

Dear MCB graduate students,

I hope that you, your family and friends are well. These are very uncertain and challenging times. Having to teach remotely, not being able to go to lab, worrying about your loved ones, and all the news make it difficult to concentrate. I think many of us feel that it is much harder to be productive now and wish we could do more. On top of that the rules of engagement are being changed on the fly and this uncertainty makes things worse.

I want to thank those of you who are TAs in helping the transition to “virtual” labs and discussion sections. This is not easy and takes extra time. It is also hard to teach and interact with the students without seeing the responses.

Now, I want to provide you with information from our department, the University and reassure you that we are here to support you.

1. **For students who came in after we implemented the milestones:** The faculty agreed that we will not enforce the milestone deadlines during these times. We encourage you to have “remote” committee meetings or “remote” 2nd year exams but if you do not feel like that you can do well in them due to the current circumstances you can cancel and postpone them at any time. We also recognize that some first year students feel like they cannot make progress as they cannot go to lab and if instead they want to read and work on preparing with their mentor for the 2nd year exam. They can take it early if they want to.
2. **Related proposals and defenses:** We have had “remote” related proposals and defenses that went very well. So if you feel comfortable please try this option. Graduate School rules require original signatures (“wet ink” signatures) on the thesis or dissertation approval page. Due to the current extraordinary circumstances, until further notice this requirement can be met by any one of the following means: i) Original wet ink signature on an approval page, mailed to the Registrar’s Office, ii) Scanned image of an original wet signature or an electronic signature on the approval page emailed directly from the faculty member’s UConn or UCHC email address to the student’s degree auditor, iii) An email sent directly to the student’s degree auditor* from the faculty member’s UConn or UCHC email address indicating approval.
3. **PASS/FAIL OPTION AT GRADUATE LEVEL:** Graduate students in a degree or certificate program under jurisdiction of The Graduate School may convert a spring 2020 course from “graded” to either “pass/fail” by May 22 with approval of the student’s major adviser and/or program director. This change reflects a vote on Monday by the Graduate Faculty Council. Students can, but need not, wait until after receiving their grade to decide whether to seek a conversion. Once a course is converted, it cannot be converted back to a letter-graded course.
4. **Access to Labs:** There is no new information but a virtual informational session has been called: The Office of the Vice President for Research will join President Katsouleas in hosting a virtual informational session for UConn and UConn Health researchers on Monday, April 20 from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Its purpose is to update the UConn research community on critical information related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as answer questions from UConn faculty and staff. Questions and comments can be sent to ovpr@uconn.edu before Monday, April 20. **To join the session: click here: <https://www.facebook.com/UConn/>.**
5. **Important website from the graduate school** with COVID-19 related information: <https://grad.uconn.edu/coronavirus/faq>

6. **Mental health:** <https://counseling.uconn.edu/>
7. **MCB Travel Awards:** Those who received an MCB travel award but the conference was cancelled can use the money to attend a different conference.
8. **Concerns and questions:** Please feel free to contact me if you have questions and concerns.

Stay safe and best wishes,

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