**Graduate Students – FAQs**

Please find below a list of frequently asked questions relevant to the impact of the Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic on graduate students. We also encourage you to review the information available on our [COVID-19 information webpage](https://www2.gmu.edu/coronavirus), and information on student success on the [University Life webpage](https://ulife.gmu.edu/coronavirus-2/).

**Will the Office of Graduate Education remain open during the spring 2020 semester?**

Yes. The Office of Graduate Education, is committed to helping students continue to make progress toward their degrees while safeguarding their health. Staff will work remotely, and can be reached at provgrad@gmu.edu during normal business hours (8 a.m. – 5 p.m., Mon-Fri). You may also schedule a remote meeting with our staff by emailing a request to provgrad@gmu.edu.

**What arrangements are being made for international students?**

For any questions related to international students, please visit [Mason’s OIPS webpage](https://oips.gmu.edu/coronavirus/).

**What arrangements are being made for Graduate Assistants and Graduate Lecturers?**

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs), and Graduate Professional Assistants (GPAs), and Graduate Lecturers (GLs) are expected to continue their responsibilities, in most cases by working remotely. Any questions about how to deliver your particular assistantship and/or lectureship responsibilities while protecting your health and that of those around you should be directed to your supervising faculty member in consultation with your graduate program director. Similar arrangements are being made for summer assistantships. If your assistantship responsibilities are happening outside the US, contact your supervising faculty member to receive guidance on your individual situation.

**if I am unable to fulfill my duties as a Graduate Assistant or Lecturer due to becoming ill with COVID-19 or caring for a family member who is being treated for the virus.**

Graduate Assistants (GTA, GRA, or GPA) or Graduate Lecturers may be eligible to receive Public Health Emergency Leave (PHEL) provided by the Commonwealth of Virginia. For more information on PHEL, please see [guidance](https://hr.gmu.edu/benefits/leave/PublicHealthEmergencyLeave%28PHEL%29.pdf) provided by Human Resources.

**What if I need emergency funding due to the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak?**

University Life has established a process for students seeking temporary, short-term, financial assistance during this time. For more information regarding emergency funding for students, please see [guidance](https://ulife.gmu.edu/student-emergency-assistance-funding/) provided by University Life.

**Will graduate students who need to conduct experiments can access campus facilities?**

Only graduate students engaged in activities designated “critical” will be permitted to conduct experiments at campus or at off-campus clinical and field settings after March 20. Critical activities are those that include animal husbandry, research related to COVID-19, and activities essential to the maintenance of critical equipment and materials. Graduate students are not permitted to conduct research on campus after March 20, 2020 unless their activities have been designated “critical” by the vice president for research, innovation and economic impact.

**My research involves interaction with human subjects, including conducting interviews and physical examinations. Will I be able to continue?**

Research involving human subjects that can be done remotely (e.g. administering electronic surveys) may continue consistent with approved IRB protocols. In-person interviews/interactions are prohibited.

**My research involves travel (domestic or international). Will I be able to continue?**

Mason has suspended all university-sponsored and/or university-related domestic and international travel for students, faculty and staff until further notice. Please note that travel for thesis/dissertation research/fieldwork is considered “university related” regardless of the source of funding. If your travel is supported by the University, please contact provgrad@gmu.edu.

**Am I allowed to continue in my internship, practicum or clinical site?**

In-person participation should be based upon the policies of the host site and the ability to practice appropriate safety precautions. After discussing with your faculty/staff coordinator, if the host site remains open and safety precautions are adequate you can continue with your field placement.

**What happens if my internship, student teaching, or other field work site is closed?**

Academic units are working on alternative means of acquiring insights that normally would be gained experientially. Students should consult with their supervising faculty or staff member regarding your individual situations.

**For all academic actions conducted to comply with graduate policies, can graduate students submit forms electronically?**

Graduate students can submit forms electronically. Signatures of committee members and program officials can be collected electronically and documents can be forwarded to the appropriate office(s) for review and recording. [University Dissertation & Thesis Services (UDTS)](http://library.gmu.edu/udts) is also accepting electronic submissions of all [Final Submission materials.](http://library.gmu.edu/udts/process#step5) All signatures, including [Signature Sheets](http://library.gmu.edu/udts/SignatureSheets) and [Embargo Request Forms](http://library.gmu.edu/udts/resources#forms) can be digital, as long as they are actual signatures (as opposed to a text box stating “I certify that this is correct” or something similar).

**What should we do about scheduling and holding required milestone examinations (Preliminary Exam and Thesis/Dissertation Defense)?**

Consistent with the university’s commitment to support online learning, your advisory committee and program will make preliminary or thesis/dissertation defense exams available through web-based conferencing platforms. Instructors are not permitted to conduct these exams or any other exams on campus at this time. If there are well-founded concerns that will prevent you from holding your defense remotely, you should work with your committee chair to mitigate such issues.

**I anticipate defending my dissertation this semester. Will commencement be held in May?**

No decision has been made yet regarding spring commencement. Please continue to monitor [COVID-19 information webpage](https://www2.gmu.edu/coronavirus) for more information.

**What will happen to the graduate student events scheduled through the end of the year?**

Most graduate education events, including Graduate Education Week, have been canceled through the end of the semester. Some events may be rescheduled, but will likely be provided virtually. Graduate Student Life has made updates to their events that can be found [here](https://gradlife.gmu.edu/). Please stay tuned for future announcements and be sure to follow us on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/Mason_GradEd) for live updates.

**I am currently conducting my graduate research outside the US. Am I required to return?**

If you are in your country of permanent residence, you should remain in place. If you are in a country you are not a resident of, Mason’s Travel Abroad policy only orders mandatory recalls for students abroad when the State Department Travel Advisory level for the country is a 4. For countries at State Department Level 1-3, it is the student’s decision whether to remain and shelter in place or return to the US or home country. As an emergency planning precaution, coming home among a network of friends and family can help if conditions deteriorate, so our recommendation would be to return. As you consider your next steps, consider your current access to health care, current travel limitations, as well as the risks of the actual and future travel and quarantine requirements.