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Subject: EAPS education policies and procedures during COVID-19 restrictions
Date: March 20, 2020 at 1:12 PM
To: eaps-dept eaps-dept@mit.edu



Dear EAPS students, instructors, and advisors:

I hope this message finds you all well and adjusting to remote operations. We in EAPS want to do all we can to ensure that educational activities continue this spring despite the current upheaval in all of our lives. We recognize that our students are facing a very challenging situation, and we will do our best to enable them to continue working towards their degrees with as little added stress and delay as possible.

Given the circumstances with COVID-19, some changes to the usual procedures will be necessary. In this message, we would like to communicate changes to EAPS policies and procedures related to educational activities other than courses. This includes undergraduate senior theses, UROPs, graduate general exams and thesis proposal presentations, and MS and PhD thesis defenses. (Instructors: For questions about the transition to online teaching, please refer to the separate message from Jen Fentress on 3/19 about EAPS-specific teaching resources and recommendations. All: Stay tuned for a separate message from Rob van der Hilst on policies related to the scale-back of on-campus research.)

Thank you all for your efforts! With a bit of creativity and flexibility from everyone, we will keep things on track and continue to fulfill EAPS' educational mission.

Undergraduate senior theses

To our seniors and all of our undergraduates: we already miss you! As you all get settled in new locations, we hope you will stay safe, stay in touch, and maintain a connection to EAPS.

If you haven't done so already, we strongly encourage advisors to contact their undergraduate thesis advisees as soon as possible to make plans for completing theses. Given the inability of undergraduate students to perform research on campus under the current circumstances (in addition to the substantial disruption associated with moving off campus), it may be necessary to adjust goals related to the final scientific content of theses. We encourage advisors to be flexible in their expectations and to work with their advisees to ensure that they can complete this graduation requirement. **The due date for senior theses will be May 12**, the last day of classes. If a student anticipates circumstances that could prevent her/him from meeting that deadline, s/he should contact her/his advisor and Megan Jordan (mkjordan@mit.edu). Theses should be submitted as PDFs to Brandon Milardo (bmilardo@mit.edu) in the EAPS education office.

One of the ways we celebrate our seniors is with the thesis presentations at the end of the semester. It is unfortunate that we will not be able to enjoy these presentations in person this year, but we are currently working with Jess Abbott to plan an alternate format for our

this year, but we are currently working with Jane Abbott to plan an alternate format for our seniors to share the research they have worked so hard to complete. Stay tuned for more details about our plans for the end of the semester.

UROPs

Although in-person UROPs ended on March 15, there is still an option to continue UROPs remotely (including for pay) if both the advisor and the student agree that this is practical. Here is the web form that students must complete by **March 31** in order to continue working remotely on a UROP:

<https://UROP.mit.edu/node/8810/>

Once the student submits the form, the UROP advisor and the EAPS Education Office will be notified and asked to confirm.

Graduate student general exams and thesis proposal presentations

To our graduate students who are planning to take general exams this spring: we want to help you stay on track and maintain momentum as you prepare for your exams. Your committees also understand that this interruption has cost you some preparation time and, in some cases, interrupted research activities involving in-person work or travel. In the interest of helping students progress toward their degrees on schedule, we encourage students who are planning to take general exams this spring to proceed with online exams using videoconferencing software (e.g., Zoom) and electronic delivery of the two papers. This change in exam format will involve some adjustments. For example, we know that many of you have questions about acceptable alternatives to writing on a chalkboard. We will be in touch with advisors and students with further guidelines for online exams to ensure that procedures are as uniform as possible.

However, we recognize that some students may prefer to postpone their general exams to the summer or fall due to the disruptions this spring. Students should make this decision in consultation with their two project advisors, with the understanding that we do not know yet when in-person exams will be an option again. In any case, students who were scheduled to take the general exam this spring should not plan to postpone the exam any later than the end of October 2020. Non-PAOC students should email Megan Jordan (mkjordan@mit.edu) with updated plans for their general exams. PAOC students should contact Prof. Mick Follows (mick@mit.edu) with requests for postponement or questions about the schedule for the PAOC general exams.

Thesis proposal presentations should occur within 6 months of passing the general exam, as usual. As with general exams, these presentations can occur online using Zoom or other videoconferencing software. We encourage students who need to present thesis proposals this spring to schedule a date and time with their committee as soon as possible.

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Thesis defenses

MIT's goal is to have students on the spring degree list complete their degrees on schedule. To meet that goal, we must all consider what is practical while the current restrictions are in place. We encourage students, advisors, and committees to be flexible as they discuss plans for theses and defenses, working together to arrive at mutually agreeable plans that allow students to defend on time.

Megan Jordan has already been in touch with all graduate students on the spring degree list about their plans. The information below is included for completeness, and to make sure that all members of the EAPS community are aware of thesis defense procedures.

Until further notice, we expect to have the entire defense – that is, both the public and closed-door components of all defenses – online (e.g., on Zoom). The EAPS Education Office and Headquarters staff will be available to help set up and advertise virtual defenses, and to assist with the logistics of the online format.

Students on the spring degree list should plan to **defend before May 7th**. Please schedule a virtual defense in coordination with thesis committee members as soon as possible and notify Brandon Milardo (bnilardo@mit.edu) in the education office once you have identified a date and time, or with any changes in the scheduled date or time. The COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving, and we all certainly hope that things will return to normal in time for defenses to be held in person, but the reality is that we do not know how long the current restrictions will remain in place. We should therefore expect online presentations and defenses to be the format for the foreseeable future.

Students will need to have their theses signed electronically and submit the final signed copy electronically to the EAPS education office no later than **May 21st at 4pm. This is a hard deadline**. The Registrar has informed us that there are no plans to change thesis filing deadlines. Please contact Megan Jordan (mkjordan@mit.edu) in the education office if you have questions about the above dates or submitting your thesis.

To all:

Finally, if any of you encounter situations or questions that are not addressed in this message, please get in touch with me (perron@mit.edu) or Megan Jordan (mkjordan@mit.edu). If we have missed anything, we will follow up with additional communications or clarifications as appropriate. These changes in policies and procedures will require us all to adapt, but with some planning and patience we will keep all students progressing towards their degrees while we all wait for the time when we can work together on campus again!

Taylor Perron
Associate Department Head

for the EAPS Education Committee:
Megan Jordan (Academic Administrator)
Paul O’Gorman (Graduate Officer)
Richard Binzel (Undergraduate Officer)
Amanda Bosh (Senior Lecturer)