



To: Washington State Faculty Senate Steering Committee

From: Tammy D. Barry
Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education

Date: September 8, 2023

RE: Establish policy concerning graduate program student handbooks

In alignment with our recent updates to the course review process and in adherence to your guiding principles of 1) Trusting our faculty colleagues, 2) Ensuring every step of the review process adds value, 3) Upholding transparency, and 4) Encouraging innovation, the Graduate School seeks your collaboration in refining the policy surrounding changes to existing graduate program and graduate certificate curriculum.

Modifying Existing Program Handbooks

Graduate programs rely on two documents—program bylaws and student handbooks—to publish their policies and procedures. Due to the diverse nature of our graduate programs, there is an inherent variability in the format and content of both bylaws and handbooks. Whereas the Graduate School offers guidance, we recognize that individual programs may have specific requirements, provided they align with, or exceed, the standards set by the Graduate School Policies and Procedures.

In 2023, the Washington State University Faculty Senate endorsed the Graduate School's recommendations regarding program bylaws. We now turn our attention to the policies governing graduate program handbooks. We acknowledge that these handbooks serve as the primary source of information about a program to graduate students in that program. Specifically, details about course and credit requirements leading to degrees are most clearly laid out in graduate program handbooks. Students, faculty, and other program stakeholders rely heavily on these handbooks to navigate degree programs and offerings effectively.

Historically, changes to existing handbooks have not consistently undergone review by the Graduate School or the Faculty Senate. When a program did submit a handbook update, they used a *Major Curricular Change Form* originating with the Office of the Registrar. This process routed the requested change to the Catalog Subcommittee, the Graduate Studies Committee, and the Faculty Senate for final review and approval.

Building on the momentum gained by the changes to the bylaw policy, we propose that a policy be established allowing graduate programs autonomy to update their handbooks, thus bypassing the

cumbersome Major Curriculum Change process, provided any changes continue to conform with the existing Graduate School Policies and Procedures. This proposal is grounded in the understanding that the Faculty Senate annually reviews and approves all modifications to the Graduate School Policies and Procedures as well as the principle that faculty in the program are the best judges of what constitutes appropriate courses of study in their own disciplines. Program adherence to the Graduate School Policies and Procedures assures compliance with the rules approved by the Faculty Senate. Furthermore, programs submit handbooks to the Graduate School annually for archiving.

Please note this request only addresses changes to existing graduate program handbooks. All new graduate programs and courses would undergo the current evaluation process as defined by the Office of the Provost and supported by the Faculty Senate.

Modifying Existing Graduate Certificates

The Graduate School Policies and Procedures as well as Academic Regulation 119 define minimum requirements for Graduate Certificates. Following principles behind the above proposal for program handbooks, the Graduate School requests that a policy be established that grants graduate programs the autonomy to update curricula within existing graduate certificates, bypassing cumbersome processes involving the Faculty Senate or the Graduate School, provided results of such changes remain compliant with the existing Graduate School Policies and Procedures.