COVID-19 Graduate Student Forum FAQs

Unreasonable Course Work/Expectations

**Question/Concern:** Where do I direct my concerns about excessive work assignments and required class attendance during the COVID-19 transition?

**Answer:** Contact your graduate program director and express your concerns in a succinct, but respectful way. Be sure to provide concrete examples, including dates when the incidents transpired. If your graduate program director is unresponsive, contact your department chair first and then your associate dean.

Finance and Financial Aid

**Question/Concern:** My employer pays my tuition and the office closed. I am concerned about late fees being assessed to my account.

**Answer:** If the employer is paying ODU directly (i.e., we are billing them as a third-party payer), we would not charge late fees to the student if the payment were to come in late. For students who are paying ODU themselves, we would not assess late fees for summer charges on their account until August 15th at the earliest. No decision has been made about deferring summer late fee charges until September, at this time. Students should contact tuition@odu.edu or 757-683-3030 and ask for their student account processor to discuss specific challenges they have as the academic year moves forward.

**Question/Concern:** Will students be reimbursed for lab fees, student activity fees, health center fees, etc.?

**Answer:** Spring 2020 tuition and fees will not be reimbursed at this time. Fortunately, the core mission of the University, much of which is covered by tuition and fees, continues, as we have shifted to remote learning and services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Question/Concern:** How might faculty, staff, and students go about signing documents electronically, especially given the lack of in-person contact?

**Answer:** Documents can be signed electronically through use of the Adobe Suite after their conversion to a PDF file. A guide can be found [here](#). In addition, a helpful video can be found [here](#).

Military

**Question/Concern:** Is there a withdrawal policy for students who are being recalled to active duty before the semester’s end?
Answer: Yes, please see the “Sudden Withdrawal and Prolonged Absence Due to Military Mobilization Policy” in the Graduate Catalog, which provides for administrative withdrawals from coursework, along with tuition refunds, with proper documentation.

**Thesis/Dissertation/Presentation Requirements**

**Question/Concern:** How will thesis/dissertation and other graduation requirements be accommodated during the COVID-19 transition?

**Answer:** The Office of the University Registrar’s deadlines for the spring 2020 semester remain firmly in place. Whenever possible, thesis and dissertation defenses, committee meetings, and poster and oral presentations are being held via Zoom, teleconference, or some other electronic means. Students who find their degree completion delayed by the COVID-19 transition should discuss various options, including any financial implications, with their graduate program directors. These will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

**Spring and Summer Classes**

**Question/Concern:** Are graduate students allowed to withdraw from a class this spring if they feel it is necessary given current conditions?

**Answer:** Graduate students may withdraw from a class this semester; however, they should discuss this decision with their graduate program directors and/or thesis/dissertation directors before doing so. Those graduate students being supported on state-funded assistantships are required to be enrolled in at least nine hours, while those being supported by external grants through the Research Foundation, by Education Foundation funds, or by gift accounts may drop to six hours. Prior to withdrawing from a class, students may wish to consider using the limited P/F policy that went into effect for spring 2020. Students enrolled in professional degree areas governed by licensing bodies should discuss the implications of a P grade with their GPDs. N.B. International graduate students should discuss any withdrawals with the VISA office before making a decision.

**Question/Concern:** Is registration for summer classes open?

**Answer:** Yes. Registration is open for summer classes. Note that remote learning continues through summer. We encourage students to enroll now to ensure class needs are known and classes have enough students to avoid cancellation. Payment for summer classes is not due until July 6.

**Summer Assistantships (including for International Students)**

**Question/Concern:** What is the status of summer Teaching Assistantships if labs moving to remote learning require minimal instructional effort?

**Answer:** There is funding for teaching assistantships this summer. Check with your GPD about availability as they may be affected by remote learning requirements.
**Question/Concern:** Can international students’ assistantships be extended into the summer period if they cannot travel easily back home?

**Answer:** Regrettably, most assistantships are linked to an assignment in a semester. They are not extended automatically; rather, students may be eligible for new appointments in the next semester pending funding and task opportunity. Please consult with your graduate program director for possible assignments.

**Notary Public Services**

**Question/Concern:** Is there a notary public on campus who is available?

**Answer:** No. Closest to campus, the UPS store on 21st Street provides a notary service. Monarch Transit’s Ghent Route runs near to the store. For details, click [here](#).

**University Libraries**

**Question/Concern:** Will the library provide books or any other physical services during the period the University is teleworking and remote learning?

**Answer:** No. Physical books will not be available while the library space is closed to on-campus use. Requests for books through ILL will be fulfilled with digital copies if available.

**Questions/Concerns:** I have books that are due that belong to the library or were obtained through ILL. How do I return them?

**Answer:** The Library Staff discourages any return of books while the campus is following distancing protocols. However, in general and if necessary, books may be returned to the book drop on the east side of the building facing Gornto. However, they will not be checked in by staff until the University returns to on-site working. Note: Overdue fines for books checked out for the University are waived until the library re-opens. Overdue fines for ILL books and materials are also being waived until re-opening. The Library is also renewing some materials automatically for patrons and is reviewing how ILL may also be extended accordingly. More information on the library’s COVID-19 policies can be found [here](#).

**Questions/Concern:** Can I return books to a branch campus (e.g., Peninsula) instead of the main campus?

**Answer:** At this time, no. The only location to return books is the main campus (see above for location and policies).

**Graduation**

**Question/Concern:** Will there be a spring 2020 commencement ceremony?
Answer: Planning is underway to mark the May 2020 commencement in a virtual manner around the actual date. A postponed, in-person commencement ceremony is also under development for some time during the fall 2020 semester. More information will be disseminated as soon as details are finalized.

Research

Question/Concern: What research am I allowed to conduct while the University is teleworking and practicing physical distancing?

Answer: Please review the University’s Continuation of Research Activities guidelines here.

Helpful Tips

• CamScan and Genius Scan are free apps that can be used to take photos of documents to convert them into PDF files.

• The Graduate School and the Learning Center are hosting “Let’s Talk Grad Life Open Forums” for graduate students to collaborate during these challenging times. These are casual discussions for students to stay connected. Students can email graduateschool@odu.edu for Zoom links and passwords to attend.