



August 11, 2023

Provost Katherine Newman and Academic Council Chair Susan Cochran, Co-Chairs, Academic Planning Council

RE: UPDATE ON THE JOINT SENATE-ADMINISTRATION WORKGROUP ON THE FUTURE OF UC DOCTORAL PROGRAMS

Dear Provost Newman and Senate Chair Cochran:

Our Workgroup is pleased to provide this interim guidance for UC faculty on the delineation of expectations for academic research, distinct from our expectations for employment, related to some of the questions in our charge, summarized as follows:

- What are the principles that should guide academic progress towards the completion of a graduate degree?
- What opportunities exist to more clearly delineate between compensated work and academic progress?

We recognize that interim guidelines are urgently needed in advance of the impending start of the fall term. We also acknowledge that any recommendations may need to evolve as we collectively clarify, adapt, and implement our new procedures.

When graduate students serve in an employment (Graduate Student Researcher) role, the distinction between work done for pay and activities undertaken in pursuit of academic goals can be challenging to articulate, particularly when extramural support provides GSR funding for research that is fundamental to a student's academic program. In some fields, GSR work and student research have traditionally been seen as indistinguishable in terms of many of the specific activities undertaken. Over the past several years, some campus-level Graduate Councils have attempted to clarify the meaning of academic credit in directed studies courses through a variety of mechanisms (e.g., requiring written expectations aligned with accreditation standards for all courses that confer academic credit). However, these approaches have not been implemented consistently across all UC campuses. Graduate students occupy different employee and student roles, sometimes simultaneously, throughout their time at the university. This dual status as well as the implications of the new contracts, have created a need for a systemwide approach.

**First**, we refer our colleagues to the [Interim Guidelines for Directed Studies Courses](#) (e.g., courses numbered 299 or 599) recently released by the Academic Senate's Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA). This document states: "At the beginning of each term, faculty should clearly describe to their graduate students the expectations for their academic progress, as distinct from the expectations for their employment." Underlying this statement is the principle that while activities performed for academic credit may be similar or even the same as activities performed for employment, their purposes are different, and the standards by which the activities must be measured are different. ***While employment is performed as a service for a defined period of time or for a specified set of activities, academic effort is undertaken in pursuit of a defined academic goal that is not always associated with a precise expectation of time or with predetermined activities.*** We and the CCGA further recommend that faculty advisors of graduate students enrolled in directed studies courses document their academic expectations, as well the basis on which the students will be graded, in a syllabus (or equivalent) for each student in each course.

**Second**, while the content of a syllabus attached to any course, including its grading plan, is at the discretion of the faculty member responsible for that course, we must create such documents based on common principles. In particular, the overarching goal of directed studies courses for graduate students is to provide a framework for, and faculty guidance of, student academic progress. **Thus, academic expectations are defined by progress toward the dissertation or final thesis project, including through a collection of intermediate goals and learning outcomes.** Research and creative activities are by their nature open-ended. Learning from trial and error, and even failure, are intrinsic parts of the process. Finally, the effort required to engage in original research and to create new knowledge may vary from one student to another, from one term to another, and from one dissertation project to another. In general, faculty advisors are highly experienced at guiding such projects, and they should discuss with their students how to pursue their academic goals in light of these varying parameters.

**Third**, we acknowledge that considerable additional effort may be required of faculty advisors to articulate academic expectations clearly in writing and to discuss them with each advisee. Faculty are encouraged to make use of sample documents when possible, while adapting such examples and templates based on discipline, project, student, or other specific details. Faculty may also decide to create yearly plans that can be updated periodically as needed, as long as the basis for grading each term's progress is clearly articulated. Faculty may wish to highlight their development of academic progress expectations when they document tenure, merit, and promotion activities, as described in [APM 210-1.d.1](#): "general guidance, mentoring, and advising of students; effectiveness in creating an academic environment that is open and encouraging to all students, including development of particularly effective strategies for the educational advancement of students in various underrepresented groups."

In summary, faculty have the authority to require, assess, and judge academic outcomes, and they must do so for all graded experiences in the university, consistent with the policies and procedures of the Academic Senate. Faculty, when they supervise the work of graduate student employees, also have the responsibility to evaluate employment appropriately.

For situations in which employment activities overlap with activities related to the academic progress of graduate students, faculty should use employment assessment processes (e.g., reappointment, letters of concern, discipline) to address employment expectations and outcomes (e.g., time spent, activities completed). They should use academic assessment processes (e.g., grades, annual student reviews) to address academic outcomes (e.g., learning outcomes, dissertation progress).

Sincerely,



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cc. Academic Senate Vice-Chair and Chair-Elect James Steintrager  
Members of the Academic Council of the UC Academic Senate  
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