

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: 19 October 2016

Executive Committee
Received and Forwarded

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Academic Senate

Date: 26 October 2016
First Reading
30 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.

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

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-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).

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. Recent discussion with the registrar indicated that the commencement ceremonies are intended to celebrate degree completions. Credential students do not complete degrees, hence should not participate in commencement. In addition, the Registrar's Office that tracks completion of degrees does not have the staffing or technology to track the completion of credentials. Unlike degree-seeking students whose application for graduation signal their participation in the commencement ceremonies, credential students do not apply for graduation. The Registrar's Office has no means of identifying students' eligibility for participation without this graduation application.

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, but 5 was deemed as too restrictive for most programs to be usefully implemented. The level of 8 quarter units (or fewer) was regarded as adequate. Further discussions revealed a verbal agreement and understanding made between the President and the Doctor of Education Program which constituted an approval for a doctoral student to participate upon confirmation that they had passed their dissertation defense prior to commencement. The Report in Progress (RP) "grades" for the dissertation part of the degree totals to more than 8 units though. The Academic Affairs Committee, in extensive consultation with the Doctor of Education Program, was able to reconcile the difference (along with all

other students pursuing a graduate degree in other programs) by using the criteria that the student has either successfully passed their comprehensive exam or successfully defended their project/thesis/dissertation along with finishing all of the required coursework. The criteria of 8 or fewer quarter units will still be applicable to programs than do not have an oral defense or comprehensive examination.

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. Likewise, 6 semester units can be included to replace the 8 quarter units for semester conversion.

Recommendation

The Academic Affairs Committee recommends adoption by the Academic Senate and recommendation to the President to approve the Early Participation in Commencement Ceremonies for Graduate Students (as stated below) and to add it to the University Manual.

Early Participation in Commencement Ceremonies for Graduate Students

- 1) Students enrolled in a graduate program and pursuing a graduate degree at all levels may participate in the end of Spring commencement ceremonies if they:
 - a. Have completed all of the required classwork AND have either successfully passed their comprehensive exam or successfully defended their project/thesis/dissertation as certified by the Graduate Director/Coordinator.
 - b. Have 8 or fewer quarter (6 or fewer semester) units remaining in their graduation requirements if their program is without an oral defense or comprehensive examination requirement.
- 2) The Graduate Director/Coordinator will certify that the student has completed the GWT (or the GRE if it is accepted as equivalent) requirement.
- 3) The Registrar is authorized to develop measures to deter noncompliance of this policy.