GRADUATE COUNCIL (GC)
MEETING MINUTES
Friday, March 21, 2025
11:30am – 1:00pm
ZOOM

Documents available in Box
Graduate Council Duties

Pursuant to call, the Graduate Council met at 11:30am on March 21, 2025. Chair John Abatzoglou presiding.

I. Executive Session – Voting Members Only

No minutes were recorded during the Executive Session. The action items were shared with GC voting members.

II. Consent Calendar
  A. Today's Agenda

    Action:
      ➢ Today's Agenda was approved as presented.

  B. March 7 Draft Meeting Minutes

    Action:
      ➢ The March 7 Meeting Minutes were approved as presented.

  C. Courses

    Action:
      ➢ GC approved the following courses, and Curriculog was updated accordingly:
        COGS - 224 - Neural Networks in Cognitive Science (New; Spring 2026)
        COGS - 250 - Cognitive Science Graduate Seminar (Modify Existing; Spring 2026)
        EDUC - X485 - AP Content and Pedagogy for Teachers (New; Fall 2025)
        ECON - 242 - Public Economics (New; Spring 2026)
        GSTU - 210 - Research Proposal for Advancement to Candidacy (Modify Existing; Fall 2025)

III. Chair's Report – John Abatzoglou
  A. March 11 Divisional Council Meeting

Divisional Council members discussed the Division of Professional and Continuing Education's (PACE) PK-3 Non-Degree Certificate Proposal: Early Childhood Education (ECE) Specialist Instruction Credential. Divisional Council members then voted to endorse the proposal and transmit its decision to PACE.

Divisional Council members consulted with PACE Dean Roberts Webb regarding the work that PACE is accomplishing.

B. March 20 All Graduate Group Chairs' Meeting

Ongoing discussions centered around the usage of the Block Funds across graduate groups and the best practices for allocating and managing those funds.

The graduate group chairs discussed the high Statement of Intent to Register (SIR) rates and why there was such an increase this year. Chair Abatzoglou noted that the SIR numbers are higher at UC Merced this year than last year; however, UC Merced sent out its admissions much earlier this year.

The graduate group chairs broke into groups to discuss the Future of Doctoral Education Report. The goal of the discussions was to identify where UC Merced is doing well and where it can improve.

C. Proposed Amendments to GC's Policy for the Establishment of Undergraduate/Graduate Hybrid Degree Programs

On March 6, 2025, UGC provided a response to GC's February 11, 2025 memo (linked above) regarding GC's Proposed Amendments to GC's Policy for the Establishment of Undergraduate/Graduate Hybrid Degree Programs, conveying. UGC's approval of the proposed amendments. A GC memo regarding the proposed amendments was then transmitted to the Senate Chair for Divisional Council's consideration.

IV. **Vice Chair's Report – Irenee Beattie**
A. March 13 PROC Meeting

Vice Chair Beattie informed members that she forwarded GC's comments on the draft charge for a Combined Review Work Group to PROC. GC recommended additional faculty representation on the committee to ensure each School is represented, along with representation from a range of programs. Specifically, it is important to include faculty from programs that are aligned, interdisciplinary, and accreditation dependent. PROC responded and asked whether faculty could be selected that would fulfill multiple roles on the work group, and Vice Chair Beattie confirmed that would be appropriate.

V. **In-Person Exam Sessions for Online Courses**
The Registrar's Office is seeking further clarification from UGC and GC on the scope of an instructional modality definition in their course approval policies. Both policy documents indicate that Online courses have 0% contact hours in person, that 100% of the contact hours are delivered remotely, and that there are no in-person meetings. This raises the following questions:
1. Does this definition extend to exam sessions, including midterms and finals, so that fully online course sections cannot offer in-person exam meetings and must hold them remotely?
2. Or are online sections allowed to offer in-person exams based on the preference of the instructor or departmental scheduling unit?

Registrar Webb informed members that the Registrar's Office has not yet encountered this situation but is seeking clarification from the Senate in case it arises in the future. VPDGE Hratchian added that, although he does not believe that UC Merced currently has any fully online graduate courses, he envisions that in the next couple of years, there may be a need to differentiate between fully online degree programs, where students do not need to be in residence, and a hybrid degree programs, where students attend some portions of the program online and others in person.

GC members discussed the two options and agreed with option 1, that the definition should extend to exam sessions, including midterms and finals, so that fully online course sections cannot offer in-person exam meetings and must hold them remotely. Since students would be planning for an online modality, the course, including all exams, should be delivered online.

A member suggested that it might be worthwhile to consider one-off courses. Alternatively, the modality should match the course unless there is an approved exception. VPDGE Hratchian added that if this was done, it would need to be advertised in advance, as students would need to be aware when registering for the course. Registrar Webb requested that if an exception is made, the response from GC to the Registrar's Office clearly specify who has the authority to grant the exception. It was suggested that the exception could either be submitted to GC for approval or be incorporated into the CRF approval process. VPDGE Hratchian emphasized the importance of considering situations where exceptions are requested for private matters. Registrar Webb noted that these types of exceptions are typically managed by the administration, such as the School Deans, and therefore, it would not be required for GC to take a stance on such exceptions for specific courses. However, if there were a change to the course proposal, then Senate approval would be required. Members then discussed the various ways to note a course's modality in the CRF and agreed that if a course is partially delivered in person, it should be noted as a hybrid course, not a fully online course.

Ultimately, members agreed that the situation provided by the Registrar justifies a hybrid course offering rather than a fully online course offering. They also concluded that a fully online course should, by definition, have all of its content, including exams, delivered online with no in-person components.

Actions:
- ➢ The GC Analyst drafted a memo containing the committee's comments and circulated it to members for their review.
- ➢ Once the memo is approved, the GC Analyst will transmit GC's comments to UGC for consideration.

VI. Discussion: Artificial Intelligence (AI)

At the February 21, 2025 GC meeting, members discussed Artificial Intelligence (AI) in relation to graduate education and academic integrity. Currently, the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (OSRR) oversees academic honesty and misconduct through the Academic Honesty Policy and the Code of Student Conduct. At the March 7, 2025 GC meeting, members discussed their various opinions regarding AI use and possible recommendations for action. Following the discussion, Chair Abatzoglou agreed to synthesize the committee's comments for further discussion at a future meeting.

Existing UC Merced Policies and Guidance:
- OSRR: UCM Academic Integrity
  "Plagiarism refers to the use of another's ideas or words without proper attribution, or credit."
- Research Compliance and Integrity: Research Misconduct
- Graduate Policies and Procedures Handbook (GPPH): Academic Disqualification (page 40)
- Using AI in Instruction

Related Articles Regarding the Use of AI:
- Protecting Human Cognition in the Age of AI
- AI Tools in Society: Impacts on Cognitive Offloading and the Future of Critical Thinking

Members reviewed the summary provided by Chair Abatzoglou in the GC Brainstorm on AI Guidance for Graduate Education Google Doc. Chair Abatzoglou suggested moving forward with guidance for the campus rather than a policy. Members then discussed whether GC should provide general guidance to the campus regarding AI use. VPDGE Hratchian suggested that the guidance could be made available for all graduate groups to consider the topic, and it might be valuable for all graduate groups to report any general thoughts, concerns, and open questions regarding AI use. In addition, graduate group chairs should be encouraged to have discussions with their graduate groups, as not all faculty may have used AI or have sufficient knowledge regarding AI use.

Members discussed how OSRR oversees academic honesty and misconduct even in cases of academic misconduct. They agreed that it is concerning that cases of academic misconduct, plagiarism, etc. are not reviewed, handled, or even seen by the Graduate Division. Vice Chair Beattie noted that if there is a model from other schools where this type of misconduct is overseen by the Graduate Division, it may be worth exploring a similar model for UC Merced.

Members discussed the potential differences between graduate groups' view on AI use. A member noted that despite the different viewpoints, academic dishonestly should have the same definition across graduate groups. It was added, however, that in terms of AI use, some departments may wish to allow the use of generative AI with citation, while others may not want to permit AI use at all. It would then become considered academic dishonesty within certain departments if AI use is not permitted, even when properly cited. Therefore, it would be useful to understand how graduate groups feel about AI use and for GC to consider the differing opinions when drafting guidance.

Ultimately, members agreed that it would be valuable to reach out to graduate group chairs through a survey to gather their feedback and input regarding AI use. VPDGE Hratchian wondered if CCGA has done something similar. Chair Abatzoglou noted that while CCGA has not specifically addressed this, some other campuses are looking into AI use as well.

Actions:

➢ Chair Abatzoglou will create and circulate a Google Doc for members to add potential survey questions to.
➢ The survey will be reviewed by members at a future meeting prior to its distribution to graduate group chairs.

VII. Waiver Policy for In-Person Graduate Defenses

Faculty with ADA-based accommodations to work remotely have concerns about the policy requirement in the Graduate Policies & Procedures Handbook (page 39) mandating in-person attendance at graduate defenses. Some faculty members make every effort to attend defenses in person, but often times they are unable to do so and are then required to fill out last-minute waivers so that they can attend the defenses remotely. At the March 7, 2025 GC meeting, members discussed possible resolutions. Chair Abatzoglou agreed to synthesize the committee's comments and provide options of resolution for the committee to review at a future meeting.

Relevant language from UC Merced and other UC campuses is available here.

Members reviewed potential revisions to the language in the Graduate Policies & Procedures Handbook as noted on the shared Google Doc. It was noted that it seemed appropriate for the Department Chair to approve such requests rather than the Graduate Dean. VPDGE Hratchian agreed that the Department

Chair seemed like an appropriate level to handle these types of requests.

Members discussed whether it would be valuable for the Graduate Division to track defense participation through different modalities. VPDGE Hratchian stated that this could be done with a slight modification to the Graduate Division qualifying exam form and defense exam form if GC wished to track modality participation. The Graduate Dean could then report annually to GC on modality participation in case there were any concerns about the change in policy. Members agreed that it would make sense to collect data and track modality participation.

Actions:
➢ Members agreed to revise the language in the Graduate Policies & Procedures Handbook (page 39) regarding mandating in-person attendance at graduate defenses.
➢ Members will continue to edit the proposed language revisions on the shared Google Doc.
➢ This topic will be added to the April 4 GC agenda for members to review the proposed language and vote to approve if there is a consensus.

VIII. Campus and Systemwide Review Items
A. Interim Policy on Withdrawal of Consent to Remain on University Property (Campus Wide)
The policy outlines implementing procedures of Penal Code Sections 626.4(a) and 626.6 on University Property for the University of California. The policy applies to all campus affiliates (students and employees) and non-affiliates.
- California Penal Code Section 626.4 refers to campus affiliates, includes a 14-day withdraw of consent and allows for a hearing.
- California Penal Code Section 626.6 refers to non-affiliates, includes a 7-day withdraw of consent and no hearing is afforded.

Comments are due to the Senate Chair by **Monday, April 14, 2025.**

Actions:
➢ Chair Abatzoglou invited members to review the policy and share any comments with Petra and Chair Abatzoglou by 10:00am, Monday, March 31.
➢ In the absence of comments by the deadline, the GC Analyst will notify the Senate Chair that GC declines to opine.

B. Proposed Revisions to APM 500, Recruitment – Updated (Systemwide)
The policy revisions respond to the need to address two new bills signed into state law that add and amend sections 92612.1 and 92612.2 of the California Education Code, effective January 1, 2025 (reference Senate Bill (SB) 791, Postsecondary education: academic and administrative employees: disclosure of sexual harassment, and California Assembly Bill (AB) 810, Postsecondary education: hiring practices: academic, athletic, and administrative positions). The new revisions are indicated below using **bold** and underlined text.

Comments are due to the Senate Chair by **Monday, April 14, 2025.**

Actions:
➢ Chair Abatzoglou agreed to serve as lead reviewer.
➢ The lead reviewer's comments will be shared with members and further discussion will take place at GC's April 4 meeting.

C. [Presidential Policy on High-Containment Research](#) (Systemwide)
The policy includes the following key provisions:
- All high-containment facilities and research activities at all University-owned and/or operated locations.
- The authority of the UC High-Containment Laboratory Oversight Committee is formalized.
- The required elements of a High-Containment Research Program are identified as the local High-Containment Laboratory Oversight Group, the designated High-Containment Laboratory Director, and the High-Containment Laboratory Plan, which details the management and operational safety plan for each high-containment facility.

Comments are due to the Senate Chair by **Friday, April 25, 2025.**

Actions:
➢ Chair Abatzoglou invited members to review the policy and share any comments with Petra and Chair Abatzoglou by 10:00am, Monday, March 31.
➢ In the absence of comments by the deadline, the GC Analyst will notify the Senate Chair that GC declines to opine.

D. [Liberal Studies B.A. Proposal](#) (Campus Wide)
The proposal from SSHA is for the establishment of a B.A. in Liberal Studies with emphasis tracks in Social Sciences, and Humanities and Arts. This program is planned for implementation in Fall 2025 for continuing students and Fall 2026 for first year and transfer students.

Comments are due to the Senate Chair by **Monday, April 28, 2025.**

Actions:
➢ Chair Abatzoglou invited members to review the proposal and share any comments with Petra and Chair Abatzoglou by 10:00am, Monday, March 31.
➢ In the absence of comments by the deadline, the GC Analyst will notify the Senate Chair that GC declines to opine.

IX. VPDGE Hratchian's Report
A. Admissions Updates

VPDGE Hratchian shared an admissions report with members and noted that he is monitoring the doctoral applicants, as this is where there are funding commitments and potential budgetary concerns. He added that in the past, admissions had been delayed, but this year, were delivered on schedule. VPDGE Hratchian stated that UC Merced will have approximately the same number of admits as last year. One concern shared by VPDGE Hratchian was in regards to the SIR numbers, as UC Merced is up about 70% this year. One potential reason for UC Merced's increase is that sending out admits early may lead to more SIRs. Another concern is that all 10 UC campuses are seeing a large increase in SIRs, ranging from 25% to 400%. Many Graduate Deans across UC campuses believe this may be due to students hearing about possible recissions and funding decreases, prompting them to SIR to more campuses than in previous years. VPDGE Hratchian's bigger concern is that this may negatively impact UC Merced in the long run, as the campus may plan for a larger number of students, only for many of them to choose to attend a different university.

B. Future of Doctoral Education Report
The Graduate Division collected feedback from the graduate group chairs on the 'Bold Initiatives'

within the report.

    Actions:
- ➢ VPDGE Hratchian will send the GC Analyst feedback that the Graduate Division collected from the graduate group chairs regarding the report.
- ➢ This item will be added to a future GC agenda.

X. Any Other Business

VPDGE Hratchian shared an uplifting statement from former UC President Clark Kerr.

    Actions:
- ➢ VPDGE Hratchian will send the GC Analyst a link to a video from a recent Board of Regents meeting where the President of the UC Graduate and Professional Council presented a statement to the Regents.
- ➢ The GC Analyst will share the link to the video with GC members.

VPDGE Hratchian stated that he may ask for a GC representative to conduct a holistic review of the graduate application soon.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:00pm.
Attest: John Abatzoglou, GC Chair