

August 14, 2009

Adam J. Cole
President, Rackham Student Government

Dear Mr. Cole:

I write in response to Rackham Student Government Resolutions SS-09-01 and SS-09-02. You brought these Resolutions to my office on July 27, 2009, requesting a written response by July 31, 2009. Providing the detailed response you requested in that very short time period was not feasible. In this letter I address the issues mentioned in the two resolutions.

The primary goal of the Continuous Enrollment Policy is to make it more likely that students will complete their doctoral studies and earn a Ph.D. By fostering strong connections from graduate programs to students, the policy supports continuous communication, mentoring, and services that will be helpful to students as they move through their graduate studies. Nearly all major research universities have a similar policy for their doctoral students. We will accomplish the goal of continuous enrollment without imposing any new financial burden on students; financial plans are being designed to ensure that outcome. The policy will become effective in the fall term of 2010, which provides time for planning and constructive problem-solving.

In SS-09-01, you ask for access to Rackham's information about the continuous enrollment policy.

On the Rackham web site we have provided considerable information about the policy. In particular, the section of the questions and answers about registration (at http://www.rackham.umich.edu/policies/continuous_enrollment/registration/) provides detailed information about many of the questions that we are asked most often. If there is additional information you would like to have, we will be happy to respond to specific questions.

In SS-09-01, you request a written summary of the planning work to date by program.

Over the course of the summer, we have been working with many groups to plan for the implementation of the policy in the Fall of 2010. We have convened a set of task forces that have been working through the summer to ensure that we can put appropriate support in place for students; the task forces are working on processes associated with registration, reinstatement, the provision of University services, funding plans, internal and external reporting, evaluation, training, and communications. The task forces involve representatives from the Registrar's office, UM Information and Technology Services (formerly MAIS and ITCS), International Center, Division of Student Affairs, Office of General Counsel, Academic Human Resources, Office of Budget and Planning, a dozen academic departments and schools, and some faculty and students. (Students have been involved with Communications and Evaluation, in particular.) Four information exchanges with the graduate coordinators from all Ph.D. programs took place. In these productive sessions, graduate coordinators asked questions and provided valuable feedback and suggestions.

The planning this summer is focused on university-wide systems and processes, to be sure that the systems can be designed and tested well in advance of the time that they will be needed. These processes and systems apply to all 104 Ph.D. programs on the Ann Arbor campus.

The other major work of the summer is the financial planning in each school and college. We are working with each school and college on individual unit plans; each school and college will be able to provide information to the graduate programs within that school or college early in the Fall Term. That information will make it possible for individual graduate programs to do their own planning in the coming academic year.

As suggested by the Continuous Enrollment Student Advisory Committee, a timeline showing many of the major activities over the coming year is posted on Rackham's web site.

In SS-09-01, you request an update about the policy's provisions as they will affect specific groups of students.

- 1) Students who plan to have a child or who are raising children. Students who are parents will be expected to register in each fall and winter semester until completion of their degree requirements unless they are on an approved leave of absence.

So long as they are making satisfactory academic progress, their graduate programs will provide them with the funding support that they were offered at the time of admission and any other funding opportunities available within the program. Their graduate programs will also provide tuition-only support for semesters in which they are required to register but would not have registered under current practice, assuming that they continue to make satisfactory academic progress. Satisfactory academic progress toward degree is defined by individual graduate programs. It will not mean the same thing for every graduate program. Nor will it mean the same thing for every student in a given program. Individual circumstances, raising children being one of many, affect the pace at which students work; graduate program faculty are best qualified to make decisions about students' progress. Students who become parents during their periods of study are eligible for a parental accommodation, which allows a period of time for a student to attend to the needs of the new child, after birth or adoption, without any loss of his or her funding support. See Rackham's Academic Policies, section 1.3.7. Students who become parents during the course of their studies are eligible for an extension of time limits set by Rackham or by the graduate program. See Rackham's Academic Policies, section 1.3.6. After the continuous enrollment policy is effective, a student who gives birth and has medical complications that make it difficult to return to active graduate study after the six week parental accommodation period will be able to take a leave of absence for medical reasons. Students who are parents (both mothers and fathers) will also be eligible to request a leave of absence for family or dependent care, which will be an option if a student wishes to suspend active work in graduate school in order to attend to the needs of his or her dependents. At the conclusion of a leave of absence, the student returns to active graduate study and resumes where he or she left off. Students will be eligible for leaves of absence for medical and for dependent care reasons, even if they have taken a leave before.

- 2) Students who are taking care of a family member or dependent while in graduate school.

Students who are taking care of family members will be expected to register in each fall and winter semester until completion of their degree requirements, unless they are on an approved leave of absence. So long as they are making satisfactory academic progress, their graduate programs will provide them with the funding support that they were offered at the

time of admission and any other funding support available within the program. Their graduate programs will also provide tuition-only support for semesters in which they are required to register but would not have registered under current practice, assuming that they continue to make satisfactory progress. Satisfactory progress toward degree is defined by individual graduate programs. It will not mean the same thing for every graduate program. Nor will it mean the same thing for every student in a given program. Individual circumstances, family care being one among many, affect the pace at which students work; graduate program faculty are best qualified to make decisions about students' progress. Students are eligible to request a leave of absence for family care, which would be an option if student wishes to suspend active work in graduate school in order to attend to the needs of his or her family members. At the conclusion of a leave of absence, the student returns to active graduate study and resumes where he or she left off. If a student experiences multiple episodes that require family care, the student is eligible for multiple leaves.

- 3) Students need to live outside of Ann Arbor, either temporarily or permanently, for spousal or personal reasons.

Students who need to live outside of Ann Arbor will be expected to register in each fall and winter semester until completion of their degree requirements, unless they are on an approved leave of absence. So long as they are making satisfactory academic progress, their graduate programs will provide them with the funding support that they were offered at the time of admission or other funding opportunities available in the program. Their graduate programs will also provide tuition-only support for semesters in which they are required to register but would not have registered under current practice, assuming that they continue to make satisfactory academic progress. Satisfactory progress toward degree is defined by individual graduate programs. It will not mean the same thing for every graduate program. Nor will it mean the same thing for every student in a given program. Individual circumstances, place of residence being one among many, affect the pace at which students work; graduate program faculty are best qualified to make decisions about students' progress.

- 4) Students who are unfunded or need to obtain funding to pay for tuition during the dissertation period.

The University will pay tuition for students who are making satisfactory progress to degree, but who would not register under current practices. Tuition fellowships will be provided to pay tuition for a student who is working on a dissertation, if that student would not be required to register under current practices. These fellowships will not necessarily provide funding for students who must register and pay tuition under our current rules. For example a precandidate student who is enrolled in courses is required to register under the University's current rules. Although over 95% of precandidate students have funding that pays for their tuition, a small number of precandidate students have funding from external, rather than University, sources or pay their own tuition now. That will continue to be the case for those few students. Students who would not register and pay tuition under our current practices will not have to pay tuition as a result of the change in policy. Every school and college will have a different funding plan, but they'll all be designed to achieve the same goal: students who would not have registered under our current practices, but who would be required to register under the continuous enrollment policy, will have their tuition paid by a University source. Most schools and colleges plan to create tuition fellowships to cover the tuition costs of students making satisfactory progress to degree, who are not otherwise supported in a term. Tuition fellowships will fill the gap between funding already committed to students and funding required under the new policy.

- 5) Students who work professionally in their chosen field while making degree progress or hold another job to fund their graduate education.

Nearly all students work to support themselves during their graduate education. Most students work within the University but some work outside of the University. Whether students are working inside the University or outside of the University, students will be expected to register during fall and winter semesters until completion of their degrees, unless they are on an approved leave of absence. If they are making satisfactory progress toward their degree, but they would not have had to register under current practices, then the University will provide tuition fellowships for those students. If they have suspended graduate study in order to devote themselves to work that is not connected to their degree requirements, then students will have the option of taking a leave of absence for personal reasons, or of withdrawing from graduate school and applying for reinstatement when they are ready to return to active study. Students who are near completion of their degrees and accept a faculty or postdoctoral position at another institution will be expected to register during fall and winter semesters until completion of their degrees, unless they are on an approved leave of absence. If they are making satisfactory progress toward their degree, then the University will provide tuition fellowships for those students.

- 6) Students who are away from the University for an extended period to do fieldwork, including semesters when they are unable to make much progress due to circumstances such as language training or political unrest in the country where they are studying.

Students who are away from the university conducting fieldwork will be expected to register in each fall and winter semester until the completion of their degree requirements unless they are on an approved leave of absence. Fieldwork is an essential part of the training in many fields of study; the same is true of language study. In these fields, fieldwork and language study are exactly what the faculty expect from students making satisfactory progress toward degree. While students are conducting fieldwork under the supervision of faculty advisors, the University will provide tuition support, just as it will for all students who are making satisfactory progress toward their degrees who would not have registered under current practices. The challenges and difficulties associated with progress in fieldwork are fully appreciated by the faculty in those fields of study where fieldwork is common; the faculty are in the best position to understand when external circumstances beyond the students' control have made it difficult to accomplish research goals. Since the faculty who have detailed knowledge of the students and the research will be making the judgments of satisfactory academic progress, the faculty will be able to appreciate the challenges that students face while doing fieldwork.

- 7) Students who face chronic conditions (such as disability or mental illness) that may require flexibility in degree path.

Students who encounter challenges due to physical or mental health conditions, or learning disabilities have a variety of options under current policies, and will continue to have those options after the continuous enrollment policy is effective. Whenever possible, the faculty seek to keep students enrolled and making progress. Students who do not need or do not want to take a leave of absence will be able to work with their faculty advisers, as they do now, to obtain the flexibility that they require to make progress. The Americans with Disabilities Act mandates the University to make reasonable accommodations so that graduate students with disabilities may take full advantage of the opportunities available to students in our programs. A number of doctoral students are registered with the Office of Services to Students with Disabilities; that office facilitates support for these students and advocates with faculty and graduate programs on their behalf. Satisfactory progress toward

degree will not mean the same thing for every student in a given program. Individual circumstances, chronic illness or disability being two among many, affect the pace at which students work; graduate program faculty are best qualified to make decisions about students' progress. When students need to suspend their studies and take time away from graduate study, they will be able to take a leave of absence for medical reasons. This leave is available for physical or mental health reasons. Students with recurring conditions are eligible for more than one leave.

- 8) Students who are coping with a medical and/or psychological issue but need to avoid going on leave in order to keep their health insurance.

Students who encounter health difficulties have a variety of options under current policies, and will continue to have those options after the continuous enrollment policy is effective. Whenever possible, the faculty seek to keep students enrolled and making progress. Faculty members are expected to make reasonable accommodations that adjust their expectations of academic progress for a student's individual circumstances. Not all Ph.D. students have University paid health insurance. Students qualify for University paid health insurance premiums when they are appointed to a qualifying GSI or GSRA position or when they receive a benefits-eligible fellowship. That will not change when the continuous enrollment policy is effective. University policy currently allows graduate students whose University paid coverage ends (for example because their GSI appointment has ended) to continue their coverage at their own expense. That will not change when the continuous enrollment policy is effective. Students who take leaves of absence may continue their health insurance, at their own expense. Those students enrolled in the Aetna student health insurance plan, offered to students at their own expense, can continue their coverage while on a leave of absence.

- 9) Students whose time to degree is longer than average for any reason other than those listed above.

Students who take longer than average to complete their degrees may or may not have increased terms of registration due to the continuous enrollment policy. If students are making satisfactory progress toward their degrees, the University will provide tuition support for students who would not have been enrolled under current practices. For some students that might be zero or one term; for others it might be several years. The length of time required to complete a degree depends on many factors, including the field of study, the program requirements, students' situations, faculty availability, resources, the size and scope of the dissertation, and many more. Funding resources for tuition fellowships are planned to accommodate those students whose time to degree is longer than average as well as those whose time to degree is shorter than average.

Resolution SS-09-02 requests that Rackham provide its student body with a written statement ensuring that under the continuous enrollment policy students who are currently not required to register (and therefore not billed for tuition) will be guaranteed a tuition fellowship or equivalent source of funding for each semester of their graduate studies, thus financially holding the students harmless under the proposed policy.

I provided the following statement to all Ph.D. students on April 15, 2009, and it remains true today.

The University will pay tuition for students making satisfactory progress to degree, but who would not register under current practices. Every school and college will have a different funding plan, but they'll all be designed to achieve the same goal: students who might not have registered under our

current practices, but who would be required to register under continuous enrollment, will have their tuition paid by the university. Most schools and colleges plan to create tuition fellowships to support students making satisfactory progress to degree, but who are not otherwise supported. Tuition fellowships will fill the gap between funding already committed to students and funding required under the new policy.

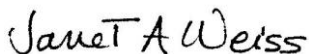
Resolution SS-09-02 also requests that Rackham communicate the continuous enrollment policy in its full form to the Rackham graduate student body no less than one month before the policy is presented to the University of Michigan Board of Regents, to allow for sufficient student feedback.

The Continuous Enrollment Policy was communicated to all Ph.D. students in December 2008, immediately after its adoption by the Rackham Executive Board. It has also been posted on the Rackham web site since that time.

Through many channels, we have received extensive student feedback, and have used that feedback to guide our plans for putting the policy into action. We are eager to continue to receive feedback so that we may address students' questions and concerns.

The University of Michigan Board of Regents has the authority to set all tuition rates at the University, on the recommendation of the President and Provost. The Board of Regents will approve tuition rates for all degree programs for the 2010-2011 academic year at their June 2010 meeting. At that time they will set the rate for Rackham candidacy tuition. The tuition rate decision is the only action item related to the Continuous Enrollment Policy that will come before the Board of Regents. Well before the June Regents' meeting, graduate students will receive more information about the plans made by individual graduate programs. Please see the timeline posted on the Rackham web site: http://www.rackham.umich.edu/policies/continuous_enrollment/timeline/.

Sincerely,



Janet A. Weiss