Helping Students Experiencing Academic Difficulty

As graduate students progress in their program, sometimes difficulties arise. The following scenarios were created based on common challenges graduate students encounter. The purpose of this exercise is to work together to consider approaches to each scenario as well as share experiences and ideas for how to address each case, from your perspective as a Director of Graduate Studies (DGS).

Case Study #1A:

It is the 13th week of the fall semester and George, a first year, first-generation doctoral student in your department, is experiencing academic difficulties. He is enrolled in four classes (12 sh) and he has not been able to keep up with his coursework. He makes an appointment to meet with you to discuss his concerns that he anticipates failing grades in two of his classes. You know that the drop deadline has passed but he shares that would like to drop these two courses because receiving “F”s will negatively affect his GPA.

What questions do you have for George?

What options might you present to him? (for this semester and for next semester)?

If George is a grad assistant (research or teaching), would that change any of his or your considerations? Options? If so, how? If not, why or why not?

What campus resources might be helpful in this situation?

What mechanisms are in place in your department to document and/or monitor George’s continued academic progress.

Case Study #1B:

You are presented with the same general scenario as #1A—(a) late drop request(s) for anticipated “F” grades—except this time George provides medical documentation of a chronic health condition that he states has negatively affected his ability to complete his assignments and to go to class.

Would this additional information change your approach to the problem and if so, described the differences compared to #1A?
**Case Study #2:**

Erica is in her 8th year as a graduate student in your department. Erica's struggle with depression during her doctoral studies has slowed her progress considerably. Her research advisor is sympathetic but frustrated with her slow progress over many years. Erica is beyond the end of the 5 year post-comprehensive exam period and she has already had a one year extension because of her documented mental health issues. Her advisor indicates that he thinks Erica can finish her dissertation in one more year barring any additional delays and requests another one year extension.

**How would you handle this request for another one-year extension?**

**What would you communicate to the student and to the advisor?**

**What other questions might you ask the student and/or advisor?**

**What campus resources might be helpful?**

**Case Study #3**

Weiguo, a second year international doctoral student in your department, is not making satisfactory academic progress. He has been on academic probation for two semesters and his gpa has improved from 2.5 to 2.75 but at the end of the Graduate College probationary period is still below the minimum required 3.0 gpa. Weiguo pleads for an extension of his academic probation for one more semester because he does not want to have to leave the country and he believes that he can improve his gpa. His advisor is sympathetic but not particularly optimistic that Weiguo will be able to raise his gpa.

**What would you do in this situation?**

**What additional factors might you consider, e.g., Weiguo’s research, academic potential, courses with strong (poor) grades, ESL issues.**

**What would you communicate to the student and to the advisor?**

**What campus resources might be helpful?**
Case Study #4
Mary is in her third semester of a two-year program as a professional master's student. She makes an appointment to see you because she has been informed that she will be dismissed from the program at the end of the semester. Mary's advisor for her practicum project, successful completion of which is required of all students in your program, has just informed her that she will fail the project, and consequently will not be able to graduate. When you meet with Mary, she points out that the departmental graduate student handbook states that students will receive a written evaluation of their practicum progress at midterm, including feedback about how to improve if deficiencies are present. Mary says that she was not provided feedback at midsemester about any concerns for the quality of her project. Her advisor indicates that she was provided feedback several times over the course of the semester, which included clear instructions for recommended improvements, but that Mary has been unable to raise the quality of her performance.

How would you approach this situation?

What campus resources might be helpful?

Are there steps you can take to prevent something like this in the future? If so, what? If not, why not?
Resources for Helping Graduate Students Experiencing Academic Difficulty

DGS Meeting
February 8, 2017
Case Study #1A and #1B

Resources and Information

- Office of Graduate Inclusion (OGI) Graduate College
- Academic Affairs Office Graduate College
- Registrar’s Academic Deadlines
- Graduate College Policy on Dropping and Withdrawing (see sections J. and K.)
- Student Disability Services
- Graduate College Policy on Academic Probation (see sections A. and B.)
- Graduate College Policy on Continuous Registration Requirements (see section L.)
Case Study #2

Resources and Information

• Academic Affairs Office Graduate College
• Registrar’s Academic Deadlines (deposit deadlines)
• Semester-Contingent Extension Request
• Student Expectations Timeline
Case Study #3

Resources and Information

- Office of International Students and Scholars
- Academic Affairs Office Graduate College
- Graduate College Policy on Academic Probation
Case Study #4

Resources and Information

• Academic Affairs Office Graduate College

• Graduate College Policy on Dropping and Withdrawing (see sections J. and K.)

• Student Disability Services