

CALIFORNIA STATE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY, POMONA
ACADEMIC SENATE

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

REPORT TO

THE ACADEMIC SENATE

AA-006-145

Early Participation in Commencement Ceremonies for Graduate Students

Academic Affairs Committee

Date: 12 October 2016

Executive Committee
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Academic Senate

Date: 26 October 2016
First Reading
09 November 2016
Second Reading

Background

Each CSU campus may determine policies for student participation in graduation ceremonies. There is no CSU-wide or State policy. Currently, at Cal Poly Pomona there is some leeway in allowing undergraduate students who have not fulfilled all of the requirements for graduation to participate 'early' in the June Commencement ceremonies. However, graduate students are not afforded the same consideration.

The current university policy for graduate students is:

- 1) *Graduate students who have not completed all of the graduation requirements may not participate in the June commencement ceremonies.*
- 2) *The Graduate Director/Coordinator will certify that the student has completed the GWT requirement and will be able to complete by the end of Spring all other requirements.*
- 3) *The Catalog will add a section before "Graduation," entitled "Participation in Graduation Ceremonies."*
- 4) *Exemptions can be granted by the Associate Vice President for Academic Programs in extraordinary circumstances based on a recommendation from the Graduate Director/Coordinator who will certify that the student will be able to complete all requirements by the end of the Summer.*

This policy refers to graduate students generally, which includes masters, credential, and doctoral students.

To dissuade any ineligible student—undergraduate or graduate--from participating in graduation ceremonies, several years ago Student Affairs and the Commencement Committee imposed a \$200 'crash' fine for 'walking' at June Commencement without being eligible. The fine remains in effect.

Commencement-eligibility policies for graduate students at CSU campuses show a wide array. These range from "no policies" at all (San Jose State); "no policies" as long as the student applies for graduation (Fresno State, Sacramento, San Marcos); students allowed to 'walk' in the Spring if they will finish in the following Summer or Fall (Monterey Bay, Humboldt); and those equivalent to Cal Poly Pomona's, allowed only upon completion of all degree requirements (Bakersfield, Stanislaus).

Resources Consulted

The following resources were consulted by the Academic Affairs Committee during its deliberations in 2015-16 to ensure that the number of remaining units would be adequate for students with RP grades for some part of the culminating experience courses. The received feedback was considered in formulating the final recommendation.

- Deans
- Associate Deans
- Department Chairs

Discussion

Discussion of this issue was held among the Associate Deans at their meeting of February 6, 2015. All felt there should be some leeway afforded to masters and credential students but not doctoral candidates. To be equitable, allowing to 'walk' those graduate students with 5 units or less needed to fulfill graduation requirements would be proportionally equivalent to the current policy for undergraduates.

The unequal treatment of undergraduate and graduate students in Cal Poly Pomona's policies on participation in graduation has had some negative impacts on graduate students, their academic departments and graduate programs, and University advancement in general. The College of Science has reported that some graduate students who are close to finishing all their requirements opt to participate 'early' in Commencement and pay the fine in lieu of having to return to campus the following June. The practice enables only those who are ineligible but financially able the option of participating 'at a cost.' Other colleges report students 'walking' and opting to take the risk of being fined. Some students that are Advanced to Candidacy but finish their thesis preparation in Summer and defend in Fall, opt never to participate in the ceremonies.

Since Commencement is held only once each year and is not a graduation requirement but solely voluntary, returning the following June to participate may be especially difficult for foreign students who have gone back home. The same holds for those who, after graduating, have found employment in areas far from Pomona. Not participating in Commencement may be a disappointment or eventually a regret for graduate students, their parents and family, who may also be angered and as a result less likely to join alumni associations or become University supporters. Thus, there are negative, long-term consequences to not allowing graduate students who are close to fulfilling graduation requirements to join their classmates to celebrate individually and collectively their achievements at Commencement. A change in policies would ameliorate the situation and might serve to promote lasting class, department, college, and campus loyalties.

Commencement in "June" is based on the quarter system. Replacing "June" with "end of Spring" will allow the revised policy to be consistent in both quarter and semester calendars.

Recommendation

Based on the discussion presented above, the Academic Affairs Committee recommends that the current Senate policy be revised as follows (~~strikeouts~~ are deletions; underlines additions):

- 1) Masters and credential students with 8 or fewer quarter (6 or fewer semester) units remaining in their graduation requirements may participate in the end of Spring commencement ceremonies. Graduate Doctoral students who have not completed all of the graduation requirements may not participate in the end of Spring ~~June~~ commencement ceremonies.
- 2) The Graduate Director/Coordinator will certify that the student has completed the GWT requirement ~~and will be able to complete by the end of Spring all other requirements.~~

- 3) The Catalog ~~will add a section before “Graduation,”~~ entitled “Participation in Graduation Ceremonies” will be amended to reflect this policy.
- 4) Exemptions can be granted by the lead authority in the Office of Academic Programs ~~Associate Vice President for Academic Programs~~ in extraordinary circumstances based on a recommendation from the Graduate Director/Coordinator who will certify that the student will be able to complete all requirements by the end of the Summer.