

Graduate School Town Hall Q&A

October 29, 2020

We have collected questions received before and during last week's Graduate School Town Hall, as well as answers to those questions, for your review. Please note that in some cases the question was answered on video as well, and that in some cases we were able to provide additional links and information after the recording. If you have additional questions or concerns, please email gradschool@luc.edu.

SPRING 2021 PLANS

Q1: Will graduate assistants be required to teach on-campus in the spring given the email that we were sent yesterday?//What steps is the graduate school taking to ensure graduate students have full capacity to decline teaching or TA-ing in person next semester?// What safe guards are there against retaliation if students decline to be in person? How will that be addressed if it happens?

The university announced tentative plans for Spring in the email you have referred to (<https://www.luc.edu/coronavirus/previousmessages/102820-plansforspring2021.shtm>). We do not anticipate a large number of teaching assistants will be assigned to classes on campus, but we await further word on which classes will be on campus and who would be impacted. There is form available for TAs to request accommodation that will be distributed in the weekly Graduate School Announcements and is available on the [Graduate School's Academic Policies](#) website (under Reasonable Accommodations for Graduate Assistants) so that qualified graduate students will not have to serve on campus, and we encourage TAs to contact us once class assignments are made if they have concerns. In any situation where a student believes they are being retaliated against due to a request for this kind of accommodation, the Graduate School will investigate and will take action accordingly.

Q2: What is the plan if a graduate student gets COVID while teaching?

Dean Barman is currently pursuing approval of a sick leave policy for graduate assistants, and we will make that information available as soon as possible.

Q3: Will next semester be offered via online given the COVID situation?

The majority of classes will still be online in Spring term. Please see <https://www.luc.edu/coronavirus/previousmessages/102820-plansforspring2021.shtm> for information. Courses that are going to be made available in person will be offered in a hybrid model for students who choose not to be on campus.

Q4: For spring semester is there a way to ensure that graduate student instructors are not overloaded as they were this semester, with some theology graduate students teaching up to 45 students, which is an extensive load for *students* attempting to finish their dissertations.

We are dismayed to hear that students were put in this position, particularly as course assistants were made available for Fall semester. We encourage all students who have concerns about their teaching workload to contact their Graduate Program Director regarding additional assistance.

Q5: It is my understanding that building access has been restricted at the LSC. Will this policy be modified for the Spring 2021 semester?

Plans for campus reopening have not been finalized. We encourage you to keep an eye on COVID email announcements and/or the main university COVID information website https://www.luc.edu/coronavirus/?utm_source=luchomebanner&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=coronavirus

COVID-RELATED DELAYS

Q6: I'd like to ask, are there any plans to support graduate students whose research progress is delayed due to COVID? Like Master students who need more time to complete their thesis research because COVID presented several complications. Are there talks about lowering tuition (or even tuition waiver) to keep them in the system after they completed course requirements?

We have a generous extension policy available for students who anticipate delays in their degree completion, especially in these times when research has been impacted by COVID. Extensions can be requested in GSPS. PhD students have 8 years to complete (or 6 years post-master's degree) and master's degree students have 5 years. Past that an extension is required.

For students who are in the process of completing their thesis or dissertation, they are enrolled in a supervision course to maintain active status in the Graduate School. Supervision courses are fee-based (rather than tuition per credit hour), and cost significantly less than the traditional course. <https://www.luc.edu/bursar/tuitionfees/current/graduate-cas/>.

Q7: Are there resources or extended deadlines for students who test positive for COVID-19 and whose symptoms make it physically (or otherwise) difficult for them to continue their work?

Please contact your Graduate Program Director for assistance navigating extensions or other assistance with coursework and/or research delays. You are also always welcome to contact Graduate School staff by email (gradschool@luc.edu) or to schedule an appointment for Virtual Office Hours through the link at luc.edu/gradschool.

STIPENDS/FINANCIAL CONCERNS

Q8: Many students expressed concerns regarding student financial distress during COVID. What is the Graduate School and the university doing to help these students?

At present, as was just discussed, the university has a few options available for graduate students in financial distress. In terms of the Graduate School, the impact of COVID-19 on the university's budget resulted in a \$90 million shortfall and the university has implemented a hiring freeze, instituted furloughs and layoffs, and halved the budget of many university units, including that of the Graduate School. The university can only make up this shortfall in income by cutting its budget; it does not have access to other funding sources. Drawing from the university endowment is very difficult given that most donor gifts come with restrictions on use and that the university is limited, coupled with federal tax law that discourages the amount that Loyola can draw from its endowment. In consequence, neither the university nor the Graduate School has additional discretionary funds to be used to assist students in financial distress, however we are working to advocate for graduate students in the way that existing hardship funding for our graduate students is distributed.

Q9: When should graduate assistants/graduate workers expect a raise in stipends? What about summer funding?/ What is going to be done to address graduate student stipends? How will this information be communicated to students who are struggling financially currently?

The Provost has recognized the necessity of an increase to the LSC stipend amount for a 9-month stipend. Unfortunately, discussion around how to proceed with changes to existing funding cannot take place until after the full effect of COVID-19 over not just this semester but the next several semesters on the university budget has been established.

Q10: As PhD students, our stipend is not considered scholarship or award from The Graduate School. As a result, we are forced to file our assistantships as taxable income and have to pay taxes on our 'income' as well as health and dental insurance included in our yearly award, yet we are not labeled as workers or teachers. Is there a way to reconcile this, or entertain navigating this differently?/ Can you expand more on the university's position that graduate students are fundamentally "students"? If that were the case, then why are students being taxed on their stipend as opposed to treating our stipends as "scholarships"?

We are actively working with Human Resources for an answer to your question. Typically, all funding with a service requirement is taxable according to federal regulations, and the university must abide by tax policies. But we are investigating all options and hope to have additional information in the near future.

Q11: How can TA students access the \$50/month stipend for technology?

You can find information on this on the Graduate School website's Financial Assistance and Funding page, under COVID-Related Financial Assistance. You can also email Emily Forestieri at gradschool@luc.edu for more information on this.

Q12: Will the university be recognizing the graduate student worker's union?

The university's position on this is that graduate students who are engaged in teaching and research as part of their academic program are fundamentally students and, therefore, do not qualify as "employees" within the meaning of the National Labor Relations Act. Consistent with this position, shared by many the higher education community, we maintain they are not eligible for union representation. That said, the Graduate School would like to note that we are not turning a deaf ear to the concerns expressed by representatives in favor of a union, and Dean Barman is holding ongoing meetings met with some of those students in an effort to make headway on critical areas of concern to all graduate students.

Q13: I will run out of funding in May 2021. The LUC website only shows graduate school fellowships for 2020-2021. Will these be available for the 2021-22 school year?

At this time, the Graduate School has no reason to believe that fellowships will be decreased in the coming academic years. In fact, we are continuously working on advocate for additional fellowships and we are committed to participating in the Diversifying Faculty in Illinois fellowship program starting next Fall for continuing PhD students.

ANTI-RACISM & DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Q14: How specifically do you plan on addressing OurStreets LUC's list of demands?

[Answered by Robyn Mallett, Chair, Anti-racism Initiative]

If you compare the OurStreets LUC list to the Anti-Racism Initiative goals and strategies listed here: <https://www.luc.edu/academicaffairs/antiracisminitiative/> you will find that the BCC recommendations are being addressed. In fact, we are exceeding their recommendations in a number of ways. President Rooney is meeting with student leaders on a regular basis to ensure that she (and we) have an up to date understanding of student needs.

Please note that we received several questions and notes of concern regarding staff in other offices on campus. The Graduate School is not in a position to comment on these matters.

Q15: Is there a constituency group for Latinx grad students?

We have various community and student groups. You can find the information here: <https://www.luc.edu/gradschool/diversityequityinclusion/resources/> To our knowledge there is not a Latinx graduate student group at present, though the AP for Academic Diversity has expressed a desire to support the building of such an organization. Please do email Quortne Hutchings, Diversity Coordinator, at qhutchings@luc.edu for more information.

FURLOUGHS & LAYOFFS

Q16: How is Loyola working to preserve the jobs of current staff and non-tenure track faculty at the university? I am dismayed by the layoffs of staff as part of Loyola Dining as a result of COVID.

We are similarly concerned about the layoffs and furloughs experienced by a number of our colleagues throughout the university. As one small school within the university, we are unable to provide additional information about current or future plans for workforce reductions.

Q17: It is my understanding that the university has balanced its budget through the current fiscal year (June 30, 2021). Does TGS anticipate staff furloughs or layoffs within the school beyond this date?

Not that we are aware of, no. Our understanding was that once the budget was balanced, no further cuts would be made to the FY21 budget.

MISCELLANEOUS

Q18: Would it be possible to have another town hall where graduate students and administration can be in an actual dialogue? One where the chat box and Q&A is not moderated?

Ideally, this kind of event would take place in person on campus, which would better facilitate interactive discussion. However, since the event had to take place virtually we have done our best to at least make sure that your concerns and questions are addressed and the information is available to everyone who was able to attend as well as those who are reviewing the information online afterwards. We encourage anyone with additional concerns to schedule a meeting with a Grad School staff member, including Assistant Dean Sevener and Dean Barman, to discuss more directly.

Q19: The limited entrance to IC and the library is very concerning to me; it's going to cause heavy foot traffic around that limited space. Would the library be willing to open the closed entrance so there are two entrances?

We know that this has been an issue of concern for some time, and that it was shared with the Dean of the Libraries and with Facilities and Operations. We have reached out to library staff on this issue and have been informed that there is currently no plan to open additional entrances.

Q20: Can TGS provide any updates or plans for commencement 2021? Will commencement be held in May or August? Will commencement be virtual or in-person?

The university will hold virtual commencement ceremonies in May. [Additional information became available during the processing of this recording. Please see the email announcement sent on November 2 or <https://www.luc.edu/commencement/> for more information]

Q21: The NY Times reported about significant budget cuts in higher education. How will the current financial crisis affect Loyola's long-term goal to become an R-1 school?

As Dean Barman mentioned, this is a long-term goal, conceived prior to the pandemic but still held by the President, Provost and our school: its viability cannot be addressed until we are able to fully assess the impact of COVID on future budgets.

Q22: When will hiring take place for the next Assistant Dean of the Graduate School?

If you are referring to the Associate Dean for the Graduate School, the interviews for that position have begun and we anticipate a new Associate Dean will join us in the new year. We wish Associate Dean Penckofer all the best on her retirement!