

Graduate School Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

Topic: Five-Year and Ten-Year Enrollment Limit Procedures

Document #: GR-SOP-Admin-03

I. INTRODUCTION

There are specific limitations for the number of years a graduate student can be continuously enrolled and pursuing a graduate degree at University of Houston. In addition, doctoral students must apply for either a leave of absence or withdrawal for any discontinuation of enrollment in order to remain in good standing at the university. Students who do not return to an enrolled status at the end of an approved leave of absence or withdrawal are in violation of the continuous enrollment policy.

Note: If a student is not enrolled in classes for thirteen (13) months, the student is discontinued by an automated computer process. Some programs may require these discontinued students to reapply to the program, while others may opt to reinstate the student by petition.

The Graduate School will enforce the catalog policy limiting the length of enrollment for graduate students based on specific documented parameters. The catalog states the following:

- “Students who are enrolled as graduate students at the University of Houston must complete the master’s degree program within five years of the date of enrollment with a master’s degree objective at the University of Houston. Any exceptions to this policy will require a petition approved by the department advisor, chair, college dean, and the Graduate School. Transfer credit may not apply to any master’s degree if the course credit is more than five years old at commencement.
- Students who enroll as doctoral candidates must complete their degree requirements within 10 years of the date of first enrollment with a doctoral degree objective. Failure to comply will result in the candidate being ineligible for that doctoral degree.
- Doctoral students who fail to complete their dissertation within five years after completion of the comprehensive examination must retake the examination.
- With the exception of programs for which another termination date has been specified, no degree will be granted for a graduate program not completed within five years of its deletion from an issue of the University of Houston catalog.”

II. POLICY

- A. Academic Year and Compliance - An academic year is defined as three semesters (Fall, Spring, and Summer).

Therefore, a Master’s student who does not graduate before the end of the fifteenth (15th) consecutive semester is in violation of the 5-Year Enrollment Limit. Additionally, a Doctoral student who does not graduate before the end of the thirtieth (30th) consecutive semester is in violation of the 10-Year Enrollment Limit. Semesters are counted

regardless of enrollment; even if a student is not enrolled in a semester, it is still counted toward the limit. See Section III.B for exceptions.

- B. The enrollment limits begin with the student's first admit term for a graduate program. However, if a student first earned a Master's degree, then started enrollment for a Doctoral program, the student enrollment rule is ten (10) years (or thirty semesters) from the first semester of doctoral study.

III. GUIDELINES

- A. Communication of Enrollment Limits – At the end of each semester after this procedure is implemented, the Graduate School's Assistant Director for Graduation Programs & Student Records will send a spreadsheet to each college coordinator, listing all students in the specified college who have any Master's students within one (1) year of the enrollment limit of five years, and any Doctoral students within two (2) years of the enrollment limit of ten years.
- B. Warning Letter Process – Any graduate student on the aforementioned list from the Graduate School will receive a warning letter from the appropriate college dean's office (typically the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies) at that time.

The Graduate School must receive a copy of this letter. The contents of this warning letter will state the Five-Year and Ten-Year Enrollment Limit policy and inform the student that failure to complete the appropriate degree requirements by the end of the 15th/30th semester will make the student ineligible for further graduate study.

Note: No further action will be performed by the Graduate School.

- C. Extension request - If a student requests an exception to the 5/10 year enrollment limit, it must be based upon any of the 3 reasons listed below.

1. Withdrawals – A Medical or Administrative withdrawal from a semester can be a basis for appeal of the enrollment time limits. The [Medical/Administrative Withdrawal Request Form](#) for the student must already be on file addressing any specific semesters impacting enrollment, and the affected semesters can be omitted when calculating the enrollment limits. Such omission should be requested by petition and approved by the college Dean and the Dean of the Graduate School.

Note: Medical Withdrawals must include a doctor's documentation regarding the student's reason for withdrawal.

Note: Examples of Administrative withdrawal include, but are not limited to, any personal emergencies out of the student's control, primary caregiver for a seriously ill family member, death of immediate family member, military orders, and letters of legal detention.

2. Leaves of Absence – A doctoral student leave of absence from a semester does not automatically "stop the clock" on enrollment limits. Students requesting an extension of the 5/10 Year Enrollment Limits based upon a documented and approved leave of absence must provide a full explanation and include the original documentation granting the Leave of Absence.
3. Extenuating circumstances – Students who have experienced special circumstances beyond their control which delayed their progress towards the timely completion of their degree may petition for an extension of the 5/10 Year

Enrollment Limits. Such circumstances may include for example a change in faculty advisor.

- D. Extension Request Process – Any graduate student requesting an extension of the enrollment limit must file this request before the closing day of the student's penultimate semester within their 5/10 year enrollment limit. A student may request a one-time extension on the enrollment limits to the specific degree program. However, any extension can be approved for no more than one (1) academic year.

Extension requests must be submitted to the Graduate School using a [Graduate and Professional Student Petition](#), and must include the following documentation:

1. A statement from the student, explaining the need for additional time for the degree program.
2. Any documentation of medical/administrative withdrawal or leave of absence upon which the student is basing the request.
3. A statement from the Thesis/Dissertation advisor, supporting the student's ability to complete the degree requirements within a given period of time (one academic year or less).
4. A proposed timeline for the student's degree requirement completion.

- F. Enrollment Hold Process – Any graduate student found to be out of compliance with enrollment limits at the end of the semester will have an enrollment stop (hold) placed immediately on his/her account. The student will be ineligible to enroll in future semester of graduate study.

Dismissal Letter Process – The student's associate college dean will send a letter to the student, indicating that the student is no longer eligible to receive a degree from UH due to the Five-Year or Ten-Year Enrollment limit. Graduate students will be informed in the dismissal letter of their ability to file a grievance.

Note: The Graduate School must receive a copy of this dismissal letter.

Note: Graduate student grievances and extension requests must be initiated within thirty (30) days of receipt of the letter.

- G. Grievance Process – Dismissal grievances are governed using the documented grievance policy of the specific college and the University grievance policy as stated in the Graduate Catalog. Documented grounds for a grievance in the case of enrollment limits are any circumstances in which a student has documented evidence of withdrawal for a semester(s) that was counted toward their enrollment limit.

Documentation of a Successful Grievance – If the College approves a student for readmission to the program, full documentation must be provided to the University. This documentation should take the form of a [Graduate and Professional Student Petition](#), signed at all applicable college levels and imaged into the IRIS system. A plan for thesis/dissertation completion and any other supporting information must be included with the [Graduate and Professional Student Petition](#).

- H. Termination Process – If the graduate student does not appeal the dismissal decision or the appeal/extension process is denied, the student’s college is responsible for terminating the student via the [Graduate and Professional Student Petition](#) to the University Registrar through the IRIS system.

Note: The Graduate School does not approve termination General Petitions.

- I. Each 5-Year and 10-Year Enrollment Limit procedures follows this timeline:

Time Period	Activity	Responsible Party
Student is within warning period of enrollment limit (within one (1) year of the time limit for a Master’s degree or within two (2) years of the time limit for a doctoral degree)	A warning letter is generated to the student by the Associate Dean of the college.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Associate Dean of College (Signature) Copy of letter given to the Graduate School
Penultimate semester before student reaches 5-Year or 10-Year Enrollment limit	Graduate student can file an extension request with the College.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student Supporting College Thesis/Dissertation Advisor
After Student Has Reached 5-Year or 10-Year Enrollment Parameter at the end of the semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enrollment Stop (Hold) on student’s account Dismissal Letter generated to the student by the Associate Dean of the college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Associate Dean of College (Signature on letter) Copy of letter given to the Graduate School Copy of letter given to college coordinator Graduate School places Enrollment Stop
Before 30 Days Elapse After Dismissal Letter Receipt	Graduate student can file a dismissal grievance with the College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student Student’s Academic Advisor
If student does not submit an appeal/extension or the request is denied	College will terminate student using Graduate & Professional Student Petition sent to the University Registrar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College Applicable signature cycle on General Petition (no signature by Graduate School) University Registrar (receipt of General Petition)

IV. DOCUMENTATION

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- A. 5-Year Enrollment Limit or 10-Year Enrollment Limit Warning Letter
 - B. 5-Year Enrollment Limit or 10-Year Enrollment Limit Dismissal Letter
 - C. [Medical/Administrative Withdrawal Request Form](#) (for Administrative or Medical Use Only)
 - D. [Graduate and Professional Student Petition](#) and [petition instructions](#) (for Leave of Absence documentation and Return from Medical Withdrawal Only)
- V. APPROVAL

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Vice Provost and Dean, University of Houston Graduate School

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Approval Date

REVISION LOG

Revision Number	Approved Date	Description of Changes
1	04/07/2015	Initial edition
2	11/21/2018	New Dean's signature

