

Graduate Student Annual Reviews (Process Document)

A. Purpose and Use

Annual progress reviews provide students with regular, structured feedback on where they stand, help catch challenges early and ensure that expectations, milestones, and support are clearly communicated between students, advisors, and programs. Review processes help to ensure every student, regardless of program, receives this same basic level of attention to their progress. In addition, annual reviews can serve other purposes at the university, including the following:

i) Program Assessment and Curricular Governance

Aggregated, de-identified review data allows departments to evaluate program health at a structural level: typical time-to-milestone, attrition points within the curriculum, variance in outcomes across advisors or subfields, and the adequacy of current degree requirements. This supports evidence-based curricular revision for departmental and college-level graduate committees.

ii) Early Identification and Remediation of Academic Difficulty

Reviews function as a structured mechanism for identifying students who are falling behind expected milestones before those difficulties become terminal to the student's progress. The intent is diagnostic and corrective, allowing to identify issues earlier, so that programs can respond with intervention (committee reconstitution, revised timelines, additional mentoring) rather than allowing problems to compound silently until a terminal review or dismissal decision.

iii) Support for Administrative Processes

Annual review documentation also underlies time-sensitive administrative petitions, most notably extension-of-stay requests for international graduate students under F-1 or J-1 status, and increasingly EOS petitions to USCIS as immigration regulations evolve. Faculty should be aware that the rigor and timeliness of the review process directly affects the institution's ability to support students in these processes.

iv) Support for Research Reporting

Annual reviews provide consistent documentation of graduate student progress, academic standing, and research and training activities, supporting the university's ability to meet federal reporting and oversight expectations associated with sponsored research and training awards. A consistent institutional process also gives faculty and programs reliable evidence of trainee progress and outcomes when preparing federal progress reports, renewals, and new funding applications.

B. Annual Review Process

Each graduate program is required to conduct an annual review of every student's academic progress. Programs have full discretion over how they structure this review in accordance with existing R&P policies on graduate education. The progress milestones recorded in the annual review will follow university regulations for doctoral programs (as outlined in R&P 3.23, 3.24, and 3.25) and for Master's programs (as outlined in R&P 3.22.1), with program specific timelines as described in the catalog. The format, participants, and criteria for annual reviews are determined at the program level, consistent with best practices in the discipline. For example, Program A may have a program director evaluation in years 1-3, followed by a dissertation committee review in years 4-6; Program B may have an individual faculty review in years 1-2, followed by dissertation committee review in years 3-5; Program C may have a full committee review in years 1-2, followed by dissertation committee reviews in years 3-5. It is critical that a department or program document their process in a program handbook and/or their department website.

The content of the review, while subject to a few parameters, as shown in the submission requirements section below, can also be flexible. Some programs may look to evaluate TA performance in addition to research performance. Others may seek to use rubrics for performance indicators. The outcomes of each student's review must be submitted to the central graduate data repository, using the required data elements below.

B1. Timing

Reviews are conducted annually, with the submission window open March through August. Students begin their annual reviews in the calendar year following the first term of their enrollment, with common examples shown below.

- Students who begin in the Summer or Fall term complete their first review in the next March–August window (e.g., a student starting Fall 2026 has their first review in March–August 2027).
- Students who begin in the Spring term skip that window and complete their first review in the following March–August window (e.g., a student starting Spring 2027 has their first review in March–August 2028, not 2027).

B2. Annual Review Submission Requirements

For doctoral students (Please see [here](#) for further details):

- LIN
- Student Name (Last, First)
- Program
- Expected Program Duration (ex. 5 years)
- Entry Term (ex. Fall 2027)
- Expected Completion (ex. Spring 2032)
- Required Coursework Completed? (Y/N/NA)
- Qualifying Exam Successfully Completed? (Y/N/NA)
- General Exam Successfully Completed? (Y/N/NA)
- Proposal Successfully Completed? (Y/N/NA)
- Next Milestone (narrative)
- Next Milestone Date (ex. December 2028)
- Progress Assessment (Satisfactory/Satisfactory with Concern/Concern)
- Faculty Comments (Narrative)
- Program Comment (Narrative)
- Action Required? (Y/N)
- Action Comment (Narrative)
- Follow up Date (ex. Spring 2028)

Note that after the first annual review, the data will follow the student LIN. Therefore, prior information (name, program, duration, entry term, etc.) will be retained year over year, and will autopopulate the form.

Faculty/program comments can be brief, but should capture successful student progress in a holistic manner (and opportunities for improvement, as applicable). Examples could include:

Good Progress

- "Demonstrates strong initiative in refining research questions and standardizing methodology."
- "Publication velocity is aligned with program expectations; draft of Chapter 2 is ready for advisor review."
- "Has successfully passed comprehensive exams and shown high competency in qualitative analysis."
- "Exhibits solid task management and maintains regular, productive communication with committee members."

If the student is struggling, some examples could be

- "Needs to transition from consuming literature to producing original synthesis and analysis."
- "Research timeline is slipping; need to set strict monthly writing goals for the dissertation proposal."

- "Technical/analytical skills require strengthening before proceeding to the data collection phase."
- "Communication with committee members has been irregular; proactive updates are required."

For master's students (Please see [here](#) for further details):

- LIN
- Student Name (Last, First)
- Program
- Expected Program Duration (ex. 2 years)
- Entry Term (ex. Fall 2027)
- Expected Completion (ex. Spring 2029)
- Expected Coursework Completed? (Y/N)
- On Track with Additional Coursework (Y/N)
- Thesis Progress (narrative)
- Progress Assessment (Satisfactory/Satisfactory with Concern/Concern)
- Faculty Comments (Narrative)
- Program Comment (Narrative)
- Action Required? (Y/N)
- Action Comment (Narrative)
- Follow up Date (ex. Spring 2028)

Note that after the first annual review, the data will follow the student LIN. Therefore, prior information (name, program, duration, entry term, etc.) will be retained year over year, and will autopopulate the form.

Faculty/program comments should be brief, but should capture successful student progress (and opportunities for improvement, as applicable). Examples could include:

Good Progress:

- "Maintaining a cumulative GPA above program requirements and completing core courses in the recommended sequence."
- "Shows active participation in seminar courses and consistently meets advanced course learning objectives."
- "On track to fulfill all credit-hour and breadth requirements within the expected timeframe."
- "The research topic is well-defined, and the IRB/ethics approval process is moving on schedule."
- "Demonstrates good foundational knowledge of the field and applies methods correctly to the dataset."
- "Writing is clear, structured, and on track to complete the capstone defense by the target graduation date."

Needs Improvement:

- "Scope of the thesis is overly ambitious for a master's timeframe; needs to be scaled down immediately."
- "Struggling to integrate advisor feedback into revised chapters, leading to redundant review cycles."
- "Literature review remains too broad and lacks focus on the immediate project goals."
- "Academic standing is at risk due to a drop in GPA near the departmental threshold; academic support is advised."
- "Needs to address prerequisite gaps in technical subjects before enrolling in advanced electives."

B3. How to Submit

Programs may conduct reviews using any internal process or format. Results should be entered into the central repository via the Graduate Student Annual Review Form **<A GO link will be added when ready>** any time within the March–August submission window. The form is completed once for each student being reviewed. The form will follow the information found [here](#), and is also outlined above, in the Annual Review Submission Requirements. The reviewer will enter the student LIN, and available information (such as name, program, entry term, and expected completion term) will be populated automatically and display the most recently retained information. The reviewer will then enter the applicable annual review outcomes, milestone information, progress assessment, comments, and any required action or followup.

Centralized collection of annual review data serves a protective function by ensuring that academic determinations faculty already make each year are reliably captured and retrievable at the moments students most need them. Absent a consistent institutional record, a student's legitimate progress or documented setback exists only informally, at the discretion of an individual advisor or department, and cannot be reliably produced when the institution must act on the student's behalf. The data collection does not supersede departmental or program academic judgment; it preserves it, converting decisions already made by faculty into a durable record the institution can stand behind.

This will follow a standard Jira ticketing process.

C. Use of Data for Extension of Stay Requests

Lehigh is responsible for the academic and institutional components of a program extension. The University will provide supporting documentation for all Extension of Stay requests. The student is responsible for applying to the federal government for an Extension of Stay. USCIS is responsible for determining whether the EOS is approved.

Lehigh should provide students with sufficient information and documentation to understand and navigate the process without making OISS responsible for preparing or reviewing individual

I-539 applications. At the moment, we are uncertain as to exactly what will be required; we are anticipating the following will be required from the university:

- The University Registrar will provide necessary documentation to demonstrate academic progress. This could include degree audits, catalog procedures for assessing progress, and a statement related to student progress based on institutional procedures, such as: On x, y, and z dates the student was found to be making satisfactory academic progress towards [degree]. The annual review process will both support transparent institutional procedures, as well as this statement from the University Registrar.

The Registrar statement is not designed to be editorial, but rather a statement of policy and documentation. If a student does experience a normal setback, the documentation of the remediation of the setback will be crucial to the Registrar's factual description of the student's academic progress.

- Department or College Letter of Support for an Extension of stay. The program provides a letter that supports continued normal/satisfactory progress in the program, through the lens of the field of study. The department letter is a true narrative of the student progress, details of which can be supported through the annual review process. This letter should:
 - confirm that the student is currently making satisfactory/normal academic progress per an established definition;
 - identify the academic or research circumstances that have affected the student's reasonable completion timeline, such as a change of major or research direction, research findings requiring refinement of the research plan, unexpected research obstacles, a change of adviser, funding delays, or other comparable academically legitimate circumstances;
 - explain why the additional time is academically necessary, rather than simply preferred;
 - identify the academic requirements or research milestones that remain, informed by the student's documented annual reviews and record of completed requirements; and
 - provide a reasonable revised completion date and, where appropriate, the anticipated milestones leading to completion.