

The UAF Faculty Senate passed the following at Meeting #175, May 2, 2011:

RESOLUTION:

The UAF Faculty Senate recommends the Office of International Programs (OIP), in consultation with national immigration legal counsel, review UAF's interpretation of the "completion date" for graduate programs used for international students, and revise the "completion date" definition to enable students to complete all program requirements before losing F-1 status.

Motivation and background

- According to U.S. immigration rules students in F-1 status have to leave the country within 2 months of the expiration of their visa, or the end date of their graduate program, whichever comes first. Currently UAF considers students in F-1 status to have completed their graduate program ten days after the date of their defense or after the last in-person meeting of a required course.
- In contrast the graduate program for non-foreign students terminates at the end of the semester during which the students have fully met all UAF graduate school requirements.
- Students often do not take in-person coursework during the semester they finish their degree, instead taking 698 (non-thesis research project) or 699 (thesis/dissertation, preparing for scholarly or research activity) which does not extend their visa eligibility under the current definition.
- Typically, a students' thesis is not 100% complete at the date of the defense. The graduate committee recommends some amount of additional work, such as collecting supplementary data or refining the existing data analysis.
- This additional post-defense work often requires access to specialized scientific instrumentation, computer software/hardware, sample collections, and datasets that are not accessible from another location.
- Due to the current definition a student can no longer be paid ten days after his/her defense. While this can be overcome by application for Optional Practical Training (OPT), the process of securing F-1 OPT status requires significant advance planning and expenditure of both student and university resources.
- Many universities use a more student-friendly definition of the "completion date," such as the end of the semester in which the student defends the thesis, the date when all requirements are fulfilled or the date of graduation and degree conferral. [See the appendix for examples.]
- Immigration law is complex and contains many ambiguous regulations. Lawyers often specialize in the field of immigration law and dedicate their whole career to serving clients in this area.
- Seeking consultation from a lawyer specializing in immigration law would aid UAF in revising its definition of the "completion date" for graduate students and ensure that U.S. immigration law is complied with.


President, UAF Faculty Senate

2 May 2011
Date

Appendix:

What Constitutes 'Graduate Program Completion Date' for International Students at some other US Universities? (compiled on: April 6, 2011)

UAFs definition: "If you are graduating this semester and you are enrolled in classes that end in May, your program completion date will be May 12 - the last day of final exams. If you are a graduate student and enrolled in only thesis or research credits, your program completion date will be your date of project or thesis defense plus an additional 2 weeks. If you are employed on a Research or Teaching Assistantship, employment authorization ends effective with the program completion date ~ not the end of the semester ~ unless you have applied for and received your OPT card (see below)."
<http://www.uaf.edu/oip/news-and-announcements-1/information-and-reminders/>

University of Arizona: "For graduate students, a true completion date is typically the submission date of final thesis/dissertation draft (and allowable time for revisions) or the comprehensive exam date if no thesis/dissertation is required (completion date can be any date during the calendar year)"
<http://internationalstudents.arizona.edu/pageview.aspx?id=19217>

Boston University: "Graduate Students in Thesis or Dissertation Programs - Your official date of completion will be the day of the graduation ceremony of the semester in which submit your thesis/dissertation. You must be enrolled in that semester, as well. Please note that all students who will complete and submit their thesis/dissertation during the summer must be registered as continuing students during the summer semester to maintain lawful F-1 status."
<http://www.bu.edu/isso/students/prospective/immigration/fl/legal.html>

University of California Berkeley: "Your completion date is the day on which all degree requirements are fulfilled, such as filing the thesis or dissertation in the Graduate Division."

Johns Hopkins University: "The University considers the date that President Daniels signs the official degree roster (which can only be done after the Graduate Board has signed off on it) as the student's completion date. This is the date referenced for University processes, community wide."
<http://semps.ses.hsa.jhu.edu/stujob/employer.cfm?pid=4&grad=1&bk=emp>

NC State University: "For Master's thesis and Ph.D. students, program completion is defined by OIS for non-immigrant status-related benefits purposes as successful defense and the subsequent draft submission, provided that a student is registered at the time of defense".
<http://www.ncsu.edu/ois/current/completion.php>

Minnesota State University: "Graduate students completion date is the day on which all degree requirements are fulfilled, such as filing your thesis or dissertation in Graduate Programs."
<http://www.mnstate.edu/intl/opt.cfm>

Virginia Tech Graduate School: "International students who have some work remaining on their thesis or dissertation and who plan to defend any time during the semester are required to enroll for 3 credit hours. The 3-hour enrollment documents your need to be physically present on campus for the semester, utilizing university resources and pursuing degree requirements (which are required for continued eligibility for F-1/J-1 status)."

Washington University in St. Louis: "This completion of studies date is the date a student completes all requirements for his/her specific degree program, not necessarily the official commencement date established by the institution." <http://oisshome.wustl.edu/students/current/RegResp/F1OPT>