September 23, 2020

To: Directors of Graduate Study and Department Chairs
Cc: Deans of Schools and Colleges; GFEC members
From: Associate Dean Lisa Martin
Re: Funding flexibility and requests to temporarily suspend admissions

Given the academic job market, funding, and other uncertainties at this time, many graduate programs are questioning their Fall 2021 admissions and support strategies for graduate students. For some programs, this evaluation is part of a longer-term process that has been brought to the forefront by the pandemic; for others, it is a matter of how they should respond in the short term.

We remind programs that receive funding for fellowships from the Graduate School through the Graduate Student Support Competition (GSSC) that they have substantial flexibility in how those fellowships are used. The Graduate School does not earmark any fellowships for specific students; programs decide which students receive fellowships. No fellowships are designated to be used only for incoming students or as “recruiting” fellowships. We encourage programs to be strategic in thinking about how they fund new versus continuing students in the context of their overall enrollment management and student support plans, including non-Graduate School support such as TA positions. As fellowships for dissertators have a lower cost than those for non-dissertators, programs are welcome to convert Graduate School allocations of non-dissertator fellowships into dissertator fellowships. Please notify Fellowships Officer Nathaniel Haack (nathaniel.haack@wisc.edu) when you make such a conversion.

Some institutions and programs have announced that they are suspending graduate admissions or considering doing so. Admissions suspensions run counter to the teaching and research mission of the institution and the Graduate School discourages such activity. Rather, each program faces its own unique situation, and we encourage you to be strategic and selective in your admissions plans. We do not see widespread support for admissions suspensions among our Big Ten peers. We remind you that the admissions cycle has already begun for most PhD and MFA programs. Students may have already begun applying to your program, and you have an obligation to give consideration to those applications.

If you are considering suspending admissions for the upcoming year, you will need to get approval from the Graduate School. Please make the request by submitting your overall admissions and enrollment strategy for this year and a discussion of how this plan will affect your program in the next few years. Your plan should be sent to Assistant Dean Jenna Alsteen (jenna.alsteen@wisc.edu). The deadline for providing this request is October 15. Please contact Assistant Dean Alsteen with any questions about temporary changes to your standing admissions policy.

Thank you for your commitment to excellence in graduate education.

Lisa

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