25 March 2020

Dear graduate students, faculty, and graduate coordinators:

In response to additional measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 and Governor Inslee's "Stay Home; Stay Healthy" order, the Graduate School is issuing further guidance and policy changes. These policy changes are temporary, and only in effect until the end of the Spring 2020 interim exam period (extended to 29 May 2020). Please recognize that this guidance and related deadlines are subject to change in response to any up-dates to the "Stay Home" order. I realize that this memo might be long, but I think that it is important to start with an explanation of why the policies are in place so that the adaptations make more sense.

Review of changes announced on 18 March 2020
https://gradschool.wsu.edu/letter-dean-update-graduate-school-exam-policies/

1. Extending deadlines for degree completion.
The last date to complete a final defense for Spring 2020 graduates is 8 May.
The interim exam period is extended to 29 May.

2. Exam environments (master's and doctoral final exams and doctoral preliminary exams) .
Exams can be conducted exclusively online, *e.g.*, by Zoom with everyone participating from different places, with no faculty member in the room with the defending student. Similarly, the policy that the exam should take place "in an academic environment" is suspended.

The new changes described in this memo apply to exam-related signature requirements. For review of the "current" (as of yesterday) Graduate School policies on signatures, see the Graduate School Policies and Procedures manual.

- Chapter 1.E.6, at the end of this web page: https://gradschool.wsu.edu/chapter-one-e/
- Chapter 6H, first bullet: https://gradschool.wsu.edu/chapter-six-h/

These policies are consistent with the October 2019 revisions of BPPM 90.50, including the restriction clause regarding "academic documents held to a stricter standard for signatures as identified by a unit's customized e-signature policy and as posted on the college/area website." The Graduate School policies align with the best practices of many other peer institutions. That said, in these unprecedented times, there is the flexibility to adapt policies to manage situations that limit face-to-face interactions necessitated by social distancing and the governor's "Stay Home" order.

3. Signatures on ballots
Original, ink signatures have been required on the faculty ballots and balloting memos for final exams and preliminary doctoral exams; the primary purpose of this policy is to ensure the integrity of the exam results as reported to the Graduate School. Pre-COVID-19, this was not complicated, as most committee members were present in the same room with the student; if a committee member was attending remotely, s/he would have an electronic copy of the ballot to print, sign, scan and email to the Graduate School Liaison (GSL)—who is typically the chair of the student's advisory committee.

Effective 25 March, for exams occurring on or before 29 May 2020, the Graduate School will accept digitized or electronic signatures on ballots. As always, each member of the student's advisory committee and any eligible graduate faculty who have participated in the exam must complete a ballot.

When collecting paper ballots in the traditional manner is not practical, one of the following procedures must be employed:

1. Printing, signing, scanning and emailing the ballot to the GSL for the exam;
2. Printing, signing, taking an image with a smart phone and emailing to the GSL (if sent by text, there should be a follow-up email from the faculty member's wsu email account, confirming the content of the ballot);
3. Completing the ballot electronically, with a digitized signature (*e.g.* a jpg image of an original signature) and emailing the ballot to the GSL;
4. Completing the ballot with an electronic signature, using a program that tracks the signature process in a final audit report, and emailing the ballot and audit report to the GSL.

For all of the above procedures, the ballot must be signed and dated, then sent from the faculty member's wsu email account. The GSL is responsible for compiling all documents (ballots, emails accompanying the ballots, and the completed ballot memo) into a single packet and forwarding the packet electronically to the program's graduate coordinator and the Graduate School. It is essential that all of these documents are in one packet to prevent loss of documentation. Keep in mind that the Graduate School will be receiving paperwork from hundreds of exams in the next three months.

Note: ideally, the exam balloting process will eventually go online through myWSU. The Graduate School is working with central IT to implement this process, but the programming isn't in place yet.

4. Extension of the deadline to submit a completed signature page on cotton paper

First, why does the Graduate School require cotton pages and ink signatures? Like for ballots, the original ink signatures are to verify the integrity of the approval of the thesis or dissertation by the faculty advisory committee. The requirement for cotton pages is necessary to meet the archival policies and standards that the Graduate School is charged with regarding theses and dissertations. 100% cotton paper is not the only special paper that meets archival standards, but it is the only type of paper, because of the watermark, that allows the Graduate School staff to readily confirm that the paper meets archival standards.

There is a strong commitment from the Graduate School to maintain the requirement for a signature page, on cotton paper, with original ink signatures, because these pages are the only archived documentation of faculty approval of the student's thesis or dissertation. Dissertations are deposited with ProQuest, but there is no accompanying, completed signature page. However, it is recognized that completing this signature page within five business days becomes challenging when faculty and the defending student are not on campus and readily accessible for face-to-face interaction. Therefore, the Graduate School is extending the deadlines for submission of the completed signature page.

- *For any defenses scheduled between 9 March and 24 April 2020, the deadline for submission of the completed signature page is 8 May.* Earlier submission is encouraged, contingent upon whether the "Stay Home" order is in effect, and the Graduate School doors are open.
- *For exams scheduled between 27 April and 29 May, the deadline for submission of the completed signature page is extended to fifteen working days from the date of the student's successful defense.*

No request for an exception to policy is required. This extension only applies to the signature page and other archived cotton pages (title page and abstract pages). All other required

documents, including the electronic copy of the thesis or dissertation, must be submitted within five business days of the successful final defense.

There may be rare instances where it is impossible to obtain all original, ink signatures on the cotton pages in a timely manner. On a case-by-case basis, the Graduate School leadership will consider requests for exceptions to policy to accommodate these individual situations. Be aware that the standard for documentation to approve such exceptions will be high.

Contacting the Graduate School.
As always, feel free to reach out to the Graduate School if you have questions or concerns.

- Email: gradschool@wsu.edu
- Phone: 509-335-6424

Please check social media, Friday Focus and the Graduate School announcements page for the schedule of up-coming Zoom “Office hours with the Dean.”

Best regards,

LMG

Lisa M. Gloss
Dean of the Graduate School