

November 16, 2020

Rationale for GFC Doc. #1740 – Academic Leave of Absence (ALA) Accommodation for Graduate Students

Although employees at UWM, including faculty, have provisions for leaves of absence, students have had no similar protections. This Academic Leave of Absence (ALA) policy eliminates this inequity, all the more important during a global pandemic that has placed even greater pressure on graduate students. Designed in collaboration with our colleagues at UW-Madison, who are preparing their own leave of absence provisions, this policy establishes standards and procedures that will be similar at both doctoral-granting UW-System campuses. This policy also brings UWM in line with peer universities, most of which already have some form of leave of absence for students in place.

Doctoral students in particular have been constrained by two UW-System policies requiring them to remain registered even while enduring personal, family, or medical emergencies. The first, the residency requirement, requires them to be enrolled for two or three consecutive semesters during coursework, depending on course load. The second, the continuous registration requirement, requires dissertators to register for three credits every semester until graduation, or pay a fine in order to graduate. Continuous registration often forced students to enroll even when family or medical emergencies prevented them from making progress toward degree. Because these are UW-System policies, each individual exception to them formerly required approval by the UWM Chancellor. To avoid that, this policy effectively stops the clock on the time limit to degree for students who merit a leave of absence, so that an approved ALA will not count as an interruption of residency or continuous registration.