

Graduate School of Arts & Sciences Policy on Probation and Dismissal for Academic Reasons

This policy gives guidelines and procedures for probation and dismissal because of poor academic performance (Academic Dismissal) for students enrolled in Ph.D. programs. Academic Dismissal is distinct from withdrawal (initiated by the student), deactivation of a student's record by a failure to register, and dismissal or other sanctions associated with the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences (GSAS) Academic and Professional Integrity Policy or the University Student Judicial Code. Dismissals are recommended by the degree program and are not final until approved by the Dean of the GSAS.

Extant Graduate School policy addresses dismissal due to time limitations and immediate dismissal for extreme academic underperformance. Students enrolled in the GSAS normally are expected to maintain full-time continuous enrollment to their terminal degree. The maximum number of semesters of continuous enrollment is 18 (9 years). Students in Ph.D. programs who have not completed their terminal degree and who have not withdrawn will be dismissed at the end of 18 semesters. An exception may be granted by the Dean of GSAS on request by the designated faculty graduate program director (in most departments this position is called the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)) if the student is expected to complete their degree during a 10th year of enrollment. Enrollment for an 11th continuous year will not be allowed. Semesters on approved Leaves of Absence are not included on the enrollment clock.

Students may be dismissed immediately for extreme academic underperformance. Examples of extreme underperformance might be two grades of C or below in one semester or three unfinished courses (I, X or N) in one semester. Students who encounter personal situations that contribute to academic underperformance during a semester should be informed of the option to request a Leave of Absence rather than continuing enrollment with poor performance. The ability to complete TA responsibilities is not a sufficient basis for remaining enrolled.

Most academic difficulties are not of the severity associated with immediate dismissal. The GSAS' explicit criteria for maintaining minimal standards for satisfactory academic progress are: (1) a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or greater, (2) no more than 9 credits of incomplete (I), final examination missed (X) and/or not yet submitted (N) on the transcript at any one time, and (3) submission of a dissertation proposal, in the form of a completed *Title, Scope, and Procedure Form*, before beginning the 9th semester (5th year) of continuous enrollment. A program may add requirements for good standing, such as the completion of comprehensive or qualifying examinations by a certain time, but may not relax the GSAS-wide requirements. The faculty also are responsible for evaluating the ability of the student to identify and undertake an original scholarly project at the level of excellence expected for a Washington University Ph.D., as well as whether the student is making timely progress toward completion of the degree. The program may place a high value on the quality of performance in TA assignments and/or other professional responsibilities. The judgment of the faculty on these issues can lead to Academic Dismissal for students who meet other criteria for good academic standing. Departments are expected to maintain written guidelines that help students understand the major categories of expectations for satisfactory progress. Such guidelines should be provided to students at the beginning of their academic program, and reviewed with students on a regular basis.

Guidelines for Academic Probation and Dismissal

Except for circumstances justifying immediate dismissal, a student cannot be dismissed on the basis of academic performance without the opportunity to return to good standing during an identified period of probation. The purpose of probation is to: (1) explicitly warn the student of his or her status, (2) provide the student with clear guidelines of the performance that will be necessary to return to good standing, and (3) provide the student with reasonable time to meet these expectations. To meet these objectives, probation normally should be designated for a minimum of three months. When the probation criteria involve coursework, then the probation period would normally correspond to the semester duration. A student on probation must receive a detailed letter from the DGS stating the reasons for the probation and explicitly identifying the steps necessary for the student to return to good standing by the end of the probation period. A copy of this letter should be sent to the Dean of GSAS. If a student does not meet all criteria for good academic standing but the department does *not* wish to place the student on probation, an appeal for this exception can be made to the Dean of GSAS by the DGS or designated departmental faculty representative.

At the end of a first probation, the student may be: (1) returned to good standing, (2) placed on a second consecutive probation, which generally will be for a full semester, or (3) dismissed from the program. A second consecutive probation must be accompanied by a new letter identifying the steps required to return to good standing. While the purpose of the probationary period is to provide the student with time to improve, the decision of the program at the *end* of a probationary period could involve immediate notification of dismissal.

At the end of a second continuous probation, the student will be either returned to good standing or dismissed. A third probation will be allowed only if it is not continuous. A fourth probation will not be allowed. A student whose performance would result in a fourth probation will be dismissed immediately. A leave of absence cannot be used by a student to delay or nullify the consequences of a third consecutive or fourth probation.

Each program must have a standard procedure (such as a graduate advisory committee) to manage decisions regarding placement on probation, removal from probation, recommendations for dismissal after a probationary period, and recommendations for immediate dismissal due to extreme underperformance. The procedure for managing such decisions must be applied to all students in the program and cannot be managed solely by an individual faculty member, including the student's research mentor, though the input provided by the research mentor may play a key role in the process.

Stipend support should continue during a probationary period unless the student is failing to meet the basic expectations of his/her position (e.g., a student who holds a TA position repeatedly misses the class or section to which the TA is assigned or a student who holds an RA position is repeatedly absent from the lab and fails to carry out lab duties). If a program or school decides to suspend stipend support under these circumstances, the student must be given a minimum of two weeks' notice prior to withholding such support. If the student's performance improves and he/she begins meeting the basic expectations of the position, stipend support should resume at that time. During all probationary semesters, tuition remission will remain as offered at initial enrollment.

Notification Procedures for Academic Probation

1. The explanation of academic performance issues leading to probation should be specific (low GPA, failed exam, etc.) and contain a clear statement of what must be done within a specified period of time in order for the student to return to good standing. This includes probation associated with faculty judgments of research potential, timely progress toward the degree, teaching performance or professional responsibilities. The expectations will be consistent with those held for all students in the program. They must be communicated in writing, accompanied by the opportunity to meet with the DGS or designated departmental faculty representatives for a clarifying discussion, and copied to the Dean of GSAS.
2. If the student does satisfactorily meet the requirements of the probation, a written notice of reinstatement, including the date that the student has returned to good standing, will be provided to the student. Students may be reinstated before the end of the probation period if they have met the requirements for reinstatement.
3. Copies of any letter or e-mail to the student, or summary notes of discussions with the student regarding the student's placement on probation should be placed in the student's file in the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, which the student has the right to review.

Notification Procedures for Academic Dismissal

1. If the student does not meet the requirements of the probation by the specified time and the program recommends dismissal, the program will send a request for dismissal and a draft of the dismissal letter to the Dean of GSAS, along with copies of all previous communications and/or warnings. The draft dismissal letter will include the grounds for dismissal, the effective date of dismissal and advice to the student that voluntary withdrawal from the program is an option. All academic dismissals require approval by the Dean of GSAS.
2. If the student is an international student on a visa, the program should consult with the Office of International Students and Scholars prior to drafting the dismissal letter. It is often advisable for an international student to withdraw ahead of a dismissal to avoid an adverse impact on future entry to the U.S.

Appeal Procedures

The appeal of probation or dismissal by a student should follow the guidelines for all GSAS Student Grievance Procedures, in that it should begin at the most local level. In cases of probation or dismissal, a student may appeal within 14 calendar days to the department chair or another designated faculty representative or committee beyond the DGS or graduate advisory committee, consistent with Department or Program procedures.

Probation

Appeals of probation end with the Chair of the department or program (i.e., placement on probation cannot be appealed to the Dean of GSAS). In cases where there is a perceived conflict of interest with the Chair or the DGS, another member of the department can be designated to address the appeal process for probation or dismissal.

Dismissal

For academic dismissal decisions, a graduate student enrolled in GSAS may submit a final appeal of his/her dismissal to the Dean of GSAS, as provided below. Appeal requests must be initiated at the appropriate level within 14 calendar days of formal notification of probation or dismissal, and appeals to the Dean must be made within 14 calendar days of a decision by the Chair of the Department to uphold a student's dismissal. Responses to appeals generally occur within the next 14 calendar days after the appeal is requested. Stipend support is discontinued at the time the student is notified of dismissal. The student is not eligible to receive stipend support during an appeal of dismissal; however, if the appeal is upheld, the student is eligible for stipend support covering the period of the dismissal appeal process. Students who have chosen to withdraw from their program or department (as opposed to taking an authorized leave) cannot appeal or seek reconsideration of this decision.