

GRADUATE COUNCIL (GC)

Meeting Minutes
Monday, October 2, 2023
1:15pm – 2:30pm
ZOOM ONLY

Documents available in [box](#)
[Graduate Council Duties](#)

I. Consent Calendar – Chair Scheibner – 1:15pm – 1:20pm

- A. Agenda
- B. [September 20 meeting minutes](#)

Action:

- The agenda and September 20 meeting minutes were approved as presented.
- GC analyst will update Senate website accordingly.

II. Chair’s Report – Michael Scheibner – 1:20pm – 1:30pm**A. September 28 DivCo Meeting**

- Discussions were held in preparation of the upcoming Shared Governance Retreat, scheduled to take place on Friday, September 29, 2023.
- Interim EVC/Provost Zatz discussed the potential federal government shutdown. An announcement was circulated on Monday, October 9, 2023, announcing a 45-day delay.
- Interim EVC/Provost Zatz reported on the current Dean searches for SSHA Dean Gilger’s and VPDUE Frey’s replacement.
- Interim EVC/Provost Zatz, Senate Chair LiWang, VPDGE Hratchian, and SNS Dean Dumont will attend the systemwide Congress on the Future of Graduate Education on October 9, 2023.
- Interim EVC/Provost Zatz discussed the importance of differentiating professional development & work for hire, vs. academic progress & graduate training, etc.
- The TA and GSR Unions may merge. There have been ongoing issues with scholarships affecting students’ financial aid packages, and the administration announced that beginning next year, merit-based scholarships will no longer be subtracted from students’ financial aid packages.
- Interim EVC/Provost Zatz also discussed plans for boosting faculty morale, which include a faculty lounge in the Dining Center, faculty discipline-based awards, etc.
- Faculty Advisory Committee on Sustainability (FACS) Chair Dawson provided an update on FACS’ function and goals for the year.

B. September 29 Shared Governance Retreat

Chair Scheibner reported that the following four main points were discussed at the Shared Governance Retreat:

1. **Faculty Morale** led by Professor Tom Handford. Many faculty are thinking about leaving UC Merced because their needs are not being met.
2. **Faculty and Campus Needs: Financial Reporting Systems** led by CoR Chair Ye, DivCo At-

Large Member Khatri, VCR Wilson, CIO Dugan, CFO Schnier, and SoE Dean Goel. Discussions were held regarding issues with the Oracle Financial System and research facilities.

3. **Enrollment Growth Clarity and Faculty Hiring** led by Senate Vice-Chair Hibbing, VCSA Nies, and VPAAS Spitzmueller. Participants discussed how to increase enrollment numbers, especially at the undergraduate level.
4. **Graduate Students Funding** led by VPDGE Hratchian and GC Chair Scheibner. Chair Scheibner will provide an update during discussion of agenda item VI.

III. Vice Chair's Report – John Abatzoglou – 1:30pm – 1:35pm

A. September 25 PROC Meeting

Vice Chair Abatzoglou reported that programs are reviewed every seven years, and several programs are currently undergoing their review. There are plans for vertically integrated program reviews, which would include the concurrent review of both undergraduate and graduate programs. Undergraduate and graduate programs are currently reviewed separately. More definitive guidance has been requested in terms of what is expected from PROC, which Vice-Chair Abatzoglou will share with committee members one received.

IV. Systemwide Review Items – All – 1:35pm – 1:45pm

A. [Proposed New APM 672-Negotiated Salary Program](#)

The purpose of the Negotiated Salary Program (NSP) is to provide a mechanism for participating campuses to augment faculty compensation on a temporary basis according to the competitive requirements of academic disciplines.

Requested Action: Members discuss the proposed new APM 672-Negotiated Salary Program and determine whether GC should opine.

GC Analyst noted that GC is, in fact, a lead reviewer for this item.

Chair Scheibner summarized the new APM 672 noting the piloted programs at various campuses and the several reviews that have resulted in systemwide implementation. Having such a program that allows negotiation of compensation may be important because postdocs at UC Merced have declared that they would rather not go through the trouble of becoming a faculty member and would rather pursue industry or other jobs where they can better maintain a living. Chair Scheibner would like to continue the discussion at the October 18 GC meeting.

Action:

- Members are to send Chair Scheibner and GC Analyst Snyder their comments on the proposed new APM 672 via email **by Wednesday, October 11, 2023.**
- Further discussion will take place at the October 18 GC meeting.
- Comments are due to the Senate Chair by Friday, November 3, 2023.

V. Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Scholar Survey Results – Rebeca Arevalo and Min Hwan Lee – 1:45pm – 2:00pm

At the September 20, 2023 GC meeting, member Lee provided a summary of the results of the graduate student and postdoctoral scholar surveys, available [here](#), which revealed the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic, BSP building shutdown, Oracle Ordering System, etc. have had on their research and progress

to degree.

On September 29, 2023, members Lee and Arevalo met with Associate Dean of Graduate Education Ghosh to further discuss the survey results and to identify the top 3-4 impacts for GC to address first.

Requested Action: Members Arevalo and Lee will provide the committee with an update. Members determine which 3-4 impacts should be elevated to the attention of the administration to be addressed.

Member Lee summarized the three impacts that he, member Arevalo, and Graduate Division Associate Dean Ghosh believe to be the most important issues to recommend to the administration:

1. Advisor Mentoring

Many students expressed a desire for regular meetings with, and improved guidance from, their advisors. Member Lee recommended including “Postdoctoral Mentoring Guidelines” in Graduate Groups’ Policies and Procedures, which should outline the frequency of meetings and clarify advisors’ roles and responsibilities in updating students of their degree milestones.

2. Resource Portal

Many students and postdocs inquired about an onboarding checklist that includes essential resources and regular reminders. Member Lee recommended a portal that contains all links, FAQs, and information that students can refer to. Member Arevalo clarified that there is an existing onboarding portal and recommended adding an FAQ section. Member Lee would like to suggest including a one-pager to the existing portal that contains all necessary links and contact information, an FAQ section, etc.

3. Graduate Group Chair/Student Relationship

Several students suggested additional career workshops, job fairs, and professional development support. Because the campus already offers several workshops, job-matching events, and career development support, members Lee and Arevalo believe that improved communication is needed.

Chair Scheibner noted that all aspects of these three items may not need to be addressed by the administration alone, but that graduate group chairs and GC can address some of the issues. He recommended that members Lee and Arevalo sort the three items to recommend to Graduate Group Chairs, the administration, and what GC can address.

Action:

- Members Lee and Arevalo will sort the three areas they have identified as most important (Advisor Mentoring, Resource Portal, GG Chair/Student Relations) to recommend to Graduate Group Chairs and the Administration, and for GC to address.
- Members Lee and Arevalo will provide the committee with an update at the October 18 GC meeting.

VI. Future of Graduate Education – Chair Scheibner – 2:00pm – 2:30pm

At the September 20, 2023 GC meeting, Chair Scheibner shared with members his ideas and questions regarding how to improve graduate education and better support all faculty at UC Merced. Members were invited to share their ideas with Chair Scheibner prior to today’s meeting to better inform the discussion.

This agenda may contain confidential and privileged material for the sole use of GC Members.

Today, GC will continue to discuss and identify particular situations, needs, and opportunities at UC Merced that pertain to the impacts from the new contracts.

Requested Action: Members engage in discussion and determine next steps.

Chair Scheibner summarized his discussion from the Shared Governance Retreat regarding graduate student funding. His PowerPoint slides are available [here](#). He asked members the following three questions:

1. **Opportunities for funding graduate education and research training:**
Can we envision a more consistent, sustainable, scalable and plannable funding support of graduate education that enables an economy of scale for Faculty, GGs/Depts., Schools, etc.?
2. **Opportunities for a more holistic vision of graduate career paths:**
What mechanisms and support would be needed to provide graduate students opportunities to prepare themselves for the full spectrum of careers; in- and outside academia?
3. **Opportunities to elevate graduate training & research culture:**
What measures can we take to advance fundamental discovery, stimulate innovation and creative expression, across disciplines fields and industries?

Vice Chair Abatzoglou noted that he is involved in several graduate groups that have a small number of incoming students. The graduate groups will not be able to offer curriculum to incoming students if nothing is done to increase enrollment numbers. Vice Chair Abatzoglou summarized his potential solutions which included offering graduate courses through more than one graduate program, offering undergraduate/graduate hybrid degree programs, and offering conjoined courses to upper division undergraduate and graduate students. He also noted that many students are promised 5-year funding commitments, which can be problematic if offered to underperforming students.

Member Andresen Eguiluz noted that he is also a member of a graduate program with a low number of incoming students with the majority being international students. In order to address this issue, members of the graduate group are visiting California State Universities (CSU's) in an effort to encourage students to apply to the Materials and Biomaterials Science and Engineering (MBSE) Graduate Program. Member Andresen Eguiluz also noted that it is easier to fund domestic applicants, and in order to apply for additional training grants, graduate groups must increase their number of domestic graduate students.

VPDGE Hratchian clarified that the number of graduate applicants this year is down by approximately 1.5 times rather than the previous estimated 2-3 times compared to other universities. UC Merced is particularly behind in the number of domestic applicants. Regarding 5-year funding commitments, VPDGE Hratchian noted the importance of ensuring faculty and graduate group chairs have the tools to determine early on whether graduate school is not the appropriate path for some of their students. Discovering halfway through the 5-year commitment that a student is not suitable for the program can be demoralizing for all. Oftentimes, a couple years in, the faculty mentor does not want to engage in the difficult conversation with their student to ask them to leave, so they find alternative unethical ways to force the student to leave.

Chair Scheibner reported that he is developing a pilot program for real work-based training. He is working to partner with a third-party platform to advertise course profiles that include a description of the course; what students join the course; projects from business industries, government organizations, national labs, for-profit and non-profit organizations; etc. Companies can make suggestions on the projects you can select and which projects are most suitable for your course/workshop. Then, you can assign students to the projects who could then connect with potential future employers.

Action:

- Members are to send Chair Scheibner and GC Analyst Snyder their responses to the three questions listed above **by Wednesday, October 11, 2023.**
- Further discussion will take place at the October 18 GC meeting.

VII. Any Other Business – 2:30pm – 2:35pm

No other business was discussed.

VIII. Executive Session – Voting Members Only – 2:35pm – 2:45pm

No minutes were recorded during the executive session. The action items were shared with GC voting members.