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Research Guidance for Graduate Students and Advisors during Covid
- from the Research Workgroup, in collaboration with the Student Workgroup

We offer this guidance for graduate students, advisors, and other faculty and staff who support graduate students in their work across the COE. Our main goal in sharing these ideas is to inform and encourage us to be creative, flexible, and compassionate as our lives, careers, and research projects have been altered in profound ways during this pandemic. It is likely we will experience the effects of these shifts for years to come, although our focus here is on immediate strategies as well as strategies for the next 1-2 years. We recognize that our guidance is incomplete and see this as contributing to necessary conversations and future initiatives and policies that will support our graduate students in the difficult and uncertain time ahead.

Before sharing our guidance, it is important that we remember that the communities we partner with in research continue to teach, learn and live across the same systems as our original research plans or past research, just in very new ways in the context of pandemic. That is, all our past work informs the present and future. This is to say that it is likely many of the core research questions, rationales, and commitments of our research projects remain. Indeed, they may even be exacerbated or more pressing as we have seen inequalities across race, class, disability, language, incarceration, housing (and so on) further revealed during the pandemic. We also recognize, of course, there are myriad research methodologies employed by our community, and that some of our guidance may not apply to all to all methodologies. Please use only what is useful for your research approaches.

Research Milestones

While many of the issues central to our research remain, how we can undertake inquiry into those issues has shifted dramatically. This is particularly true for research methods that involve close, face-to-face work and relationships with families, young people, educators (and so on). This is where being creative, flexible, and compassionate will be key in the time ahead. In all cases, scaling back, shifting data collection (and possibly what data we generate), and extending timelines need to be on the table in conversations between graduate students and those advising them on their research.

For Dissertation Studies and Master's Theses and Projects (as well as R&I projects), we suggest different possible approaches depending on where you are in the work. *If you are in the design phase (proposing a study), we can assume that most in-person data collection will not be likely for the next several months.* We suggest thinking of various

possibilities and remaining flexible. The following advice, which we support, was circulating on social media (we cannot at present locate the original author—please let us know if anyone finds the person to cite).

It involves coming up with three dissertation/thesis plans:

1. “Normal” life plan (assuming things are opening up in the next handful of months)
2. Significantly restricted/delayed data gathering (Plan 1 but much later or scaled back)
3. A dissertation that is possible without face-to-face engagement — using digital / virtual research and collaboration methods, secondary data analysis [from databases, COE faculty projects, public sources], conceptual inquiry, [meta-analyses](#), etc. UW Libraries provide [a guide to national and international databases](#) that you might access for research data, and [Deborah Pierce](#), the librarian working with our College, can provide additional assistance.

In considering any plan, but especially plans #1 and #2, we should be aware that even once our schools and communities reopen, research access to classrooms, teachers, leaders, and other community members may be quite limited due to well-founded concerns about hygiene, safety, and capacity for research participation for schools, teachers, students, and communities. It may be that a study can be designed to largely rely on the sort of data in #3 but committees and students remain prepared to shift if conditions change (this sort of iterative and responsive flexibility is generally accepted in many qualitative research traditions anyway, but better designing for it seems prudent). It is also possible that entirely new spaces for related research may open up as educators, communities, families, and researchers (often in collaboration) create online and remote learning spaces that may be in line with our expertise, research interests, and community-anchored commitments.

If you are in the midst of the study, it is important to think about what data you have already gathered and whether it is possible to write-up (even a scaled back version) of the project from what you have. This is where those advising students and those serving on student committees need to be especially open to projects being different and most likely scaled-back than originally planned. We know many of us are taking these approaches to our teaching this quarter. Remembering that it is possible to do good work—just less of it and sometimes with more time to complete it—will serve us all well.

If you are in the analysis and/or write-up phase of a study (e.g., R&I, Dissertation, Thesis) it may be that you need more time to complete the analysis or writing. In general, it seems that all of us are having some challenges writing in the current moment. While this may change going forward, assuming and being open to more time to complete writing tasks is important (sometimes additional weeks or months may be needed). This general guidance on allowing more time should carry across the work graduate students do across the COE (working on projects, as RA's etc.) This includes milestones like General Exams, which may need to be extended in time and shortened in length, or possibly taken over the summer or other creative strategies depending on student needs.

Funding, Degree Completion, Job Market

Another area to consider is funding and research support, which is connected to job markets and completion of degrees, as well as future admissions. In general, it is vital that those funding graduate students (e.g., through research projects, teaching assistantships) maintain whatever funding was promised/planned before the pandemic. Even as faculty research is of course similarly impacted, supporting our graduate students must remain a priority. For graduate student RAs, this might mean faculty being creative in designing/redesigning their funded research projects in the ways listed for dissertations and theses above. More broadly, as a College, our commitment should be to continued support for the graduate students working in community with us now. Given that the academic job market (and other related job markets) will be virtually non-existent next year and possibly the following year, it will be important for students and advisors to think carefully about the trajectory and timing of degree completion. It may be prudent to consider the possibility of delaying graduation a year for doctoral students planning to graduate in 2021. Given that we all may need more time to complete and redesign work, such extensions seem reasonable and needed in a variety of ways. The COE, the University, as well as individual advisors and projects need to think about how to extend time-to-degree and, crucially, funding and other benefits to current doctoral students for at least an additional year. This may mean we should consider not accepting (or accepting fewer) doctoral (and in some cases master's) students into certain programs or onto projects, focusing instead on those students who are already in community with us at the UW COE.

As you may know, The American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Spencer Foundation recently announced they are conducting “a study of the impact of COVID-19 on early career scholars and graduate students in education research—the most professionally vulnerable of the field. The project, '[Centering the Needs of Early Career Scholars and Graduate Students in Education Research: An AERA-Spencer Inquiry into the COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts](#),’ will assess the pressing needs facing these individuals and what might be important in a ‘recovery plan’ for addressing them:

“The study will broadly examine the effects of COVID-19 on current employment or academic situations and career advancement; financial strains and their impact on academic/career progress; the challenges of navigating professional and personal lives; how teaching, mentoring, and advising roles are being transformed; the impact on areas of research and the availability of data; the ability to continue with meaningful research; and the forms of support—social and material—that will enable moving forward in the face of substantially altered and pernicious circumstances” (see the linked press release above for a full description).

Consistent with this stance, AERA is launching a [Virtual Research Learning Series](#), a set of webinars scheduled between mid-May and mid-September, 2020, that address topics ranging from writing for publication to quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

It is in this spirit of supporting graduate students, who are deeply valued members of our community and who will continue to contribute to transforming our educational systems toward justice and equity, that we offer these suggestions to begin our conversation. We

know other working groups are drawing on the expertise of students and other members of our communities toward addressing similar and related issues. We see these efforts as collective and are hopeful our thinking here can be useful in moving in a good direction as we support graduate students in their vital research and in launching their important careers.

Further reading:

[Centering the Needs of Early Career Scholars and Graduate Students in Education](#)

[Research: An AERA-Spencer Inquiry into the COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts](#)

[Spencer Foundation Open Letter on Effects of Covid-19](#)

[Supporting Faculty and their Careers During and After Covid](#)