Policy Proposal for
Annual Assessment and Feedback (AAF) of Graduate Students on Progress Towards Degree

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 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. This is reflected in the results of the pertinent question in our doctoral exit survey. On average, 47% of our Ph.D. graduates (Fall 2012 to Summer 2017) indicate that they received an annual assessment. However, as shown in Figure 1, there is considerable variation among the schools and colleges on
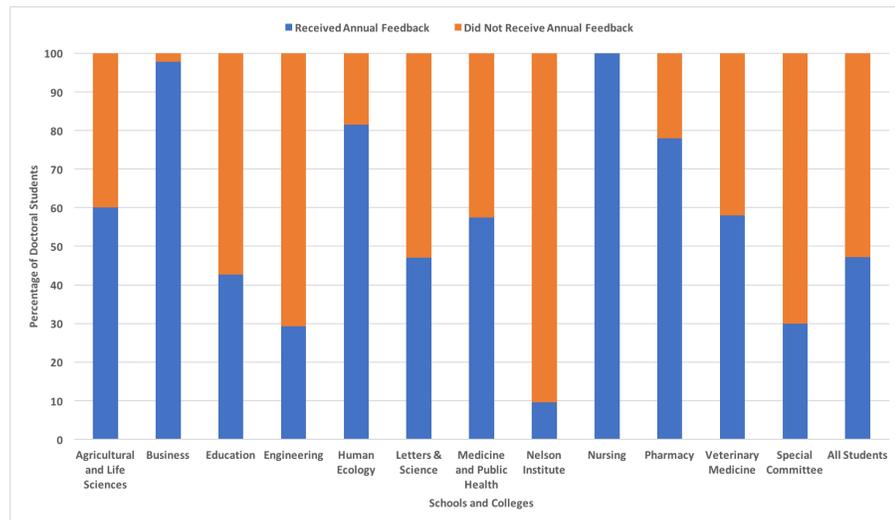

Figure 1: Percentage of PhD graduates in the doctoral exit surveys (2012-2017) who indicated that they receive formal annual assessment, divided based on respondents' school or college.

this aspect. 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

Studies such as the *Graduate Education Initiative* (10-year Mellon Foundation project) [(Ehrenberg, Zuckerman, Groen, Brucker, 2006] and Council of Graduate Schools 2010 report on *Ph.D. Completion and Attrition* have demonstrated some of these benefits. University of Wisconsin, Madison data that integrates information from the Doctoral Exit Surveys and Time of Degree information also shows slight decrease in the time to degree for students who say that they received annual feedback in their exit surveys, after controlling for program and other fixed effects. Such findings suggest that annual assessment and feedback are beneficial to a student's navigation of his/her graduate education.
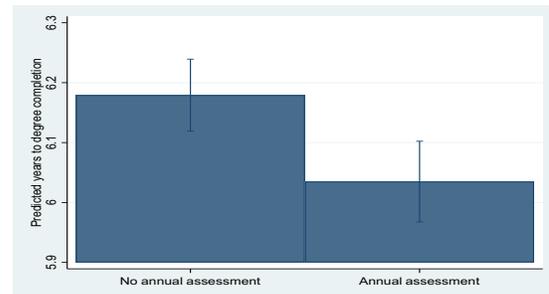

Figure 2: Reduction in time to degree among students who indicate they received annual assessment in the doctoral exit surveys (2012-2017) after controlling for program and other fixed effects. The number of students included in this plot is 3943 and error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Guiding Principles for the proposed Annual Assessment and Feedback (AAF) policy?

- AAF must work for all programs on campus (small and large). It should not add undue burden on the programs.
- Programs should have flexibility in implementing the policy.
- The assessment and feedback must include input from a program faculty member other than student's advisor(s).
- Professional and career development training should also be part of this annual review so that the students are better prepared for a career of their choice.

UW-Madison Graduate School AAF Policy Proposal

1. Effective Fall 2019, all graduate students past their second year of study must submit an annual progress report and receive a written feedback assessing their progress towards completing the degree. The format and nature of the report will be decided by the program and included in the graduate program handbook.

2. The written feedback to the student must include input from <u>at least two</u> graduate faculty members chosen by the program, at least one whom is <u>not an advisor or co-advisor</u> of the student. The written review should include feedback on the educational and research accomplishments, the milestones the student must complete, and an estimated timeline for completing the remaining activities (e.g., the timeline to become a dissertator or the timeline to defend the thesis).

3. The written feedback must also explicitly state whether the student is "*Making Satisfactory Progress Towards Degree*" or "*Not Making Satisfactory Progress Towards Degree*". For students who are not making satisfactory progress towards degree, the written feedback must include steps the student should take to make satisfactory progress and a timeline for doing so. Failure to make satisfactory progress may result in the student being placed on academic probation and/or even dismissed from the program for failure to make sufficient progress towards degree. Programs will develop policies for handling such situations, including an adequate appeal process for the student.

4. In addition, to the curricular and research milestones, the annual progress report submitted by the student should preferably include the professional and career development activities in which he/she participated. Use of Individual Development Plans (IDPs) may be encouraged. Similarly, the written review should preferably provide guidance on the professional and career development training for the student.

5. The Graduate School will develop a process to record and track the annual feedback provided to each student. Early in the Fall semester, the Graduate School will check whether each student met the program's AAF requirements in the immediate preceding year. An enrollment hold may be placed on student who did not submit an annual progress report.

6. Each program must archive all the annual progress reports submitted by a student and corresponding feedback given to the student.

UW-Madison Graduate School AAF Implementation Strategies

There are two components to AAF implementation: (i) software to track completion of AAF, and (ii) software to record and archive assessment & feedback.

Software to track completion of AAF. Graduate School will work with campus to add a field to Student Information System (SIS) to record and archive each year's final assessment, i.e., "Making Satisfactory Progress Towards Degree" or "Not Making Satisfactory Progress Towards Degree". Graduate School Tracking System (GSTS) (when fully developed and deployed) will have capabilities to view and track this new SIS field.

Software/tool to facilitate AAF. There are many options for software this category.
- *Option 1*: Graduate School provides a set of sample forms containing assessment and feedback questions. Programs may create their own forms or adapt one of these sample forms. The program maintains an archive of the signed and completed forms for each student in the program.
- *Option 2*: Graduate School provides a software that only has the following five capabilities: (i) student information, advisor information, program information, etc. are populated automatically from University records, (ii) student can upload a file documenting his/her activities, (iii) program/advisor can upload a file documenting the written feedback given to the student, (iv) program indicates whether the student is making or not making satisfactory progress towards degree, (v) an archive of previous years' documents and recommendations are available to the student, advisor, and the program through a portal. ***All programs must use this software for all their students***. If SIS is enhanced to allow uploading and archiving documents, we may be able to extend GSTS to implement this option.
- *Option 3*: Graduate School provides software that is similar to the current campus software called Performance Management and Development Program (PMDP). As in option 2, student information, advisor information, program information, etc. are populated automatically from University records. In addition, there are web forms that allow students to add activities and goals, and supplemental information in the form of a PDF file. Advisors have the capability to assess and provide feedback on the activities and goals entered by the student. Advisor/program may also attach a PDF file for additional feedback. The software also has a web form where the program/advisor indicates whether the student is making or not making satisfactory progress towards degree. As in option 2, an archive of previous years' assessment and feedback is available to the student, advisor, and the program through a portal. ***All programs must use this software for all their students, although they may simplify its use by relying only on uploading files and submitting recommendation***.

First year of implementation. If the AAF policy becomes effective in Fall 2019, students and program will have until August 2020 to meet the AAF requirements. Early in the Fall 2020 semester, the Graduate School will check whether each student met the program's AAF requirements in the preceding 2019-20 year. An enrollment hold for Spring 2021 may be placed on student who did not submit an annual progress report.

UW-Madison Graduate School AAF Examples

Examples of possible program policies that will meet Graduate School's AAF requirements.

1. Annual thesis committee reviews commonly used in many programs on campus will meet the Graduate School's AAF requirements if it includes the necessary written feedback.
2. Although Graduate School recommends a face-to-face discussion between the student and the faculty members involved in the review, it is not required. If the student's research advisor was part of the formal assessment, then he/she may be able to communicate the feedback as part of the regular interactions with the student.
3. The assessment committee need not be tailored to each student. A single committee that assesses the annual progress of all doctoral students in the program will also be adequate.
4. Example of the assessment form from University of California-Berkeley and Duke University's Department of Chemistry's annual assessment process are included to illustrate possible approaches.

In summary, for most students, a new process is not needed. They already receive good feedback from their advisors and/or other mentors on a regular basis. However, with over 5000 doctoral students on campus, there are several adverse situations each year that could be alleviated by this policy. The goal is to alleviate these situations, be constructive for all students, and not be burdensome on the programs.