

# Overview of Graduate Academic Policies

*Note: This document reproduces the graduate section of the Arts & Sciences Faculty Manual (version approved by the Faculty of Arts & Sciences on March 12, 2019) and is intended to serve as a reference resource for Graduate Directors, faculty, and students. The underscoring of key phrases indicates that a web page is available online.*

## **III. Graduate Academic Policies**

In keeping with the Arts & Sciences *Bylaws*, the Committee on Graduate Studies (COGS) shall recommend to the Faculty any changes in graduate academic policies here or in the *Graduate Arts & Sciences Catalog*.

Graduate students and faculty in Arts & Sciences (A&S) face many of the same requirements and challenges as undergraduate students and faculty. But graduate students are subject to different academic standards, detailed in the *Graduate Arts & Sciences Catalog*; their financial aid and the obligations that come with being a part-time employee of the Commonwealth of Virginia are different; and the academic progress for those who must submit a thesis or dissertation to satisfy degree requirements (roughly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the A&S graduate student population) follows a different trajectory than that of undergraduate students.

## **A. Basic Responsibilities of Students and Faculty**

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Graduate study implies a commitment by the student to achieving a high level of professional development in a particular discipline or group of closely related disciplines. It includes a significant number of advanced courses, usually includes either a significant research project or an external internship, and is usually a full-time commitment. Graduate students are expected to be able to work independently with decreasing supervision as they progress toward their degrees, and to know when they need help.

Faculty in programs and departments that offer graduate degrees have an obligation to share the responsibilities and duties that are part of the administration and operation of the graduate program. They should serve as research advisors and members of thesis and dissertation committees, when appropriate; return comments on the work of students in a timely manner; consult with and advise students, even those for whom they are not the official advisor or instructor; and, when requested, write professional recommendations and submit them on time for students who are doing satisfactory work.

Directing graduate students conducting research is a privilege that carries with it certain obligations. Chief among them is the responsibility to provide timely feedback on drafts of thesis and dissertation chapters.

Late feedback can create serious problems and vulnerabilities for graduate students:

- whose financial support has expired (or soon will),
- who have already accepted new positions that are contingent upon their graduation, or
- who are fast approaching the limit on their time-to-degree clock.

All faculty in A&S graduate programs are required to assume responsibility to ensure that graduate students receive appropriate feedback in a timely manner.

## **B. Academic Requirements**

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For the graduate programs in A&S, the *Graduate Arts & Sciences Catalog* is the first source you should consult regarding academic policies and administrative procedures. Important to note is that a graduate student is bound by the catalog for the year they matriculated into a graduate program. If a student is admitted to a master's-only program, and then gains admittance to a doctoral program, the requirements for their master's degree are determined by the catalog for the year in which they matriculated, while the requirements for their doctorate are determined by the catalog for the year in which they were admitted to the doctoral program.

The *Graduate Arts & Sciences Catalog* contains a section devoted to Graduate Regulations. Topics covered in this section include Admission, Tuition and Fees, Financial Aid, Registration, Grading and Academic Progress, Financial Obligations, and Requirements for Degrees.

In addition, each of the A&S graduate programs has its own catalog entry that details the requirements for earning one of the graduate degrees offered by the program. These requirements may *augment* the general degree requirements (e.g., A&S does not have a language requirement for graduation, but some graduate programs require candidates to demonstrate a reading knowledge of a foreign or classical language). They may *strengthen* the general degree requirements (e.g., A&S requires all degree candidates to achieve a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale in all courses undertaken for graduate credit at W&M after admission to a degree program, but a graduate program may define unsatisfactory academic progress in the program as failure to maintain a grade point average of 3.3 or better). However, they may not *replace* or *weaken* the general degree requirements for Graduate Arts & Sciences (e.g., A&S requires a minimum of twelve credit hours numbered 600 or higher to graduate, so a graduate program cannot reduce this to, say, only nine credit hours).

If you are either teaching a graduate course or advising or mentoring an A&S graduate student for the first time, invest the time to review the relevant sections in the *Graduate Arts & Sciences Catalog* so that you are aware of what is expected of you, your course, and your advisee or mentee.

Finally, many of the A&S graduate programs maintain a handbook or an internal list of academic milestones that students are expected to meet. Consult the Director of Graduate Studies for your program to learn more about such documents and the expectations they detail. Many of these requirements have been migrated to *Degree Works* (e.g., “Still Needed: By the end of the 3rd semester (in October), students must complete all Ph.D. coursework and colloquium.”) to make it easier for students, their advisors, their Directors of Graduate Studies, and their graduate dean to monitor their academic progress.

## **C. Academic Administration and Oversight**

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The degree requirements for graduate studies in A&S at William & Mary (W&M) are under the overall jurisdiction of COGS, which is comprised of the Directors of Graduate Studies for the eleven A&S departments and programs offering graduate degrees, and of the graduate committees of the individual departments and programs. Most administrative matters require the approval of the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research.

### **1. Committee on Graduate Studies**

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For A&S graduate students, COGS is the sole committee responsible for the functions similar to those of the undergraduate A&S Educational Policy Committee, the Committee on Degrees, and the Committee on Academic Status.

The Dean of Graduate Studies & Research serves as the convener and chair of this committee; the Graduate Ombudsperson serves as an ex officio member of this committee. COGS bears responsibility for any changes to the *Graduate Arts & Sciences Catalog*. Petitions to make changes to the catalog must be submitted for review and approval by COGS. COGS members also review and approve any petitions for degree exceptions (e.g., course substitutions or waivers). Finally, while a student's graduate program bears primary responsibility for monitoring a student's academic progress, effective with the *2015-2016 Graduate Arts & Sciences Catalog*, the time-to-degree clock for all students earning the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy starts with the first term of enrollment in the Ph.D. program, excluding periods of approved leave and military service. The clock's termination is spelled out in the formal offer of admission each student receives from the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research. If a student needs an extension to their time-to-degree clock, then a petition must be filed for review and possible approval by COGS.

COGS members meet every two weeks during the regular academic year. If you have an advisee who requires an exception, work with the Director of Graduate Studies for your program to submit a petition for review by COGS.

## **2. Graduate Programs and Graduate Faculty**

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There are eleven A&S graduate programs: three doctoral programs in the humanistic social sciences (American Studies, Anthropology, and History), three doctoral programs in the computational and natural sciences (Applied Science, Computer Science, and Physics), three terminal research master's programs (Biology, Chemistry, and Psychological Sciences), and two professional master's programs (Computational Operations Research and Public Policy). The doctoral programs also grant master's degrees.

Each of the eleven A&S graduate programs has an internal graduate committee to handle recruitment, curriculum, and academic oversight for the graduate program and its students.

The faculty in the graduate programs are responsible for creating the graduate curriculum, developing graduate courses, and establishing graduate degree requirements. Changes must be submitted to COGS for review and possible approval. Approved changes appear in the *Graduate Arts & Sciences Catalog* immediately following the academic year in which they were approved by COGS.

The six doctoral programs conduct an annual review of the doctoral students in their program and send a written assessment of their progress to each doctoral student – a particularly valuable form of input once a student has finished all graduate coursework, their qualifying examination, and the attainment of candidacy, and is in full dissertation mode. As a member of the graduate faculty in a doctoral program, you are expected to participate fully in this process and

provide information and advice designed to keep each doctoral student in the program on track to earn their degree in a timely fashion.

The performance of graduate students in courses, on comprehensive or qualifying examinations, and in teaching and research must be based on objective, ethical, and professional criteria. These same requirements hold for defense examination committees.

To continue in a program, a student must make satisfactory progress toward the degree, as defined in the *Graduate Arts & Sciences Catalog* and the regulations of the student's graduate program. If the faculty of a program determines that satisfactory progress is not being made, a student may be withdrawn due to academic deficiency.

### **3. Dean of Graduate Studies & Research and the Office of Graduate Studies & Research**

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The Dean of Graduate Studies & Research and the staff in the Office of Graduate Studies & Research (OGSR) provide overarching oversight to ensure that all federal, state, university, and A&S regulations, guidelines, and policies that pertain to graduate students and the graduate programs, along with the academic requirements spelled out in the *Graduate Arts & Sciences Catalog*, are enforced. These must be enforced in order of precedence (i.e., all federal, then all state, then all university, then all A&S, and then all graduate catalog requirements).

#### **a. Admissions**

The Dean of Graduate Studies & Research works with the staff in the OGSR – particularly, the Registrar & Administrator of Graduate Student Services – to ensure that all the information required for admission has been received (e.g., transcripts from previous institutions, GRE scores, letters of recommendation, etc.). The majority of the information submitted as part of the application process becomes part of any admitted student's academic record at W&M, and is curated by the Office of the University Registrar under document retention guidelines set by the Library of Virginia.

The OGSR works closely with the graduate administrator(s) for your program to ensure that all these documents are in place once a recommendation for admission is sent forward by either the Director of Graduate Studies or the chair of the graduate admissions committee for your program. While the graduate administrator(s) should be providing active administrative support of this process, it is the graduate faculty who are responsible for recruiting applicants, reviewing applications, and ultimately submitting recommendations for admission to the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research.

Only the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research has the institutional authority to offer admission to an applicant following a recommendation from the Director of Graduate Studies or the chair of the graduate admissions committee for the

program to which the candidate applied. Only the faculty member designated to speak on behalf of the program has the authority to forward a recommendation for admission. The Dean of Graduate Studies & Research has the authority to decline a recommendation for admission. While historically a rare occurrence, this can happen when the Dean judges the applicant's credentials for admission to be insufficient to be successful in the graduate program.

#### **b. Financial Aid**

The majority of graduate students in A&S receive some form of financial aid. Ideally, this comes in the form of a full Graduate or Research Assistantship appointment, combined with a tuition waiver. To thrive and be successful in an A&S doctoral program, a student needs adequate financial support. The Dean of Graduate Studies & Research looks askance at any recommendations for admission – particularly to a doctoral program – that does not include a fully funded Graduate or Research Assistantship, along with a tuition waiver. While exceptions are possible (e.g., the applicant is matriculating into a professional master's program, holds an external fellowship, or is eligible for military educational benefits), any exceptions must be cleared first with the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research before anyone in the program makes any representations to the applicant regarding admission.

Each of the graduate programs receives an annual budget allocation from the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research to support a fixed number of incoming and continuing graduate students as Graduate Assistants. The majority of these assistants serve as either a Teaching Assistant or a Teaching Fellow. In addition, graduate programs with external grant support appoint graduate students as Research Assistants in their graduate program.

**Teaching Assistants (TAs)** are graduate students who assist an instructor by teaching undergraduate lab sections or conducting undergraduate discussions sessions, grading course assignments, or providing instructional assistance in some other capacity. They are not instructors of record, and are not responsible for assigning final grades.

**Teaching Fellows (TFs)** are graduate students who are instructors of record for an undergraduate course and responsible for assigning final grades for the course. The only graduate students eligible to serve as TFs are those who meet all the following conditions:

- earned a master's degree in the same, or a closely related discipline;
- passed their doctoral qualifying exams;
- met their graduate program's definition of ABD (all but dissertation); and
- been trained and will be supervised by the program responsible for the course or courses involved.

**Research Assistants (RAs)** are graduate assistants conducting research in support of a funded external grant or contract.

Graduate students holding assistantships are considered part-time employees of W&M, and thus of the Commonwealth of Virginia. There are firm conditions on the appointments of Graduate Assistants to ensure compliance with both university and state regulations. As noted in the section on Financial Aid in the *Graduate Arts & Sciences Catalog*:

- Graduate students on assistantship are considered students first, and employees second (except by Parking & Transportation Services). Thus, they must make satisfactory academic progress in their degree program or they risk losing their assistantships.
- Graduate students who hold assistantships are considered part-time W&M employees who work on average up to twenty hours a week.
- Duties for students on an assistantship are assigned by their graduate program. Typically, these involve either instructional or research support, but they may include working for other units on campus (e.g., the University Libraries, the Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture, the Cohen Career Center, and the Lemon Project). They must satisfactorily carry out the duties assigned to them or they risk losing their assistantships.
- Students on assistantship *may not* take on any additional employment or an appointment of a remunerative nature during the term of their assistantships without securing prior approval. If they fail to secure prior approval they risk losing their assistantships.
- Approval for taking on additional work of a remunerative nature consists of first submitting supporting written statements (email documentation is fine) to the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research from the student's advisor and the student's Director of Graduate Studies. These statements must assert that the additional work is not anticipated to adversely affect the student's progress toward the degree. The statements must also make clear the term of the additional work: one week, one month, one semester, one year, etc. The Dean of Graduate Studies & Research must agree, and approve in writing before the additional work is started. The Dean of Graduate Studies & Research reserves the right to either shorten or lengthen the term of the approval, depending on the circumstances.
- Because state regulations do not allow any part-time employee to work on average thirty or more hours a week, students on graduate assistantships *may not work on average more than nine additional hours per week*.

Since a graduate student's primary responsibility at W&M is as a student, taking on additional employment that does not relate in a substantive way to the student's academic progress is discouraged. Opportunities for employment that deepen and enrich a student's scholarly or professional development are welcomed, so long as the student is in good academic standing and the opportunity is deemed one that will enhance – rather than hinder – the student's academic progress.

### **c. Registration**

Upon admission to an A&S graduate program, students are required to maintain a registration or enrollment status for both the fall and spring semesters until they satisfy all requirements for their graduate degree. There are three possible choices in A&S:

- **Standard.** The student registers for classes and pays full tuition (or pro-rated tuition, if they are part-time). This is the typical status for all incoming students until they finish their required coursework.
- **Research Graduate Student.** A student becomes eligible for this reduced tuition status when the student has successfully completed all required coursework, excluding the required semester credit hours of 700, Thesis, or 800, Dissertation, necessary to satisfy the requirements for their degree and their degree program, while sustaining a minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. Also, it must be the case that the student is not employed significantly in any activity other than research and writing in fulfillment of degree requirements, and that the student is either present on campus or engaged in approved fieldwork.
- **Continuous Enrollment.** This status is reserved for students who have satisfied all the conditions for Research Graduate Student status, but are no longer resident on campus. The student pays a fee that allows the student to maintain an active status at W&M and to access W&M resources such as the libraries and email. Continuous enrollment does carry significant implications with regard to the repayment of student loans or visa status, if an international student, so a student should consult the Registration section of the *Graduate Arts & Sciences Catalog* to determine, in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies for their program, if this is an appropriate status.

Students receiving a Graduate or Research Assistantship must be registered, full-time, during the terms of their assistantship. No exceptions. For the purposes of financial aid, the state requires a minimum of nine credit hours per term to be considered as a full-time graduate student. Standard in A&S is twelve credit hours per term. More than sixteen credit hours per term is considered excessive, given the responsibilities most graduate students carry as part-time employees.

#### **d. Grading and Academic Progress**

Graduate courses in A&S use the same grading system used in undergraduate courses. As for undergraduates, effective with the 2016-2017 *Graduate Arts & Sciences Catalog* there is a Continuance Requirement for graduate students that recognizes that a graduate student must secure a cumulative GPA of 3.0 (out of 4.0) to earn any graduate degree in A&S, and that the horizon over which this must be achieved is typically no more than four semesters.

The *Graduate Arts & Sciences Catalog* spells out the policies in place for repeating a course or reviewing a grade, should either be requested by a graduate student.

Once students submitting a dissertation or thesis to satisfy degree requirements have finished the coursework needed for their degree, academic progress is assessed by the graduate faculty in their program. The doctoral programs have milestones they use to assess progress at their annual reviews of doctoral students.

Since the fall of 2015, graduate students have been admitted under a time-to-degree clock whose expiration date is set in their letter of admission. Students admitted to a terminal master's program must be completed within six years from the first term of enrollment in the master's program. The expectation is that terminal master's students will finish in no more than two years, unless they are part-time. Students admitted to a doctoral program must be completed within seven years from the first term of enrollment in the doctoral program. The expectation is that doctoral students will take no more than seven years and, ideally, appreciably less time. For a student enrolled in a master's program in A&S who subsequently advances to candidacy in the doctoral program in the same field, the term of enrollment in the master's program will count toward the seven-year limit for the doctoral degree unless otherwise stated in the letter of admission. Such exceptions are granted only at the time of admission, and typically for no more than one additional year (i.e., a total of no more than eight years to satisfy the degree requirements for both the master's and the doctorate).

The time to degree clock can be suspended for periods of *approved* leave or military service. As of fall 2018, A&S graduate students may request either a medical or non-medical leave of absence for either one semester or one year. A leave of absence may not exceed one year and may not be repeated, except under extraordinary circumstances. Requests for medical leave must be handled through the Dean of Students Office, working with the Medical Review Committee. Requests for non-medical leaves of absence must be made to and approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research.

Only the Committee on Graduate Studies can grant extensions to a student's time-to-degree clock or an exception to the approved leave policy.

### **e. Requirements for Degrees**

The requirements for a student's graduate degree from A&S are set in the *Graduate Arts & Sciences Catalog* for the year in which they entered the program. Only the Committee on Graduate Studies can grant exceptions to the published degree requirements.

The graduate administrator(s) in the degree candidate's program are required to review the student's academic record to ensure that all degree requirements are met. They must generate a memo certifying that all degree requirements have been met, which the student's Director of Graduate Studies is required to sign as affirmation. This means that if you are serving as the Director of Graduate Studies, you should be sure to confirm that the degree verification memo you sign is accurate!

Once the graduate program's degree certification memo is received in the OGSR, the Registrar & Administrator of Graduate Student Services also reviews the student's academic record to ensure that all degree requirements have been met. If so, the A&S graduate registrar generates a degree certification memo which the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research is required to sign and submit to the University Registrar as final certification of the degree.

When certifying degrees, the major checklist includes:

- All required courses have been taken.
- The cumulative graduate GPA is 3.0 (or higher, if required by the graduate program).
- A sufficient number of graduate credit hours has been earned, and enough of each type required (e.g., a minimum of 12 credit hours in courses numbered 600 or higher, the minimum number of 700, Thesis, or 800, Dissertation, credit hours required, etc.).
- All examination and proficiency requirements have been met.
- If a dissertation or thesis is required to satisfy degree requirements, then that the student successfully passed a defense examination conducted by an approved committee, that the dissertation or thesis satisfied all formatting requirements, that the forms required for copyright, embargoes, institutional compliance, etc. have all been signed and submitted, and that a final copy of the dissertation or thesis has been submitted and accepted by the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research for archiving by the University Archivist.

All requirements but those in the last bullet in this checklist are straightforward to confirm. But the final submission of a dissertation or thesis often seems like a complex process to both the student and advisor. Common pitfalls that can be avoided with sufficient foresight:

- Conducting a defense examination without a committee that has been approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research *in advance of the defense*. If the committee was not approved in advance, the outcome of the defense examination is invalid.
- Collecting the signatures of the committee members on an approval page whose format was not approved in advance. Because dissertations and theses are archival documents, they must conform to a format established in consultation with the University Archivist. Failure to follow the W&M Editorial Guidelines – particularly using forms of the university’s name that are expressly prohibited – means that the approval page will have to be reset and a second round of signatures collected.
- Making missteps when arranging for proxy signatures. Ensure that defense examination committee members who participated remotely send written notification to the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research as soon as possible *after* the examination confirming that the student passed and giving permission for proxy signatures, as outlined in the Process for Proxy Signatures. There is no need to secure permission for proxy signatures in advance of the defense examination.
- Neglecting the License and Embargo form requirement. Graduate Arts & Sciences has an exceptionally generous embargo policy; W&M has an equally generous license agreement that allows authors to retain their copyright. But the student must submit a form confirming the terms of the license and embargo (if any) that they are requesting. This form must be signed by either the chair or co-chair of their defense examination committee, and additional signatures are required if a lengthy embargo term is being requested.

The dissertation and thesis submission process is overseen by the Administrative Coordinator in the OGSR, in consultation with both the Registrar & Administrator of Graduate Student Services and the University Archivist. The process goes most smoothly when the student contacts the Administrative Coordinator well in advance of the deadlines for their graduation term to seek their guidance and assistance, *and* both the student and the chair(s) of their defense examination committee heed the deadlines and familiarize themselves with the submission requirements.

#### **f. Graduate Courses and Graduate Degree Credit**

In keeping with both federal and accreditation agency guidelines and expectations, A&S graduate students are expected to do graduate-level coursework with sufficiently advanced learning outcomes to warrant the award of graduate degree credit. This leads to two observations worth keeping in mind as both an advisor and an instructor.

First, while an A&S graduate student can petition to take an undergraduate course, the credit hours earned cannot be used to satisfy their graduate degree requirements. Such petitions are best made when a student enters an A&S graduate program with insufficient prior training in a domain of importance to their graduate studies. Otherwise, such requests should be discouraged since it makes it far more likely the student's progress will subsequently lag behind that of the other members of their incoming cohort.

Second, it is important to realize as an instructor that cross listing an undergraduate and a graduate course is restricted to 400-level (advanced) undergraduate courses and 500-level (introductory) graduate courses; in other words, no course numbered below 400 may be cross-listed with a graduate course and no course numbered 600 or higher may be cross-listed with an undergraduate course. Any courses cross-listed at the 400/500-level must either have a separate syllabus for the 500-level version of the course, or a special section on a shared syllabus, that details what additional learning outcomes will be required for students in the graduate-level course to warrant the award of graduate degree credit. Two courses offered at the same time, in the same location, by the same instructor count as "cross-listed" for the purposes of this restriction on cross listing. Any instances of a cross listing that violates this restriction will lead to the cancellation of the graduate-level version of the course.

#### **g. Forms**

Given the complex nature of degree certification and the multiple milestones in a graduate career, the OGSR relies on forms to track almost every aspect of an A&S graduate student's life at W&M, as can be seen on the OGSR's [Forms](#) webpage. Each of these forms comes with a cover page containing instructions, a checklist of required signatures before the form is submitted to the OGSR, as well as a deadline, if relevant.

Note that original signatures are required on all forms submitted to the OGSR. This requirement is intentional as it means that a graduate student making a decision regarding an event in their academic life at W&M must speak to their Director of Graduate Studies (at a minimum), quite probably their advisor, and their instructor if permission to take a course other than a graduate course in their program is being sought. This facilitates academic oversight at the level of the program, and enables further discussion if the request reveals a cause for concern. The OGSR recognizes that faculty travel to conduct research, attend conferences, etc., and thus may not always be available to sign off directly, so there is a [Process for Proxy Signatures](#) in place for faculty, including the external member of a dissertation defense examination committee. Two important notes: First, except in truly extraordinary circumstances for which approval must be secured from the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research, the graduate student's signature must be original. Second, faculty members do not need to secure permission for a proxy in advance; the acceptance of proxy signatures has been a

long-standing practice in the OGSR. But they do need to send an email message to the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research that clearly states their approval (e.g., “The defense examination was successful.”) and permission for either the Director of Graduate Studies, the Chair, or the Program Director to sign off on their behalf.

#### **D. Procedures for Grievances Involving Graduate Students and Faculty**

Certain types of concerns or grievances fall under the purview of university-wide offices that must adhere to federal, state, and/or university regulations and policies. Examples include:

- Compliance and Equity Office: harassment, bias, and hate incidents; sexual violence and Title IX compliance; discrimination, harassment, and retaliation;
- W&M Police: immediate concerns of physical harm;
- Office of Sponsored Programs: research compliance;
- Community Values and Restorative Practices: violations of the Honor Code or the Student Code of Conduct;
- Student Accessibility Services: approved accommodations for students; and
- Care Support Services: medical leaves, medical withdrawals, and medical returns.

When a graduate student has a grievance or concern that falls in one of these domains, you should immediately direct them to the appropriate university office. Odds are good that you are not aware of all the regulations at stake and the protocols to be followed; so, hand such instances off to the experts. It helps to remind yourself that while you hold a doctorate, you are not a medical doctor and, more likely than not, you do not hold a law degree and are not familiar with federal, state, and university regulations governing such matters.

So what to do when a grievance does not rise to the level of a university office, but has more to do with bad behavior between two graduate students or between a graduate student and a faculty member? Unless your graduate program has an *approved* process in place for handling grievances in such instances (unlikely), here are the options:

The student(s) or faculty member involved should first try to resolve the issue amicably. A good resource for facilitating such conversations is the A&S Graduate Ombuds who is required to maintain confidentiality except in cases that fall under the domain of the Compliance and Equity Office (mandatory reporting for cases involving sexual violence/sexual assault) and the W&M Police (when there is imminent physical danger to the student or others). The Graduate

Ombuds can talk to each party separately or, if they are willing, convene a meeting for a conversation.

If the matter remains unresolved, either party may report the grievance to the program's Director of Graduate Studies. If the grievance involves the Director of Graduate Studies, then it should be reported to either the Chair or the Program Director in the academic unit that is home to the graduate student. This report should be made within two weeks of the beginning of the semester following the incident – or the last of several incidents – on which the grievance is based. The Director of Graduate Studies, Chair, or Program Director will meet with both parties to discuss the matter.

If either party is dissatisfied with the outcome of the discussion, the matter may be brought to the attention of the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research, who will inform the Chair or Program Director of the grievance. This step must be initiated within four weeks of the receipt of the initial grievance by the Director of Graduate Studies, Chair, or Program Director. The Dean of Graduate Studies & Research will discuss the grievance with both parties. If an agreement satisfactory to both parties can be reached, the Dean will record the agreement in writing and inform the Chair or Program Director.

If no agreement satisfactory to both parties is reached, and the dean feels the case to be without sufficient merit, the dean will inform the parties and require the matter to be dropped. Otherwise, within four weeks following the time the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research was notified by the Director of Graduate Studies, the Chair, or the Program Director, the dean will consult with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Sciences, who will decide whether or not to pursue the matter further following university procedures (i.e., the [Faculty Handbook](#)).

If you are involved at any point in a grievance process, proceed with caution to ensure that you and your faculty colleagues do not exceed your authority, and that you do not violate the student's rights. Graduate students are keenly aware of the power differential, even when faculty members are not. Further, in times of stress a graduate student is far more likely to view a faculty member as a figure of authority – and quite possibly as an adversary – rather than as a friend, whatever their good intent. When in doubt, consult widely before proceeding.

## **E. Avoiding Grievances: Be a Good Faculty Advisor**

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The preponderance of complaints – some of which do lead to formal grievance charges – are due to soured relationships between a student who must submit a dissertation or thesis to satisfy degree requirements and the student's faculty advisor or co-advisors. Complaints range from inattentive to irresponsible to abusive.

There are certainly cases where the student has set unrealistic expectations for themselves and their advisor(s). Situations like this can be avoided by managing

expectations from the outset, meeting with your advisee(s) on a regular basis, and being frank about their progress – or lack thereof.

But there are also cases where the complaints about the advisor hold up under further scrutiny:

- advisors who provide no guidance or input at all and leave the student to “figure it out for themselves”;
- advisors who fail to respond to repeated attempts by their advisee to contact them;
- advisors who promise to write letters of recommendation and then do not;
- advisors who sit on drafts of chapters for months and months and months – and months;
- advisors who refuse to sign off on an advisee’s dissertation or thesis, instead trying to squeeze more research results and publications out of the student before letting them go.

While the percentage of graduate faculty against whom such complaints are made is small, the fact that the complaints are recurring over years and multiple students is unacceptable. Do not be one of these advisors, because these behaviors are precisely what can lead to formal grievance complaints.

Graduate student training – especially Ph.D. student training – in most disciplines is similar to an apprenticeship: It is the advisor who has the most influence on the student’s professional development, and who carries the most responsibility for the timely completion of the student’s dissertation or thesis.

Advisor duties include regularly scheduled research meetings with the graduate student – on a weekly basis is wise – to ensure that the student is pursuing research paths that are valuable and rewarding. While securing research results is a prerequisite to the writing of the dissertation or thesis, training students to write well in order to be able to convincingly present their results to the community is integral to graduate advising. To this end, providing timely feedback to the student on a chapter-by-chapter basis, rather than insisting on a draft of the entire dissertation or thesis before providing feedback, is crucial for productivity and to ensure that the deadlines for degree completion are met in a timely fashion. If you have an advisee who has trouble writing well or who simply suffers from writer’s block, insist that they take advantage of the resources available to them on campus to improve their writing and to engage in write-ins with other students to help overcome their writer’s block.

Beyond technical training, the advisor plays a major role in communicating to the student the code of ethical conduct within their academic discipline. Each of the research graduate programs is required to engage in formal training for incoming

students; many in the sciences start with the CITI Online Training Modules. But this training requirement for incoming students should be simply the start of an ongoing conversation you have with your advisees about the ethical – and honorable – conduct of research in the discipline. Under stress, an anxious student might feel pressure to take shortcuts. You need to help your advisees understand that in research, their reputation is everything. Should they lose their reputation over an ethical violation, recovering it could be difficult – if not impossible. Honor and integrity are essential components of an atmosphere where advanced studies and research can flourish. W&M’s commitment to integrity in all academic and scholarly endeavors is embedded in the W&M Honor System, which applies to all members of the W&M community. Make sure that your advisees understand – and adhere to – these expectations.

The university provides professional development opportunities for graduate students: The Director of the A&S Graduate Center coordinates most of these opportunities, in addition to facilitating partnerships with other units on campus. The GRAD courses offered through the Graduate Center are one option. But the Writing Resource Center, the William & Mary Libraries, and the Cohen Career Center provide workshops, boot camps, write-ins, etc., that specifically focus on graduate students. Such events and opportunities are routinely advertised in the weekly newsletter issued by the OGSR during the regular academic year. Advisors should strongly encourage their students to take advantage of such opportunities. It is not enough to get your advisees to complete their degrees; your reputation depends, in part, on the next step they take in their professional career after they earn their doctorate or master’s. So, encourage your advisees to engage in opportunities at W&M that will strengthen their CVs or resumes, being mindful of their career aspirations and goals.

Attending and presenting work at professional conferences at the regional, national, or international levels is an important milestone for a graduate student. Preparing the student before attending a conference, especially if this is one of the first meetings that the student attends, is an important task for any advisor. Again, your reputation will be impacted by the impression your advisee makes when giving a talk, presenting a poster, participating on a panel, or simply interacting with your professional colleagues in social/networking situations. You want to be sure that the impressions your advisees make reflect well on you. Encouraging your advisees to actively participate at the annual A&S Graduate Research Symposium, by submitting a talk or poster presentation, is a great way to allow students to practice in a friendly professional setting before attending a regional, national, or international meeting. And if you have advisees who are to present at the Graduate Research Symposium, show up to their sessions! Not only is this a way for you to signal your support for their professional development, it provides you with an opportunity for constructive feedback on how to further strengthen their presentation. They will appreciate your support, and this modest investment of your time is likely to pay off in terms of improving your reputation as both a researcher and an advisor.