Proposal for
Annual Assessment and Feedback (AAF) on Progress Towards Degree to
Doctoral Students

Premise. *Every doctoral student should get an annual feedback of his/her progress towards degree beginning in the third year.*

Graduate School presently does not have a policy to assure that every doctoral student is assessed annually and given a written feedback on his/her academic and research progress. Many of our peer institutions such as Duke University, University of Arizona, University of California-Berkeley, Columbia University, and University of Florida have such policies. Despite, the lack of such a policy at UW-Madison, many of our graduate programs conduct such a formal assessment, at least bi-annually, if not annually. The goal of the proposed Annual Assessment Feedback (AAF) policy is to provide all doctoral students with an annual written assessment of their academic progress towards degree completion.

Why Annual Assessment and Feedback (AAF)?
- Provides each student a clarity of expectations
  - Clarity of expectations is a basic right
- Establishes clear goals which in turn, keep students motivated
  - Reduces attrition
  - Reduces time to degree
- Helps alleviate problem situations
  - Early identification and intervention in problem situations
- A means to check whether a student is in good academic standing
  - For compliance with certain fellowship conditions
- A means for graduate students to discuss professional goals with program faculty
  - By including aspects beyond research, students are better prepared for “life” after graduation
- Aggregate information of students’ activities can inform program decisions

UW-Madison Graduate School AAF Policy

By end of Spring 2019 semester, all graduate programs must develop procedure for providing (approximately) annual assessment and feedback (AAF) to doctoral students on their progress towards degree. Effective Fall 2019, all programs must implement their procedures. Although each program may develop a procedure that works for them, the basic requirements are as follows.

1. Doctoral students must start receiving written feedback progress towards degree around the start of the third year in the program and must continue to receive AAF on a regular basis (approximately annually) until they graduate. Qualifying examinations, preliminary examinations, thesis committee meetings etc. may be included in the annual assessments as long as they include written feedback on progress towards degree. Regular research discussions with advisors do not qualify as assessments unless they include assessment and feedback on progress towards degree.
2. The feedback must be in written form so that they can be tracked and archived. Graduate School will develop a software tool to facilitate archival and tracking. The use of this software tool is optional.

3. The AAF must include input from at least two program faculty or staff and where at least one is not the students’ advisor or co-advisor. The second person may be a member of the student’s dissertation committee, may be faculty director of graduate study, another faculty member in the graduate program, or a graduate coordinator. It is understood that a program faculty or staff who is not an advisor or co-advisor of the student may not be able to fully assess the quality of the work being done by the student. Their role is to alleviate a common graduate student concern that the advisors tend to keep their productive students longer than necessary.

4. In addition, to the curricular and research milestones, the assessment and feedback may include guidance on the professional and career development training for the student. For instance, students may be encouraged to maintain Individual Development Plans (IDPs) and share parts of their IDP with their advisor or other program faculty involved in AAF in order to get guidance on their professional and career development training.