

A Call to Higher Education Administrators Regarding Student Educational Progress During COVID-19

April 22, 2020

The COVID-19 global pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for higher education. Institutions are faced with difficult decisions about how best to continue serving their educational and research missions, while also protecting individual and public health. Institutions moved at exceptional speed to close their campuses and move all instruction online. Some institutions have announced temporary adjustments to faculty review and reappointment processes, and the American Sociological Association (ASA), with dozens of other scholarly societies, encourages and supports these efforts. ASA, in collaboration with the scholarly societies listed below, also calls on institutions to make comparable temporary accommodations for students whose degree progress has been impacted by the pandemic.

Students are dealing with extraordinary disruptions to their education and facing great uncertainty about the future. Research projects have been postponed or halted; access to libraries, field sites, and archives is limited; and conference presentations have been cancelled. Teaching assistants and graduate instructors made rapid pedagogical shifts to online teaching. Students are also adjusting to online learning for their own coursework, and many students lack access to the technological resources they need. Further, graduating students will be entering a severely contracted job market. These disruptions are made all the more challenging by ongoing disruptions in other parts of students' lives. Many students are facing serious financial challenges and are engaged in increased caregiving activities.

In this context, we recommend that institutions make temporary adjustments to timelines for student progression and completion, including revising funding timelines as appropriate. For example, some institutions have given students more time to complete comprehensive exams and have provided extensions to funding eligibility. Accommodations like these ensure that students are not penalized for delays in their educational progress that are entirely outside of their control.

We also recommend adjusting expectations for learning and scholarship during this period. Institutions may consider alternate grading options or amended graduation requirements. For example, giving students the option to take courses pass/fail may remove unnecessary worry about grades and allow students to focus on their learning. Institutions may also commit to not penalizing students who in the future apply to their programs with pass-fail grades on their transcripts.

Tangible policy changes like these are important for students' educational progress and well-being, and we encourage departments and institutions to offer these and other protective measures that are appropriate for their students and context.

Students are integral to our campus, disciplinary, and intellectual communities. Like other members of our communities, they should receive appropriate accommodations to facilitate their ongoing scholarly success during this unparalleled situation. We encourage all institutions of higher education to "be flexible, accommodating, and humane in how they work with...students" during this period (quote from Teresa Ciabattari, ASA Director of Research, Professional Development, and Academic Affairs in InsideHigherEd on 4/7/20).

Endorsements:

African Studies Association
American Anthropological Association
American Educational Research Association
American Historical Association
American Musicological Society
American Philosophical Association
American Political Science Association
American Psychological Association
American Society for Theatre Research
American Studies Association
Association for Asian Studies
Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies
Association for Theatre in Higher Education
CAA
Consortium of Social Science Associations
German Studies Association
Law and Society Association
Middle East Studies Association
Modern Language Association
National Communication Association
National Council on Family Relations
National Council of Teachers of English
National Council on Public History
Rhetoric Society of America
Society for Cinema & Media Studies
Society for Classical Studies
Society for Ethnomusicology
Society for Music Theory
Society for Research in Child Development
Society of Architectural Historians
Society of Biblical Literature
Sociologists for Women in Society
The International Center of Medieval Art
World History Association