

July 20, 2018

Dr. Jonathan Holloway
Office of the Provost
Northwestern University

Dear Provost Holloway:

We write as the Chairs and Directors of Departments and Programs in the humanities and social sciences to urge you to reinstate graduate students' eligibility to apply for funding and professional opportunities beyond their 5th year, and to allow students with multi-year external fellowships to bank those years for further use. Many of us have been in conversation with TGS Dean Woodruff and understand that budget considerations drove this recent decision to deny eligibility. However, the decision seriously jeopardizes our mission to provide stellar PhD training in line with our status as an R1 university. Moreover, the long-term effects of such a decision will threaten our collective goal to rise in the R1 rankings.

Nationwide, PhD students in the humanities and social sciences typically need more than five years to produce the top notch dissertations, publications, and teaching records that are necessary to secure tenure track academic positions. As you are no doubt aware, it can often take one to three additional years due to necessary language learning, the length of time required to conduct proper archival and/or field research (which often involves travel), to secure external grants and fellowships, and to produce the basis of a solo-author publication and teaching record--all necessary components of a successful application for a tenure track position. Due to the structure of humanities and social science training, many of the post-5th year opportunities are simply inappropriate for students at earlier stages of their degrees, or inaccessible due to involvement in field research. Northwestern's time-to-degree in the humanities and social sciences is already similar to or faster than that at peer and aspirant institutions, and none of these institutions limit funding eligibility to students beyond their 5th year.

There are serious long-term consequences such a decision will have if it is not reversed. Our reputation is already being damaged nationally by this move. It will make it much harder to successfully recruit the best graduate students against our peer institutions, which will then affect faculty recruitment and retention. We will no longer be able to adequately train and prepare students to be the best scholars in their fields, or to gain tenure track jobs. Many of these positions give students valuable and transferable skills for careers outside of academia; we will lose our competitive edge in training for career

diversity. Student entrepreneurialism will be undermined because incentives to apply aggressively for fellowships are removed, because they cannot bank more than one year. The quality of hiring programs will decline, as students are often the best qualified for these positions when they are most advanced. And finally, this decision could actually extend time to degree, because students will spend more time applying for jobs for economic support instead of finishing their dissertations.

Additionally, the timing of this decision, when students and programs had already made plans for AY 2018-2019, is unfair. It has created tremendous instability for a number of students and programs, and has been particularly hard on international students and students of lower socioeconomic status who have no citizenship or financial cushions. It has also created serious issues for programs, such as Searle and The Writing Center, whose quality of programming relies on having advanced graduate students in particular positions.

For all of these reasons, we urge you to reverse the decision about post-5th year eligibility and to allow students to bank years for which they have received external grants and fellowships. The mission of Northwestern University is at stake.

Sincerely,

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