



Graduate School

TO: Graduate Students

FROM: Cheryl L. Addy

RE: Additional guidance for graduate students during coronavirus mitigation

Yesterday, the University of South Carolina issued information about COVID-19 to the University community, including travel restrictions and alerts, spring break tips, and other information from the Center for Disease Control and World Health Organization. Information distributed to the University community is available at [go.sc.edu/coronavirus](https://go.sc.edu/coronavirus).

Two specific items most relevant to our graduate students are:

1. Classes will be canceled for the week after spring break (March 16 – 22).
2. From Monday, March 23 through Friday, April 3, we will suspend all face-to-face instruction in lectures, discussion sections, seminars and other similar classroom settings and move to virtual instruction.

We have received numerous questions about classes and other graduate student activities, so we offer the following guidance and information.

**Thesis/dissertation Defenses:** Several faculty and students have reached out to the Graduate School about thesis/dissertation proposals and defenses already scheduled over the next week in particular. I know of at least one college that has explicitly said no defenses will be held. If this is true in your unit, please respect it. However, CDC guidelines are that large gatherings are being discouraged, and that caution should be exercised for smaller groups meeting in close proximity. If you, your academic unit and the committee members agree, you may proceed with the defense using one or more of the following approaches:

- Use appropriate preventative strategies, e.g., don't shake hands, ensure that all in attendance are healthy and not actively sneezing/coughing/short of breath, and maintain appropriate social distance between participants.
- Consider holding the defense virtually through a supporting program such as Zoom, GoToMeeting or similar platform for some or all participants.
- Consider having the defense without a public presentation, i.e., with only the student and committee in attendance.

### **Graduate Assistantships:**

- **Graduate teaching assistants (GTA)**, i.e., those who are instructor of record, are expected to work during the extended Spring Break to prepare their courses for online instruction for at least two weeks, as are all full-time and adjunct faculty who are teaching this semester. This work can be done remotely if the GTA has appropriate resources. Note that extensive resources to support this transition are available at [go.sc.edu/keep-teaching](http://go.sc.edu/keep-teaching).
- **Mission-critical graduate assistants working in University Housing** have been requested to return to campus no later than Saturday, March 14, at 12:00 noon. Due to the reopening of residence halls on March 14, we need to staff these halls to ensure a safe and supportive environment for the students returning to campus. Exceptions can be made for individual health and safety considerations. (These students have already been notified.)
- **Other graduate assistants (GA)** are allowed to work on a voluntary basis during the extended spring break but are not required to do so. The hiring unit or supervisor may require a GA to make up missed hours but cannot decrease the compensation to the GA. Any GA unable or unwilling to work after March 21 (end of extended Spring Break) may be placed on unpaid leave but will retain other GA benefits for the semester.

**Online programs:** We have received questions from faculty teaching in online programs if they can continue classes next week. Because you were notified that all classes were cancelled for next week, we will not allow this.

**Practica/Internships/Clinicals:** If you are completing an experiential learning opportunity such as practicum, internship and clinical rotation, decisions about how to handle these placements must be made at the program level in the context of the logistics of the experience and the requirements/restrictions of the site at which you are working. You should hear from your advisor or program director in the next few days about what you can do.