

March 13, 2015

**JEFFERY C. GIBELING**Vice Provost - Graduate Education and  
Dean – Graduate Studies

Dear Dean Gibeling:

**RE: DRAFT Graduate Studies Policy – Leave Accommodation for Graduate Students**

The DRAFT Graduate Studies Policy – Leave Accommodation for Graduate Students was forwarded to all Davis Division of the Academic Senate standing committees including school and college Faculty Executive Committees. Responses were received from the Graduate Council; and the Committee on Planning and Budget (CPB) as well as the Faculty Executive Committees of the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES), College of Biological Sciences (CBS), College of Engineering (COE), College of Letters & Science: Math & Physical Sciences (CLS:MPS), Graduate School of Management (GSM), School of Medicine (SOM). The following position is based on the responses received.

The Academic Senate generally agrees with and supports the proposed DRAFT policy on Leave Accommodation for Graduate Students, recognizing both the relevant statutory and collective bargaining mandates and our desire to offer excellent studying and working conditions in order to recruit the best graduate students. Nonetheless, some important concerns emerged from the discussions in Senate bodies and should be addressed in tandem with policy implementation.

Fund sources

The application of the proposed policy to Graduate Student Researchers (GSRs) would impose burdens that could vary widely among Principal Investigators (PIs) for reasons beyond any individual PI's control. On a related topic, we note that clarification is needed as to how individual academic units will be accountable for expenses related to graduate student leaves – including the cost of replacement TA salaries – under the New Budget Model. Following the explicit recommendations of CAES, CBS, and the Graduate Council, the Senate recommends that the proposed Graduate Leave Accommodation Fund be expanded to cover all GSRs irrespective of whether extramural GSR funding sources allowed these paid leaves. Funding for such an expanded fund might come from an increase in the benefits rate charged to all external grants for GSRs. In addition, the Senate requests clarification regarding how departments will be expected to budget for replacing TAs who need leave accommodations. The Senate also joins College of Letters and Science FEC in recommending that the policy explicitly state whether departments, schools/colleges, or a central source will be expected to provide funds for substitute TA salaries and whether graduate students will be required to pay tuition during a leave and whether tuition during a leave must be paid by either by the graduate students, the GSR fund or TA fund.

Respondents note that in addition to external funding agency rules, the degree to which the draft policy would burden individual PIs would vary according to the size of a grant, the timelines for grant deliverables, the number of GSRs who need accommodations in a particular time frame, whether the nature of the research process precludes pauses in the work, and other circumstances beyond the PI's control. A central funding source financed by a higher benefit rate would create a manageable cost for all PIs, allowing those who need to offer accommodations to focus on finding appropriate substitute research assistance during a GSR's leave when grant deadlines or project requirements do not allow a hiatus in the work.

### Unintended consequences

The Senate joins GSM and CPB in noting that the concerns outlined above could lead to the unintended consequences that PIs and departments become reluctant to hire GSRs or TAs who are or appear likely to become pregnant or whose households include members at risk of requiring sustained care that would require a leave accommodation. This possibility lends urgency to the recommendation to ensure that a central funding source is adequate to respond to student needs – and to monitor graduate student employment patterns as the policy is implemented.

### Eligibility

The Senate notes that the realities of GSR employment may create some difficulties in determining which graduate students are eligible for leave and asks that the Graduate Division determine whether changes in graduate student hiring policy are needed. As CAES points out, some GSRs are hired at less than 50% time in order to receive a higher salary rate for the same dollar amount. Such GSRs will not meet the full-time enrollment eligibility threshold, and CAES recommends that graduate groups standardize GSR hiring practices or that the threshold be set at a dollar amount rather than a percent of appointment.

### Meeting student needs

The Senate asks for reconsideration of the requirement that leave for baby bonding be taken continuously rather than intermittently, since, as CAES points out, it may not be consistent with situations in which both parents share responsibility for baby care and bonding.

### Conflated issues

CPB asserts that in its distinctions between in absentia and filing fee status, the proposed policy (e.g. Section F Special Considerations) conflates academic considerations (whether a student has advanced to candidacy) with administration considerations (payment of benefits). Academic considerations ideally should not be codified in administrative policy.

### Related policies

Finally, the Senate joins Graduate Council in endorsing a “stop the clock” policy that would extend benchmark deadlines for students using family and medical leave and recommends that these policies be extended to all graduate students regardless of employment status.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important draft policy, which will improve or graduate students’ experience at Davis but must be implemented taking into account the issues raised in this consultation.

Sincerely,



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Davis Division of the Academic Senate  
Professor: Electrical and Computer Engineering