

College of Graduate Studies Clarification of GAPA Evaluation November 6, 2013

The College of Graduate Studies wishes to clarify the GAPA processes in place to better track academic progress of graduate assistants (GA's) so that students earn their graduate degrees in a timely manner. There are two primary reasons these new processes have been implemented and each one directly affects the other.

First, the State of Ohio has changed the SSI (state subsidy) formula. Five years ago, the Ohio Board of Regents decided to move away from a formula that provided subsidy simply based on headcount to one that emphasizes course and degree completion instead. This is a complicated formula that takes into consideration a student's program of study, # of years/semesters in the program, credit hours completed, course level, etc. and compares UT information with the other USO institutions to determine state averages. As a result, COGS needs to more closely monitor graduate student progress through their programs, and when what is termed 'excessive hours' are noted, COGS needs to contact the program for clarification.

Below please find the information that COGS uses to evaluate students (and may result in a "hold" being placed on GAPA processing until clarification is received):

- Master's program (with no prior Master's degree): Time to completion should be ~2 years (4 - 6 semesters), 34 – 60 credit hours. State classification of a master's student is one with 34 hours or less, above 34 they are classified as a doctoral student taking master's level courses.
- Doctoral program (with a prior Master's degree): Time to completion should be ~5 years (10 – 15 semesters), maximum of 140 credit hours.
- Combined Master's and Doctoral program: Time to completion is 7 years (14 – 21 semesters), maximum of 174 credit hours.

According to Dr. Geoffrey Martin, V.P. of Institutional Research, **"Once a student exceeds 174 hours they are ineligible for state subsidy.** If a student has a prior master's and is in a program that would allow them to pursue a doctoral degree they are automatically [classified as] doctoral and become ineligible [for subsidy] if they exceed 140 hours."

Thus, it is imperative that advisors/departments/colleges track their students' progress closely, to ensure their students are receiving the assistance they need to excel in their field of study while still keeping a focus on their time to completion date.

The second reason that additional scrutiny of the GAPA is required is that major changes have been made to federal financial aid for all students but especially graduate students. Federal Stafford Loan and Federal Graduate PLUS Loan Programs have placed limits on the total dollar amount of loans that students will be allowed to incur. The new federal laws in these two areas are why COGS has instituted the review of all graduate assistantships. COGS requests your assistance in following these guidelines so none of our students will be adversely affected.

Ms. Carol Baumgartner (former Director of Financial Aid) has highlighted key points, as shown below:

Federal Stafford Loan Programs

1. Loss of Federal Stafford Subsidized Loan for Graduate and Professional levels (Budget Control Act of 2011)
2. Annual Limit \$20,500
3. Aggregate limit (for all undergraduate and graduate work) \$138,500

Sample of a 7 year graduate student:

\$20,500 Stafford annual limit X 7 year completion = \$143,500 (over the aggregate limit of \$138,500)

Federal Graduate PLUS Loan Program

1. Replace need for private loan borrowing for graduate student
2. Maximum loan amount is student's Cost of Attendance (COA) as determined by each school minus any other financial aid received at the attending institution.
3. Federal Stafford Aggregate Loan limit
4. Time to completion of program

Sample of a 7 year graduate student:

\$32,758 COA Graduate, living off campus, in-state X 7 year completion = \$229,306 Total Educational Expenses Allowed.

Other areas affecting Financial Aid include:

1. Dissertation hour variance (examines typical number of hours for a degree in a particular area and then FA will query any overage)
2. Following of the Plan of Study (POS); as a reminder the COGS POS must be turned into COGS once student completes 12 credit hours. FA contacts COGS for the POS in order to evaluate the student's academic progress as they move through their program. FA also evaluates the student using the Federal FA Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) assessment. That SAP (see attached) toward completion of degree program form must be completed before any further FA will be approved for a student. The SAP policy comes into play once a student exceeds 150% of the credit hours that are required to complete their program of study.

