time) 15 terms (part-time)	12-18 terms* (full-time) 18-21 terms* (part-time)	3 terms	Student submits a new application for admission.
McGill University	3 years (full-time) 5 years (part-time)	4 years after completing residency requirements	Not stated	Readmission form
University of Alberta	4 years (thesis) 6 years (course)	6 years	1 year; 2 years for exceptional circumstances	Student submits a new application for admission.
University of Calgary	4 years (thesis) 6 years (course)	6 years	Yes – time limit not	Student submits new application for admission

			stated	after first term (reactivation within first term).
UBC	5 years	6 years	1 year	Readmission form; in some cases new application for admission
UVIC	5 years	7 years	Not stated	Readmission form

* Depends on the type of entry into the program (i.e. Bachelor's – Doctoral); Waterloo is a trimester institution.

Proposed Revisions to GGR 1.12 Maximum time for Completion of the Requirements for the Degree

FROM	TO
1.12 ~~Maximum time for Completion of the Requirements for the Degree~~	1.12 Time Limit for Program Completion

FROM	TO
1.12.1 ~~General~~ ~~The maximum times for completion given below are not intended to be the normal times for completion. They are intended to take into account a wide variety of extraordinary circumstances and events that may delay completion. Individual departments may specify their expectations of normal degree completion times as a guide to determining whether a student's progress is satisfactory.~~ ~~Although it is expected that most students will complete their programs well before reaching the time limit, some students may be required to suspend work for a period of time because of mental or physical disability, pregnancy or family responsibilities. In such cases, students should apply to go on leave, should present evidence (e.g., from a doctor) of the necessity of the interruption of studies, and should request that their on-leave fees be waived. On-leave terms completed under such circumstances will be added to the student's maximum length of time in the program. Students who take on-leave terms for other reasons will not receive extensions.~~	1.12.1 Time Limit The time limit for students in a graduate certificate, diploma, or master's program to complete all of the requirements is nine terms from the start of the program. The time limit for students in a doctoral program to complete all of the requirements is 18 terms from the start of the program, or in the case of a student who has transferred from a master's into the doctoral program, without completing the master's, 18 terms from the start of the master's program. The time limits for program completion are not intended to be the normal times for completion. These limits take into account a wide variety of extraordinary circumstances and events that may delay completion. It is expected that most students will complete their program before reaching the time limit. Individual academic units may specify their expectations of normal program completion times as a guide for determining whether a student's progress is satisfactory. Some students may find it necessary to interrupt their studies by taking a leave of absence. The time

~~Students in per unit fee programs do not take on-leave terms. Students in those programs should submit a letter to the chair of the graduate program committee outlining the circumstances and requesting that their maximum time in program be extended, together with the required documentation.~~ ~~Students with long-term disabilities should discuss their situation with the Centre for Students with Disabilities early in their graduate studies or as soon as possible after the condition is diagnosed. The centre will assist students and their departments to develop plans for completion of programs, and this may include an extension beyond the normal time limits. Such plans must be approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies.~~	taken for a parental leave, medical/compassionate leave, or academic break will *not* be counted towards the time limit for program completion. The time taken for a personal leave will be counted towards the time limit (see 1.8.4). Students with long-term disabilities should discuss their situation with the Centre for Students with Disabilities early in their graduate studies or as soon as possible after the condition is diagnosed. The Centre will assist the student, and their department, in developing a plan for program completion, which may include an extension beyond the normal time limits. Such plans must be approved by the dean of graduate studies.

FROM	TO
1.12.2 ~~Master's Degree~~ ~~Students in per term fee programs (see 1.4 Enrolment) shall complete all of the requirements for a master's degree within 12 terms of equivalent enrolment. On-leave terms will not be counted as terms of enrolment. In addition, all requirements of the master's degree must be completed within six calendar years of initial enrolment as a master's student. Students in per unit fee programs (see 1.4) shall complete all of the requirements for a master's degree within six calendar years of initial enrolment.~~	1.12.2 Extensions Students may apply for an extension to the time limit if they are enrolled in a master's or doctoral program and need more time to complete the program requirements. A single extension may be for one to three terms, and students may be granted more than one extension. A master's and doctoral program can be no longer than the time limit plus six terms of extended time. Extensions may be *less than* the maximum of six terms and must meet the criteria established by the academic unit. Students should contact their academic unit to confirm the specific extension policy for their program. Applications for an extension must be submitted no later than the term in which the time limit or current extension expires. Extensions are not available to students who are discontinued from their program. Students are required to maintain continuous enrolment throughout their extension and are eligible to go on medical/compassionate or parental leave (see 1.8.4). Extensions are approved by the senior supervisor, graduate program chair and the dean of graduate studies.

FROM	TO
~~1.12.3 Doctoral Degree~~ ~~A student shall complete all the requirements for a doctoral degree within eight calendar years of initial enrolment as a doctoral student or, in the case of a student who has transferred from a master's program into the doctoral program without completing the master's degree, within eight calendar years of initial enrolment as a master's student.~~	

FROM	TO
~~1.12.4 Readmission~~ ~~Students who have withdrawn from their program and have not reached their maximum time can be readmitted to complete their degree requirements. Students who have reached their maximum time, did not complete the degree requirements, and thus were required to withdraw, can apply for readmission for one term only to complete those requirements. The term of readmission may be no later than the ninth term after the one in which the student withdrew from the program. The student applies for readmission to the relevant graduate program committee, who will make a recommendation to the dean of graduate students. Final approval for readmission is by the dean of graduate studies. Readmission decisions may be appealed in the same way as admission decisions (see 1.16.3 Admission).~~ ~~Students who have not been withdrawn but have reached their maximum time can request an extension for one term to complete their degree requirements.~~	

Proposed creation of GGR 1.4.4 Reactivation and 1.4.5 Readmission

FROM	TO: 1.4.8
(handwritten in middle column:) and are discontinued from their program,	**1.4.4 Reactivation**
	Students who are *not* enrolled or on leave (see 1.8.4) by the end of the 6th week of classes within a term, will be discontinued from their program. Students who ~~are discontinued, and~~ have not reached the time limit for their program, may apply for reactivation in the same term in which they were discontinued and be retroactively enrolled. Applications for reactivation are submitted to the relevant graduate program committee for consideration and approval by the graduate program chair.
	1.4.9
	1.4.5 Readmission
	Students who have passed the deadline for reactivation, and are within the time limit for their program plus three terms of possible extension time, can apply for readmission through the regular admission process for new students. When students *program is* ~~are~~ discontinued ~~from their program~~, the time away continues to count towards the time limit and possible extension time for program completion. Students who are readmitted to their program maintain the same start date and time limit from when they were first admitted to the program.