

Normal Progress Policy

A number of elements of the Graduate Handbook employ the term “normal progress,” which implies a set of benchmarks toward earning a graduate degree. Below are the specifications for what the Department of Romance Studies defines as normal progress, with the goal of providing clarity to students and advisers on normative expectations for graduate student performance.

In general, students are making normal progress toward a degree if they are moving through coursework, candidacy, and dissertation writing in a timely manner and with positive outcomes. Because the goals of graduate education include both cultivating scholarly acumen and acclimating students to the institutional realities of academic life, normal progress is also defined by timely completion of the requirements that the Department and the Graduate School place on students.

To meet departmental expectations for normal progress:

1. Students must be conscientious members of the professional academic community. That means, at the very least, responding appropriately and in a timely way to faculty and staff requests and deadlines, and committing to respect a diverse and inclusive professional environment.
2. Students must comply with all the policies and procedures of the department as laid out in the *Department's Graduate Handbook* and in the *Graduate School Handbook*.
3. Each student must establish a good working relationship with an adviser and a committee. In the first year of graduate study students should work closely with a temporary adviser (usually the Graduate Adviser for the student's language section) to begin defining their areas of interest, to select relevant coursework, and to move toward establishing a relationship with a permanent adviser. A good working relationship entails timely response to the adviser's requests and e-mail communications, as well as regular consultation with the adviser on the direction of coursework, research, and composition of a committee. As students move toward the dissertation proposal defense and dissertation defense, they must respond to advice on drafts of these documents or risk having defense dates postponed.
4. Until coursework is completed, students must have *completed* (with a permanent grade—H-P-L) at least 18 credit hours during each academic year (9 per semester), excluding the final two years of coursework in which 3 credit hours of a dissertation/thesis course and fewer than 18 credit hours may be required. ROML 700 must be taken in the first semester of the student's coursework (unless this requirement has been filled by transfer credit). Any student who does not take the required number of courses in any semester period is not making normal progress and will forfeit financial aid until the situation is remedied.
5. Students entering the program with a Baccalaureate degree must complete the Qualifying Exam successfully and by the end of the second year in order to continue in the doctoral program.

6. By stipulation of the Graduate School, students who enter the program with a Baccalaureate degree and are given formal permission to proceed to the doctoral degree after having successfully completed their second year of study, have up to eight years (dating from the time of their original admission) to complete the doctorate.
7. Grades of P are expected. L grades, even though passing (until one receives 3 L grades, which results in academic ineligibility), are warning signs. Students are deemed academically ineligible to continue with the Ph.D. program if they fail the Qualifying Exam twice, or receive a failing grade (F), or have accumulated 3 or more L grades (<https://handbook.unc.edu/eligibility.html>).
8. Unless granted under exceptional medical or personal circumstances, and in consultation with the student's adviser and DGS, a grade of "incomplete" reflects negatively on a student's progress. If a student must ask for a temporary grade of incomplete, she/he should finish her/his work by the beginning of the following semester so that it does not interfere with new coursework (<https://handbook.unc.edu/eligibility.html>).
9. Students must complete the requirements of the program at a rate that warrants a reasonable expectation that they will fulfill the requirements for a Ph.D. within the five years of allotted funding. In accordance with the eight-year limit set out by the Graduate School, students who enter the program with a Master's degree may have up to six years to complete the doctorate although the decision would be made on a case by case basis in consultation of the students' section and advisor. Requirements for the Ph.D. program include a minimum of 17 courses taken in residence, Ph.D. written exam, prospectus defense, and dissertation. After five years, continued funding is at the department's discretion.
10. Students are expected to establish a professional profile outside the department. At minimum, students should show some evidence of cultivating an external network through conference attendance (preferably at least once a year) by their second year in the program, and by demonstrating some progress towards submission of work for publication by their third year in the program. The nature of this requirement might vary depending on the expectations of a student's adviser. It may, for example, be satisfied not only by professional development practices for strictly academic jobs, but also by alt-ac positions.
11. The PhD Area Specialization Exam and Dissertation Proposal defense(s) must be completed no later than the end of the fourth academic year if there is to be any reasonable expectation of completing the dissertation within the five-year funding window. For students who entered the program with a Master's degree, it should be possible to complete at least the PhD Area Specialization Exam by the end of their third year and the Proposal defense by their seventh semester. The same may be the case for a student who was admitted with a Baccalaureate degree, but it is more likely that they will complete both in the fourth year.
12. Students must defend their dissertation by a date no later than four calendar years after the completion of their Ph.D. Area Specialization Exam. After that four-year deadline, they would be required to retake the Exam in order to complete the program.
13. Students must conscientiously execute their duties as a TA and/or TF. TAs must fulfill all the duties reasonably expected of them by the course instructor and must respond to the requests of the instructor in a timely manner. Teaching Fellows must execute their duties in accordance with the department's expectations for teaching excellence, including but

not limited to: making syllabi available in a timely manner; preparing for and conducting effective classes; providing appropriate feedback to undergraduates; grading fairly; and, when necessary, working in consultation with the course supervisor, Director of Undergraduate Studies, Language Director or Chair. Students must submit all required documentation for teaching assignments, including requests for teaching and supervision forms by the dates set by the Department.

14. Each year, students must submit all required documentation, in compliance with the annual review protocol of their section, for assessment of their performance. The requirements for the yearly assessment may include filing an annual plan of study or completing an end-of-year survey.

An assessment of normal progress is, of course, different for different individuals given the distinct demands of the different programs in Romance Studies, the student's proposed plan of study, and differences in an individual student's career path. An assessment of normal progress is also based on a cumulative picture of the student's work in all of the areas listed in the preceding statement of departmental expectations, though failure in any one of these areas could constitute grounds for denying a student an assessment of normal progress.

The Department is under no obligation to maintain funding for any student not making normal progress. Progress will be assessed for all students once each year. On the first occasion an assessment is made that a student is not making normal progress, their funding may be revoked temporarily, until they have remedied the problem. If a second such assessment is made, the student's funding revocation may be permanent. That would not mean dismissal from the program, but simply that the student would not receive any additional funding.