




Advisory Services Memo

To: Maurice Edington, Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs

From: Joseph Maleszewski, Vice President of Audit 

CC: Deidre Melton, Director of Audit
Jessica Hughes, Senior Auditor

Date: March 20, 2020

Re: Graduation Process Impacts – Declaration of FAMU State of Emergency

As you know, beginning effective 5:00 p.m. Wednesday, March 18, 2020, President Robinson directed the University to temporarily transition to remote work as a precaution to stem the spread of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). Among other logistical and operational impacts this transition could significantly impact the University’s ability to document that each student awarded a degree during the Spring 2020 academic semester met all graduation requirements and received all necessary approvals. Additionally, students who intend to graduate in Summer 2020 may need new guidance regarding how and when to communicate their intent to graduate.

We bring this information to your attention to assist the Division of Academic Affairs in proactively addressing these potential issues before they occur.

The goal is to continue to ensure graduating students are awarded degrees in alignment with both accreditation and Board of Governor requirements while lessening any disruption of related student services. The process should ensure that all students who are eligible for graduation are properly processed and documented so that there are no negative impacts to the University’s Performance Base Funding metrics and related funding decisions.

Background

Annually, the Florida Board of Governors directs the Board of Trustees to audit the University’s data submissions to the Board of Governors to ensure that the information provided is appropriate for performance-based funding decision-making. During the 2019 Legislative Session, lawmaker approved Senate Bill 190 that contains language amending section 1001.706, Florida Statutes, which now states, “Each university shall conduct an annual audit to verify that the data submitted pursuant to ss. 1001.7065 and 1001.92 complies with the data definitions established by the board and submit the audits to the Board of Governors Office of Inspector General as part of the annual certification process required by the Board of Governors.”

As you know, the Division of Audit, annually performs this required audit and, as a result, annually the Division evaluates the graduation approval process to ensure that students who were



awarded a degree met the degree requirements and were properly approved. Through past audit work, the Division is aware that some schools and colleges continue to use manual processes throughout the degree certification and approval process for:

- Degree Audits for Graduate Programs (while undergraduate programs use the iRatter Academic Advisement Module for degree certification, graduation programs utilize manual degree audits);
- Course Exception Forms; and
- Student intent to graduate notification processes.

The Division recommends that a plan be developed and executed to identify and address issues, such as those mentioned above. Without such a plan, the University may lack the ability to process and/or document student’s successful completion of graduation requirements with appropriate approvals. This plan should ensure that graduation processes, under the temporary remote work directives, are effective and fully documented. As you know, the Academic Calendar deadline to apply for graduation is currently March 27, 2020.

Degree Audit Process

Currently most colleges and schools perform a manual degree audit for graduate level students. This process consists of an academic advisor meeting with the student, reviewing courses taken, and identifying additional requirements needed to fulfil their program graduation requirements.

Recommendation: With the transition to temporary remote work, we recommend the Division of Academic Affairs transition in person degree audit meetings to email, telephone, or teleconferencing (Zoom).

Course Exceptions Process

Course exception forms which allow an alternative course be taken (in lieu of the stated program course) currently requires multiple signatures.

Recommendation: We recommend the Division of Academic Affairs explore technological solutions to allow for remote preparation and execution of course exception forms.

Intent to Graduate Process

Colleges and schools have various processes for which students who intend to graduate during Summer 2020 must complete during Spring 2020. For example, the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice requests students who wishes to apply for graduation to complete the “Student Intent to Graduate” form and take it to his/her academic advisor, at least one semester prior to the one in which the student intends to graduate. They are asked to bring the following documents with them when they see their advisor to begin the process:



- Graduation Checklist;
- Intent to Graduate Form;
- A Copy of Current Unofficial Transcript;
- A Copy of Advisement Report from iRattler; and
- Departmental Exit Survey Confirmation Pages.

Division of Audit Recommendation: We recommend that the Division of Academic Affairs establish and communicate steps for students to guide them through the process of becoming eligible for graduation, including the modes for transmitting information to the appropriate people and instructions for use of any specialized technological process. For instance, if forms require a signature, instructions may be included on how the students can digitally sign form or submit a confirmation statements through their official University email account.

We hope that consideration of these issues now will avoid compliance issues down the road. Should you need additional assistance addressing these matters, or have questions, we are available to assist you.