



# Graduate Theological Union **Doctoral Program Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) Policy**

Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) provides information to the Dean of Students to determine academic standing, financial aid eligibility, and to help students critically self-assess their progress toward their degree each year. SAP underlines difficulties with the quality of a student’s work as well as pace in the program. Slow progress, numerous extensions and/or problematic professional relationships are examples of unsatisfactory progress, all affecting a student's standing in the program. A student’s good standing in the program is required.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 requires that institutions of higher education establish a reasonable Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) Policy to determine whether an otherwise eligible student is making SAP in their educational program. The SAP policy must include a qualitative and a quantitative measure of the completion of work within a maximum timeframe. Students must meet both measures to maintain their eligibility during all periods of enrollment. The SAP policy must apply to all students in the program including those who are not receiving financial aid. Initial and continuing eligibility for all sources of student funding or support, such as grant-in-aid, other GTU-sponsored merit and/or need-based awards, scholarships, or fellowships and federal aid such as federal work-study and direct loans, require GTU verification of annual satisfactory academic progress.

SAP is monitored by the Dean of Students annually and is important for the following reasons:

1. Developing scholarly knowledge and skills depends upon deep, sustained engagement in a course of study;
2. Limiting the costs incurred during graduate study is key to limiting consequential financial burdens after graduation; and,
3. Expeditious program completion means that faculty advisors, coordinators, committee members, and other faculty mentors are available to work with other GTU students.

Annual Satisfactory Academic Progress evaluations will be completed at the end of each academic year and cannot take place until final grades have been posted. The review will determine eligibility for the upcoming fall and spring terms. The Dean of Students notifies all Core Doctoral Faculty (CDF) annually about the review process and invites them to share concerns they may have with the quality and/or pace of their students’ work. Students receive written confirmation of the results of their progress review from the Dean of Students in July with copies sent to the student’s advisor and the Financial Aid Office.

**Qualitative Measure:** Students must maintain a cumulative average GPA of 3.0 (B) or above after each semester to remain eligible for financial aid for the subsequent term. Please note that failure to maintain the requisite grade point average automatically warrants academic probation.

**Quantitative Measure:** Students must successfully complete the program requirements within the expected timeframes of the doctoral program as outlined below. Doctoral students are expected to enroll full-time in twelve (12.00) units per semester. All periods of enrollment are counted towards the maximum timeframes even if a student is not receiving financial aid. Students must complete their degree within 150% of the published length of the program. The normative timeframe to complete the program is seven years. The maximum timeframe to complete a doctoral degree cannot exceed eleven years. Students must successfully earn at least 75% of all attempted credits each semester during the coursework stage of their program. After the student has completed their coursework, their academic progress is measured by the following academic requirements and expected timeframes. Please note that the first two requirements will be completed during the coursework stage of the program.

Requirements	Expected Timeframes
Successful Research Readiness Review	End of the third semester
Completion of language requirements	End of the second year
Approval of the comprehensive proposal	End of the third year
Completion of the comprehensive exams	End of the fourth year
Approval of the dissertation	End of the fifth year
Completion of the degree	End of the seventh year

*\*In each of these cases “year” refers to full-time equivalent (FTE), or the combination of full-time/part-time enrollment equivalent to 2, 3, 4, 5, or 7 full-time years.*

### **Incompletes (I), Failures (F), Withdrawals (W)**

Failures (F) and withdrawals (W) are attempted but not completed courses. Incomplete grades are not counted towards completed units until after coursework is successfully completed, posted by the Registrar and reviewed by the Dean of Students. Coursework must be completed within three weeks following the end of the semester. An incomplete becomes an "F" grade if the work is not completed and/or a Change of Grade form is not submitted to the Registrar's Office by the agreed upon deadlines. A student must repeat the required department seminar if the grade earned is lower than a B-. Required courses can be repeated one time.

### **Leave of Absence**

Students who are unable to continue academic work for personal, medical, or financial reasons may take a temporary leave from the program. Students on a leave of absence during some or all of the academic year in review will be held to the expectations in place at the time they took their leave upon their return. Students on leave for one term and registered for the subsequent term are required to participate in the process.

### **Financial Aid Probation**

Students who have not met the qualitative and/or quantitative requirements for satisfactory academic progress at the annual review are suspended from financial aid for the subsequent semester. The student will receive a written notification from the Dean of Students that failure to maintain SAP has resulted in loss of financial aid eligibility. A student who fails SAP must successfully appeal the decision to be placed on financial aid probation and retain eligibility for aid. The appeal must be submitted with an academic plan that ensures the student is able to meet SAP standards by a specified timeframe. Probation is not given automatically and is for one semester only. Although the GTU reviews SAP on an annual basis, by federal law, students who are placed on financial aid probation must be reviewed at the conclusion of the probationary semester. During the probation period, students who do not meet a semester and cumulative GPA of a 3.0 or higher and/or do not meet the pace and program requirements are suspended from financial aid for the subsequent semester and must once again successfully appeal to be placed on financial aid probation.

### **Financial Aid Suspension**

If a student is not making SAP by the end of the second probationary period, they are placed on financial aid suspension for the following year and may not appeal the decision. They may regain eligibility by successfully completing the GPA and pace requirements expected in accordance with the normative time schedule and/or according to revised expectations outlined in the Dean of Student's written review.

### **Appeal Process**

If due to mitigating circumstances a student fails to make satisfactory academic progress and receives an adverse determination, they may appeal the result on the basis of injury or illness, the death of a relative or other special circumstances. In the event of unusual circumstances the student may request that the GTU temporarily suspend an expected timeframe for SAP during the year in review and approve their request for a deadline extension and/or revised timeframe. The student may not request that the GTU disregard their performance or eliminate a particular program requirement.

A student choosing to appeal should submit a written petition to the Dean of Students by electronic mail within one month of the date of the final SAP review letter. The written petition should explain the mitigating circumstances influencing progress, why they did not meet SAP, what has changed in their situation that would allow them to meet SAP at the end of the next evaluation and an academic plan that outlines how the student will meet the requirement(s) due the previous year and the one(s) due for the upcoming fall and spring semesters. The student must make every effort to get caught up with the program normative time schedule in the year following the review. The email should also verify support of the plan by the student's advisor or committee coordinator. The student should ask their advisor or coordinator to write a memo of support for the revised plan. For example, the faculty member can verify their willingness to continue working with the student for a longer period of time because of delayed and/or slower progress. The Dean of Students will render a decision about the appeal in writing by email within one month of the date of the appeal.

### **Reestablishing Financial Aid Eligibility**

Students suspended from receiving financial aid can reestablish eligibility in one of three ways:

- Successfully appealing a SAP decision and making SAP by the end of the semester; or if an appeal is not allowed,
- Completing the requirements expected according to the normative timeframe and/or according to revised expectations outlined by the Dean of Student's written review; or,
- The student must meet SAP requirements by the end of the next review.

### **Flexibility with Expected Timeframes**

Childbirth, new parenthood, or caring for ill or aged parents are common experiences for GTU doctoral students. These are time intensive tasks. Students are often reluctant to ask for a special exception to deal with parenting demands. While doctoral student parents or parent care-givers are encouraged to fulfill program requirements within the normative timeframe, they may need extra time. These students will be granted extensions based on parenting demands. Any student who has taken time to accommodate childbirth or other serious parental demands, or to care for a parent who is ill or otherwise in need of support, may receive an extension of up to one extra year to complete a program requirement. The total additional time granted by this policy may not exceed two years during a student's program, regardless of the number of children and/or parents involved. With the support of the advisor or committee coordinator, students must submit a request for an extension of a normative time deadline in light of the Doctoral Student Parent Support Policy to the Dean of Students. Students should submit the request via email, explaining the reasons for the extension and outlining a new timeline for completion of their program.

### **Program Extensions**

Students must request an extension if they need to exceed the normative time schedule or revise their deadline for any program requirement. Students in need of an extension will have their registration blocked and will not be permitted to register for the term. This issue must be resolved before the end of the general registration period.

To request an extension, students must submit an email, with their advisor's approval, to the Dean of Students, that clearly states the reasons for the extension and, if involving the comprehensive exams, dissertation or overall program completion, provide a concrete, realistic schedule for completion. Students will receive written confirmation of approval of the extension from the academic secretary with copies sent to the student's advisor, the registrar, and the Financial Aid Office.

Extensions can jeopardize a student's:

1. certification of satisfactory academic progress which determines, in part, their eligibility for financial aid; and,
2. good standing in the doctoral program.

GTU policy stipulates that students are eligible for grant-in-aid in years one and two with the possibility of providing aid in years three through five as funding permits. Federal forms of financial aid (e.g. federal direct loans, federal work-study) are available until year seven of full-time registration. Students demonstrating satisfactory academic progress may petition the Dean of Students for approval for an extension of eligibility for federal student aid for their eighth year in the program. Such permission is extraordinary, and will be granted as an exception at the discretion of the Dean of Students on the basis of a student's particular circumstances.