

SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS

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Cases of academic and/or research misconduct, discrimination or harassment, and inappropriate or unprofessional behavior are considered outside the boundaries of "satisfactory academic progress." Resources for these issues can be found here:

- The Graduate School Academic Integrity policy (<https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/tgs/academic-policies-procedures/academic-integrity/>)
- Office for Research Integrity (<https://www.researchintegrity.northwestern.edu/>)
- Office of Equity (<https://www.northwestern.edu/equal-opportunity-access/>)
- Student Handbook (<https://www.northwestern.edu/student-conduct/about-us/student-handbook/>)

Per federal regulation, recipients of federal financial aid must meet certain requirements (in addition to those listed below) to maintain satisfactory academic progress. Recipients of federal aid should be aware of the Federal Financial Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy (https://www.northwestern.edu/sfs/documents/publications_and_forms/SAPPolicyTGS.pdf).

Criteria for Satisfactory Academic Progress

The Graduate School sets the minimum standard for satisfactory academic progress. Programs may impose additional criteria beyond The Graduate School's for determining a student's academic standing.

There are three sets of criteria that The Graduate School takes into account in determining whether or not students are making satisfactory academic progress:

- **Grades and cumulative GPA:** A student whose overall (cumulative) grade average is below B (3.000 GPA) or who has more than three incomplete (Y or X) grades is not making satisfactory academic progress and will be placed on probation by The Graduate School. Individual programs may have stricter criteria and can determine independently from The Graduate School that a student is not meeting grade and/or cumulative GPA requirements in the program.
- **Milestone deadlines:** Doctoral students who have not been admitted to candidacy (have not passed the qualifying exam) by the end of their third year, or who have not completed the dissertation proposal (prospectus) by the end of the fourth year are not making satisfactory academic progress and will be placed on academic probation by The Graduate School. For students on an approved leave of absence (<https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/tgs/academic-policies-procedures/leaves-absence/>), the degree deadline will be

extended accordingly. Individual programs may have earlier deadlines or additional milestones and can determine independently from The Graduate School that a student is not making satisfactory progress toward milestones.

- **Program length:** Doctoral students must complete all requirements for the PhD within nine years of initial registration (<https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/tgs/academic-policies-procedures/phd-degree-requirements/>) in The Graduate School. Master's students must complete all requirements for the master's degree within five years of initial registration (<https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/tgs/academic-policies-procedures/masters-degree-requirements/>) in The Graduate School. For students on an approved leave of absence (<https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/tgs/academic-policies-procedures/leaves-absence/>), the degree deadline will be extended accordingly. Students who do not complete degree requirements by the established deadlines will be placed on academic probation by The Graduate School. Individual programs may have stricter criteria for timely degree completion and can determine independently from The Graduate School that a student is not making satisfactory progress toward degree completion.

Programs may have criteria beyond The Graduate School's criteria for determining a student's academic standing. Examples of these additional criteria could include, but are not limited to: unsatisfactory performance in classes, unsatisfactory performance on qualifying exams, unsatisfactory research progress, unsatisfactory progress in writing the dissertation, failure to communicate with program and/or adviser, failure to have a primary research adviser, or failure to meet requirements outlined in a program's handbook, annual progress communications or other direct communications to students from programs or advisers.

All programs must make clear and direct reference in their materials (in a printed handbook and/or on their website) to the policies detailed below, to the extent that they differ from The Graduate School's policies, and any additional program requirements.

Each student's academic progress must be reported at least annually by the student's program in writing to the student and to The Graduate School.

Failure to make satisfactory academic progress as determined by either The Graduate School or the program will result in probation or exclusion (dismissal).

The Graduate School's Academic Probation

When a student fails to meet any of the three sets of criteria established by The Graduate School for maintaining satisfactory academic progress, the student will be placed on probation by The Graduate School.

The Graduate School will notify the student in writing, along with the program's Director of Graduate Studies, and will be given two quarters (not including summer quarter) to resume satisfactory academic standing. The Graduate School notifies students of probation status on a quarterly basis (excluding summer).

During The Graduate School-imposed probationary period, students will remain eligible to receive federal and institutional assistance (except when they have exceeded their degree deadline). At the end of the probationary period, progress will be reviewed by The Graduate School. If a student does not re-establish satisfactory academic standing during the two probationary quarters and does not successfully petition for an

extension of the probationary period (p. 2), the student will become ineligible to receive financial aid and will be excluded (dismissed) from The Graduate School.

Petitioning The Graduate School for an Extension of the Probationary Period

Students who have not achieved The Graduate School's minimum GPA requirement or exceeded The Graduate School's milestones or degree deadlines and do not remediate within the two-quarter probationary period may petition The Graduate School for a one-time extension of the probation period.

Extensions of the probationary period will be granted only in exceptional circumstances when there are extraordinary reasons beyond the student's control that have been discussed in advance of the probation deadline between the student and their program (faculty adviser and Director of Graduate Studies).

The petition (<https://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/documents/policies/probation-extension-petition-form.pdf>) must include:

- The **specific length** of the extension including the exact date by which the requirement will be met. The extension time frame should be realistic, as there is no opportunity for additional extension of the probationary period.
- A **rationale** for the extension that explains the extraordinary reason(s) the requirement could not be met by the deadline or within the two-quarter probationary period. Detailed personal information is not required, but some explanation of the delay is necessary for The Graduate School to consider a petition.
- A detailed **timeline** for meeting the requirement including what work remains to be completed and the specific timeline, with proposed deadlines by which that work will be completed within the extension period.
- A detailed **letter of support** for the extension from the student's academic/research adviser that endorses the length of the extension, the timeline for meeting requirements, and addresses the feasibility of the plan.
- **Signatures** from the student's academic/research adviser and the Director of Graduate Studies.

The petition (<https://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/documents/policies/probation-extension-petition-form.pdf>) must be submitted to gradservices@northwestern.edu **seven (7) calendar days before the grading deadline of the last quarter of probation**, but no earlier than the first day of the last quarter of probation. Incomplete and/or late petitions will not be accepted.

Program Probation

As noted above, programs have additional criteria beyond The Graduate School's three sets of criteria for determining a student's academic standing. All programs must make clear and direct reference in their materials (in a printed handbook and/or on the web) to any additional criteria for determining a student's academic standing and to the consequences of failing to meet program-specific requirements.

When a program determines that a student is not making adequate academic progress, the program may place the student on probation in accordance with the probation process outlined in the program's handbook or in direct written communication to a student. Programs determine the length of the probationary period in accordance with their handbook or previous communication to a student. When a decision to

place a student on probation is made by the program, the student and The Graduate School must be notified in writing.

Exclusion (Dismissal)

A student who fails to resume satisfactory academic standing during the probationary period after being notified of placement on probation by The Graduate School will be excluded (dismissed) from The Graduate School. The exclusion decision is final when The Graduate School excludes a student who does not meet one or more of The Graduate School's three sets of criteria for satisfactory academic progress and who has failed to remediate within The Graduate School's probationary period. In such cases, there is no process for appeal and the exclusion will take effect immediately.

As noted above, programs have additional criteria beyond The Graduate School's three sets of criteria for determining a student's academic standing and may have their own probation process. A student who has failed to make satisfactory academic progress according to the program-specific criteria, or failed to remediate during a program-specific probation period, will be excluded (dismissed) by the program. A student can be excluded (dismissed) by a program when:

- the criteria for exclusion (dismissal) have been stated clearly by the program, either in a handbook or via direct written communication to a student, and have been disseminated to the students effectively, and
- the decision to exclude is made by the program faculty or a subset of faculty which includes the Director of Graduate Studies. No individual faculty member may exclude a student.

Funding will cease on the effective date of the exclusion unless other arrangements are made. When a student is excluded (dismissed) by the program, the student has an opportunity to appeal the exclusion decision (p. 2) to The Graduate School. When a student appeals the program's exclusion decision, the student remains an active student while the appeal is under review. In the event the appeal is denied, the exclusion takes effect after the appeal process has concluded.

Notification of Exclusion (Dismissal)

When The Graduate School determines that a student is to be excluded, both the program and the student will be informed in writing (email communication is considered to be "in writing") within ten business days of the determination.

Similarly, when a decision to exclude a student is made by the program, both the student and The Graduate School must be informed in writing within ten business days of the decision. The exclusion (dismissal) notification must include the effective date of the exclusion and a clear statement of the reason(s) for exclusion.

Appeal Process for Exclusions by Program

Students wishing to appeal a program's exclusion decision may appeal the final program exclusion decision to The Graduate School. To appeal a program decision, students must submit an appeal in writing to the attention of Student Services within ten calendar days of the date of the program's final written determination of exclusion to the student. The appeal must specify the basis for the appeal and include any supporting materials. If no appeal is filed within the ten-day appeal period, the program's decision becomes final and not subject to appeal.

The only grounds for appeal are as follows:

- New information discovered after the program's dismissal that could not have reasonably been available at the time of the dismissal and is of a nature that could materially change the outcome;
- Procedural errors within the program's dismissal process that may have substantially affected the fairness of the process;
- Program's decision to dismiss a student was manifestly contrary to the weight of the information presented (i.e., obviously unreasonable and unsupported by the great weight of information).

Appeals of program exclusions are reviewed by the Dean of The Graduate School (and/or the Dean's designate) who may request additional information from, or a meeting with, the student and/or program before making a final decision. If the Dean (or the Dean's designate) does not find that any of the aforementioned grounds for appeal are present, the Dean will uphold the outcome of the program. If the Dean (or the Dean's designate) finds that grounds for appeal are valid, they may amend the decision of the program. The Dean's decision will be made within 30 days of the submission of the appeal and will be communicated in writing to both the student and the program. When resolution cannot be achieved within 30 days, students and programs will be informed in writing of the delay and the final disposition will be achieved as quickly as possible. The Dean's decision is final.