



Doctoral Handbook – Policies
2023-2024 EDITION

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION:OVERALLFRAMEWORK	4
REGISTRATION AND COURSEWORK	4
Program Plan of Study.....	4
Minimum Course and Research Requirements.....	4
Registration Procedures.....	4
Concurrent Enrollment	4
Eight-Year Limit.....	5
Adjustments to Program Plan of Study	5
Residency Requirement and Consortium Courses	5
Transfer Credits.....	5
Academic Standing.....	5
Incomplete Coursework and Withdrawals.....	6
English for Academic Purposes	6
Maintaining Current Student Status.....	7
Continuing Research (0940).....	7
Continuous Enrollment (CE).....	7
Leave of Absence (LOA).....	8
COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS.....	8
Registration Requirements.....	8
Comprehensive Exam Evaluation and Retakes.....	9
DISSERTATION RESEARCH	9
Dissertation Research Registration: 8999 and 0940	9
Dissertation Defense Eligibility.....	10
Dissertation Defense Outcomes.....	10
Application for Graduation	10
THE STUDENT APPEALS PROCESS.....	10
Informal Attempts at Resolution.....	11
Post-Master’s Appeals Committee: Policies and Procedures.....	11
EXITING THE DOCTORAL PROGRAM AND GRADUATING WITH AN M.A. OR EDS DEGREE	13
FINANCIAL AID POLICIES	13
Maintaining Federal Student Loan Eligibility	13

*The George Washington University
Graduate School of Education and Human Development*

Half-Time/Full-Time Certification.....	13
UNIVERSITY POLICIES	14
Academic Integrity	14
Immunization Requirement	14
Privacy of Records	14
Student Conduct.....	14
Equal Opportunity Policy.....	14
Sexual Harassment Policy.....	15

Please note: Important forms are available online at gsehd.gwu.edu/student-services and/or registrar.gwu.edu/forms. Please contact Doctoral Student Services at docgsehd@gwu.edu with any questions.

INTRODUCTION: OVERALL FRAMEWORK

This Doctoral Student Handbook states applicable policies and procedures to doctoral study at the Graduate School of Education and Human Development (GSEHD). The stated policies and procedures apply to all doctoral degree programs, but each doctoral program may impose additional requirements. Please contact your program faculty for additional program-specific information.

GSEHD may change some of the policies, requirements, and procedures stated in this handbook during subsequent years. Students will be informed of important changes that affect them via their e-mail addresses, which must be maintained in GWeb.

REGISTRATION AND COURSEWORK

Program Plan of Study

Your program plan of study, which is listed in the [GW Bulletin](#) and on [DegreeMap](#), is your contract with the university.

Minimum Course and Research Requirements

All doctoral programs include a minimum of 36 credits of coursework and 12 credits of dissertation research. Most programs have additional credit requirements. Please see the [GW Bulletin](#) for full course requirements for your program.

Registration Procedures

Students register for classes using the online [GWeb Information System \(please see registration instructions here\)](#). Students who register for classes late, after the online registration system has closed, or who encounter technical difficulties can register using a [Registration Transaction Form](#). Students who wish to enroll in Continuous Enrollment or a Leave of Absence should fill out the [Leave of Absence/Continuous Enrollment Registration form](#) and submit it to docgsehd@gwu.edu. Students must be registered during each fall and spring semester; summer registration is optional unless you are sitting for the comprehensive exam, proposal defense, or dissertation defense, or it is required by your program (e.g., for a cohort model).

Concurrent Enrollment

Students may not pursue two degrees/programs concurrently, either at GW or at another institution, without the prior permission of the faculty advisor and GSEHD Dean's Office. To request approval, please contact docgsehd@gwu.edu.

Registration in individual courses at other GW schools, or through the [GW Consortium](#) system, is permitted and is not considered concurrent enrollment.

Eight-Year Limit

After you begin your program, you have eight years to complete all program requirements and defend your dissertation. Any leaves of absence do not count against this time limit. Exceptions to the eight-year limit are given rarely, and only with convincing evidence that the student has made all practical efforts to complete within eight years. Extensions require an appeal to and approval by the Post-Master's Appeals Committee (PMAC) (see page 10 for more information).

Adjustments to Program Plan of Study

Substitutions to the required courses may be made with approval from your advisor. To make adjustments, complete a [Program Plan Change Form](#) and submit it to docgsehd@gwu.edu. On this form, students should indicate which changes they are making to their program plan (e.g., taking an alternate class in place of a required class). Each program plan lists a number of research electives, also called Level B electives; all programs require students to take at least one Level B elective, and some require multiple. If a student is taking a Level B class that is not listed on their original program plan, they must also receive approval from the Research Methods faculty (email methodsfac@gwu.edu to start the approval process). Independent studies cannot be counted toward Level B requirements, but Consortium classes may be, with faculty approval.

Residency Requirement and Consortium Courses

GSEHD requires that all doctoral candidates complete a minimum of 36 credit hours of coursework (including internships and independent study but excluding dissertation research) at GSEHD or at other DC-area institutions through the [Consortium](#). Consortium courses count toward the residency requirement and appear on your GW transcript automatically; you do not need to apply for transfer credit for a Consortium course. To register for a Consortium course, fill out the [Consortium Registration Forms](#) and email them to docgsehd@gwu.edu. Note: Consortium policies are set by the Presidents of the member institutions and not by GSEHD.

Transfer Credits

Graduate credits earned in nondegree status at GW, in other degree programs at GW, or from other institutions can be applied to GSEHD doctoral programs as transfer credit if all of the following criteria are met:

- They were taken at an accredited college or university.
- They were completed in the past five years.
- They were passed with a grade of "B" or better.
- They have not been used to fulfill requirements for another degree program.
- They are not used to satisfy the 36-credit hour residency requirement.
- They have been approved by the student's advisor and, if applicable, by Research Methods faculty.

To seek approval for transfer credits, complete the [Program Plan Change Form](#). If the credits were earned at an institution other than GW, you must also submit an official transcript.

Academic Standing

In order to remain in good academic standing and eligible to graduate, students must earn an

overall grade-point average (GPA) of 3.0 (a “B”). No more than two grades of “C+” or below are permitted throughout the doctoral program. A single grade of “F” will remove you from good academic standing. **Students who earn a GPA below 3.0, multiple grades of “C+” or below, or a single “F” will have an academic standing hold placed on their record that will prevent future registration and may lead to program removal.**

To remain in the program after an academic standing hold, students must submit a written petition to the Associate Dean for Doctoral Studies. This petition should include information about what led to the academic standing issues and a plan for resolving issues in the future and moving forward effectively. In consultation with the Program Director and advisor, the Associate Dean will then discuss the issue with the student to determine whether continuation in the program is permitted. If students are removed from the program, they may appeal this decision to the PMAC based on the procedures described in this document.

Except for courses that specifically state that repetition for credit is permitted, doctoral students may not repeat a course in which a grade of “C-” or better was received, unless required to do so by your department. However, students must re-take a course after earning a grade of “F.” Both the original and the new grade remain on the record and are included in the student’s overall GPA.

Incomplete Coursework and Withdrawals

An instructor may give a grade of Incomplete (“I”) if a student is unable to complete the work for a course before the end of the semester due to unforeseen circumstances. Incompletes cannot be granted retroactively and must be granted during the semester you are taking the course, so if you need to request an Incomplete, please discuss with your instructor as early as possible. Incompletes can also only be granted if you are in good academic standing and your prior performance and attendance in the class have been satisfactory. Students who receive a grade of “I” must submit an [Incomplete Contract](#). Per university policy, a grade of “I” will convert to “F” if outstanding work is not completed within one calendar year.

If you plan to withdraw from a course, please reach out to both your instructor and the Office of Student Life to let them know. You will be able to withdraw online or via RTF. If you stop attending a class without formally withdrawing, you will be assigned a grade of “Z” for “Unauthorized Withdrawal” and an academic hold will be placed on your account. You cannot graduate or register for further coursework until the grade of “Z” is resolved. If you are assigned a grade of “Z,” please reach out to the Office of Student Life to formally withdraw instead.

English for Academic Purposes

Students required to take an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course must earn a minimum grade of “B-” in the course. Students who earn below a “B-” in their first course must take an additional EAP course in the subsequent semester. Students who earn an “F” in an EAP course must repeat the course. EAP courses do not count toward the overall number of program credits.

Maintaining Current Student Status

Students must maintain current student status by registering every fall and spring semester. Enrollment during the summer semester is not required unless you are sitting for the comprehensive exam, proposal defense, or dissertation defense, or it is required by your program (e.g., for a cohort model). If you “break enrollment,” i.e., fail to register for one or more semesters, you may need to apply for readmission. Readmission is not automatic but is at the discretion of the program faculty, and is based on current admissions criteria and regulations, which may differ from those that were in place at the time of your initial application. If you have questions about your enrollment, please contact docgsehd@gwu.edu.

Generally, students must be registered each semester in a minimum of three credits, but under specific circumstances, students can remain enrolled while registering in fewer than three credits. This is allowed while registered in Continuing Doctoral Research (0940), Continuous Enrollment (CE), or a Leave of Absence (LOA). Each is briefly described below.

Continuing Research (0940)

Continuing Research can be used in two different circumstances. First, if you have completed all required coursework and still need to take your comprehensive examinations, you are to enroll in one credit of Continuing Doctoral Research (CNSL, CPED, EDUC, HOL, SEHD, or SPED 0940) while preparing for and taking your exam. Note: Students may enroll in 0940 for a maximum of two semesters while preparing for the comprehensive examination.

Second, if you have completed 24 credits of Dissertation Research (8999) and have not yet defended your dissertation, you can stop registering in 8999 and instead register for one credit of Continuing Doctoral Research (0940) each fall and spring semester until you graduate. Note: Summer registration is required only for students defending their proposal or dissertation during that semester.

Continuous Enrollment (CE)

Continuous Enrollment (CE) is a zero-credit, zero-cost option which functions similarly to a Leave of Absence, but allows students to maintain library and campus access. CE is only available in a few specific circumstances. It may be used during attendance at another institution (with prior approval by the Dean’s Office). It may also be used to complete coursework for outstanding Incomplete grades.

It is most frequently used for doctoral candidates who are unable to defend in the semester in which they file dissertation defense materials (generally because the materials are filed after the graduation deadlines for the current semester). If candidates submit their materials after the current semester’s graduation deadline, but before the posted CE deadline (posted on the [GSEHD Critical Dates website](#)), they may register for Continuous Enrollment for the following semester and defend then. Note: in order to submit your dissertation materials, you must be registered and in good academic standing. This means that if you wish to enroll in CE for the fall semester, you will need to register during the summer semester and submit your materials then.

Students who are in one of these circumstances may enroll in a maximum of two semesters of Continuous Enrollment using a [Leave of Absence/Continuous Enrollment Registration form](#). To request additional semesters, the student must seek approval from the PMAC. **Note:** **International students are not permitted to register for CE; please contact the [International Services Office](#) for more information.**

Leave of Absence (LOA)

All students may take two semester-long Leaves of Absence for any reason during their time at GSEHD. You will need to submit a [Leave of Absence/Continuous Enrollment Registration Form](#) for each semester. Students who wish to register for more than two leaves of absence must seek approval from the PMAC, with limited exceptions; students who are U.S. government employees assigned out of the United States for official duties or are in the military and actively deployed may take unlimited Leaves of Absence.

Note: During a leave of absence, you will retain access to your GW email and your GW Box files; however, you will not have access to most of the university's resources, including the library and campus buildings, and faculty members will not be permitted to work with you on your dissertation. You will also not be permitted to defend your dissertation proposal or submit dissertation materials.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS

You must successfully complete the doctoral comprehensive examination near the end of your doctoral coursework and within five years of beginning your program.

To be eligible to sit for the comprehensive exam, students must meet all of the following requirements:

- Currently registered
- In good academic standing
- Successfully completed all coursework or currently registered for the last semester of coursework (In some programs, 8998 and one Level B Research Methods course may be taken after the comprehensive exam.)
- Have no grades of "I", "Z", or "IPG" (In Progress) from a previous semester (with the exception that Counseling PhD students may sit with IPGs in CNSL 8961, 8259, and 8260)

Registration Requirements

Doctoral students must be registered in coursework during the semester they take the comp exam. If you have completed all required coursework, you must enroll in one credit of Continuing Research (0940). If you take the comprehensive exam before completing 8998 and/or one Level B Research Methods course, you must still complete 8998 and Level B after your exam before enrolling in Dissertation Research (8999). 8998 will be automatically assigned a grade of "IPG" (in

progress). An instructor may enter a grade of “CR” for the 8998 course after students successfully defend their dissertation proposals, or the grade can remain IPG indefinitely without penalty. At the point of dissertation defense, all outstanding IPGs will be converted to Credit by the registrar.

If you plan to take only one course after your comp exams, please be aware that taking only 3 credits during a regular semester (fall or spring) will often mean you no longer qualify as a half- or full-time student. Check with the appropriate university offices, especially the [Financial Aid Office](#) and the [International Services Office](#), to see how this might affect you.

Comprehensive Exam Evaluation and Retakes

Each examination question is read by two or more faculty members, and this process normally takes several weeks to complete. You will receive a letter from the Office of Student Life notifying you of the outcome of your examination.

If you fail one or more parts of the examination, a retake is allowed. Following a failure, you should speak with your program faculty to determine your retake date and what coursework you should register in while retaking. If you fail part or all of the retake, you may petition the PMAC to request a second retake, but approval is not assured.

DISSERTATION RESEARCH

Dissertation Research Registration: 8999 and 0940

- After completing all coursework and passing the comprehensive exam, candidates will enroll in CNSL, CPED, EDUC, HOL, SEHD, or SPED 8999 while conducting dissertation research.
- Candidates will take a minimum of 12 and maximum of 24 credits of 8999, at a rate of three or six credit hours each fall and spring semester, until they successfully defend their dissertation or reach a total of 24 credits. Summer registration is optional.
 - (Note: GSEHD can certify students as half- or full-time while they are enrolled in Dissertation Research using a [Half-Time/Full-Time Certification Form](#). For most types of financial assistance, this will make you eligible to either receive aid or defer previous loans. Please work with the [Financial Aid Office](#) to confirm that this applies to your situation. GSEHD can certify international students as full-time for visa purposes while they are enrolled in Dissertation Research.)
- After completing 24 credits of 8999, candidates can register for one credit of Continuing Doctoral Research (CNSL, CPED, EDUC, HOL, SEHD, or SPED 0940) each fall and spring semester until they defend their dissertations. Registration in 0940 for dissertation research purposes is not permitted until you have completed 24 credits of 8999.
- To defend your dissertation, you must be registered during the semester of defense, including the summer semester. Students will typically be registered in 8999 or 0940 during their defense, but may be registered in CE if they meet the specified criteria.

Dissertation Defense Eligibility

In order to defend, students must:

- Have completed all program requirements, including a minimum of 12 credits of dissertation research (8999), and successfully defended their proposal (IPGs in 0940, 8998, and 8999 are permitted).
- Be registered and in good academic standing in the semester of defense.
- Not have an active academic standing or time limit hold on their account. If students do have one of these holds, they must appeal to PMAC to either resolve the academic standing issue or receive a time extension before becoming eligible to defend.
- Receive approval from their chair and committee that the dissertation document is ready to defend.
- Submit all dissertation materials at least 30 days in advance of the defense and no later than the posted deadlines on the [GSEHD Critical Dates](#) page.

Dissertation Defense Outcomes

If the dissertation defense is successful, the student must make any required edits and submit the final version of the document to ProQuest before the [ETD deadline](#). A student who is unable to make the required revisions before the deadline may enroll in Continuous Enrollment (CE) in the subsequent semester and finish and submit the revisions then, graduating in the subsequent semester. CE status is limited to two semesters. A student who does not have final committee approval for the dissertation within two semesters will be terminated from the doctoral program. Please note: international students are not eligible for CE, and should enroll in 0940 if they require an additional semester to make edits to their dissertation document.

If the dissertation document is acceptable but the defense is unsuccessful, the student may request a second oral defense. On the second attempt, a student must pass the oral defense and have the dissertation voted acceptable by the committee. If the student fails both oral defenses, the student is automatically removed from the doctoral program, and must appeal to the PMAC for reinstatement if interested in continuing.

Application for Graduation

Please submit the online [Application for Graduation](#) for the semester in which you plan to graduate by the listed deadline.

THE STUDENT APPEALS PROCESS

GSEHD students in doctoral programs have the right to appeal a decision. Students should first attempt to resolve issues informally and, if necessary, may appeal to the Post-Master's Appeals Committee (PMAC). The PMAC meets four times per year, typically in September, November, February, and April. Students must file an appeal with PMAC within six months of the issue in question.

Informal Attempts at Resolution

Prior to appealing a decision through the PMAC, the student should first attempt to resolve the matter with the faculty member(s) most directly responsible and with the department chair. If no resolution can be achieved or the issue is a matter of seeking an exception to GSEHD policy, the student may appeal to PMAC. Any informal attempts must occur within the six-month time frame for filing the appeal.

Post-Master's Appeals Committee: Policies and Procedures

- The Committee
 - One representative from each doctoral program and one representative from the research methods faculty comprise the PMAC. Committee members serve staggered two-year terms and may be re-elected. A representative of the Dean's office will serve as a nonvoting member.
- Justification
 - For matters not resolved informally, students may appeal the following:
 - An admissions or academic matter on the basis of a violation of GSEHD policies or procedures. The student must submit clear evidence of divergence from prescribed procedures to the PMAC. This most frequently consists of appealing a grade or appealing for a second retake of the comprehensive examination.
 - An academic matter on the basis of extenuating circumstances that would render the application of established policies and procedures unfair. Extenuating circumstances are generally an event or series of events that are beyond the student's control that prevented the student from fulfilling degree requirements consistent with GSEHD policies and procedures. To prevail on an appeal, a student must submit clear evidence of extenuating circumstances. This most frequently consists of seeking an additional Leave of Absence or seeking an extension of the eight-year program time limit.
- Student Procedures
 - For an appeal to be considered by the PMAC, students must adhere to the following process:
 - Students must present their case within six months of the date of the decision being appealed. All documents must be submitted to the Office of Student Life two weeks prior to the meeting of the PMAC. Students should expect to provide the following information:
 - Student Statement of Appeal: An explanation of the policy, procedure or decision being appealed, the circumstances leading to the appeal, the progress made, and factors which will lead to successful resolution.
 - Student Timeline: An outline of the exact steps which will be taken to complete any pending requirements successfully, if requesting an extension of time.
 - Two letters of support from program faculty. It is preferable if one letter is from your dissertation chair. If your chair is outside of your program, they can submit a letter in addition to the two letters of faculty support from

your program. *The Educational Leadership and Administration program submits one program letter instead of two faculty letters.*

- The Office of Student Life will provide additional guidance should other materials be required.
 - The appeal will be placed on the PMAC agenda for the next meeting during the academic year only when the student has submitted all case materials.
 - Procedures outlined in Section 5 below govern the conduct of the hearing and the notification of the Committee's decision.
 - The student may appeal the decision of the PMAC by submitting a written appeal to the Dean within 30 calendar days after the written date of the PMAC decision. A delay in filing an appeal may constitute grounds for rejection of the appeal. The Dean's decision is final.
 - Committee Procedures
 - The Office of Student Life provides copies of all documents related to the appeals case to each Committee member, including a summary of the appeal, the student's submitted statement, student timeline, and faculty letters of support.
 - The Office of Student Life coordinates communication between the student, the faculty advisor(s), the Office of the Dean, the PMAC Chair, and when necessary, other parties associated with the appeal. The Office of Student Life is responsible for notifying in writing the student and faculty associated with the appeal of the day, date, and time of the hearing. The student and faculty have the option of attending the meeting to explain the appeal if they notify the Office of Student Life at least one week prior to the hearing. The student may have another individual present for support, but the person will not be permitted to speak or participate in the hearing. If the individual is an attorney, the student must inform the PMAC chair no later than one week prior to the hearing. Faculty opposing the appeal may also be invited to attend at a separate time from the student's appearance.
 - The PMAC Chair is responsible for the conduct of the hearing, including allotting time should a student or faculty member appear in person.
 - The Committee will conduct a confidential discussion to reach a decision attained by majority vote. Any Committee member involved in supporting the appeal must recuse themselves from the Committee's proceedings, deliberations, and decision. The Committee has the prerogative to include in their decision conditions or terms required of students to remain in the program.
 - An official decision letter is issued no later than 10 business days after the meeting date.
 - Should the student appeal the PMAC decision, the Office of Student Life will inform the Dean of the Committee's deliberations.
 - The Office of Student Life shall keep a copy of all written records along with the committee's rulings, recommendations, and justifications for the decisions. Decision letters become a part of the student's official student record.
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EXITING THE DOCTORAL PROGRAM AND GRADUATING WITH AN M.A. OR EDS DEGREE

Students who determine that a doctoral degree no longer fits their goals or whose circumstances change such that they are unable to complete their doctoral research have the option to change their program to an Education Specialist (EdS) or Master's (MA) degree and graduate with that credential. These steps can be taken after the appeals process or independently of it.

Current students who wish to graduate with a different degree can pursue an EdS if they have already completed their comprehensive examination, or an MA if they have not. Please consult with your advisor or chair and then with the Office of Student Life at docgsehd@gwu.edu to begin this process.

Please note, if a student chooses to graduate with the EdS or MA, they will no longer be eligible to use their coursework toward an EdD program and will need to reapply and complete all program requirements should they wish to continue doctoral study at a later time.

FINANCIAL AID POLICIES

GSEHD admission decisions are made without regard to financial need. Descriptions of available financial assistance are provided on the [GSEHD website](#) (including information about Graduate Assistantships, merit scholarships, endowment awards, and other funding sources). University-wide funding opportunities are available on the [GW Office of Graduate Student Assistantships and Fellowships](#) website. Students enrolled at other campuses or in online programs should contact their program faculty to determine if there is tuition support available. All students can also contact GW's [Office of Student Financial Assistance](#) with specific questions.

Maintaining Federal Student Loan Eligibility

Federal regulations require students to maintain good academic standing and make Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) to remain eligible to receive federal student loans. For more information on SAP, please refer to the [GW Office of Student Financial Assistance](#) website. The website also includes information on Evaluation of SAP and the appeals process.

Half-Time/Full-Time Certification

Students typically must be enrolled at least half-time to receive federal financial aid. In the fall and spring semesters, GW considers 9 credits to be full-time study and 4.5 credits to be half-time. In the summer, full-time status requires 6 credits and half-time status requires 3.

Students in the following situations are eligible to complete the [Half-Time/Full-Time Certification form](#), which will allow the university to certify the student as full- or half-time despite being enrolled in fewer than the normally required number of credits:

- Students enrolled in an internship required by their program
- Students enrolled in dissertation research (8999 or 0940)
- Students taking the comprehensive exam (limited to 2 semesters)

Please note that this form must be completed each semester, as registration is required before it can be approved. The student is responsible for completing the form, obtaining advisor/chair signature, and then submitting the form to docgsehd@gwu.edu for dean-level signature.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity

The George Washington University (GW) Code of Academic Integrity is available through [GW's Student Conduct Office](#). This code is designed to promote academic honesty and describes how violations of the GW's Code of Academic Integrity are handled.

Immunization Requirement

All students under age 26, regardless of program of study, location of study, part-time or full-time status, or degree or nondegree status, must comply with the immunization requirement as set forth by the Law of the District of Columbia. You can find more information about the immunization requirement on the [GW Student Health website](#).

Privacy of Records

GSEHD complies with the provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), commonly referred to as the "Buckley Agreement." Students should refer to the [GW Guide to Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) for information regarding this policy. All applications and supporting documents become the property of GW once received and cannot be returned.

Student Conduct

The [GW Guide to Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) includes the Code of Student Conduct and details the process through which disciplinary action is taken by GW when students are charged with violations of its provisions. Students who are charged with serious offenses may have their cases heard by boards that include students as members of the hearing panels; those charged with minor offenses are subject to a disciplinary conference.

Equal Opportunity Policy

GW does not unlawfully discriminate against any person on any basis prohibited by federal law, the District of Columbia Human Rights Act, or other applicable law, including without limitation, race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression. This policy covers all programs, services, policies, and procedures of the university, including admission to education programs and employment.

Sexual Harassment Policy

GW is committed to maintaining a positive climate for study and work, in which individuals are judged solely on relevant factors, such as ability and performance, and can pursue their activities in an atmosphere that is free from coercion, intimidation, and violence. The [university mission statement](#) provides that the university "values a dynamic, student-focused community stimulated by cultural and intellectual diversity and built upon a foundation of integrity, creativity, and openness to exploration of new ideas." The university is committed to free inquiry, free expression, and the vigorous discussion and debate on which advancement of its mission depends. Sexual harassment is destructive of such a climate and will not be tolerated in the university community.

Sexual harassment of students by faculty or administrators or of employees by those in a position to affect their employment status or by other employees in the work unit is inimical to such an atmosphere and will not be condoned.

If you have any questions about the university's Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence Policy and Procedures, please direct them to the university's Vice Provost for Diversity and Inclusion, who also serves as the university's Title IX Coordinator, at diverse@gwu.edu or (202) 994-7440. You may also contact the university's Assistant Title IX Coordinators identified in the section entitled "Contacts" in the [Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence Policy](#). Additional information can be obtained from visiting the university's [Haven](#) website.