

SYSTEMWIDE AND DIVISIONAL GUIDELINES FOR FACULTY ON INDEPENDENT RESEARCH COURSES

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INTERIM GUIDANCE FROM CCGA on Directed Studies Courses

Definition of 299 Courses

On most campuses, 299 courses come under the category of graduate-level directed studies courses (290s). On some campuses, 299s are used interchangeably with 297 or 295, and on some campuses 596 and 599 are used for directed study courses, while others use 299 for education-only courses, but for the purposes of this document, we will refer to all directed study courses as “299”. 299 courses are often classified as research for the thesis or dissertation. They may also be taken as a form of independent study, in connection with research in laboratories and towards a student’s thesis. The material produced as part of the 299 may be intended for future publication or other activities (e.g., performances, poster presentations, etc.). In a lab setting, the 299 allows a student to conduct research under the oversight and mentorship of a professor. 299 courses are typically for S/U grades and taken for 1 up to 12/16 units (quarter/semester) per term.

Clarifying the research and mentorship component of 299 courses is ongoing on a departmental, campus, and systemwide level. CCGA discussed this issue and compiled a repository of campus-level efforts, including documents generated by graduate councils on the various campuses, often in the form of guidance on syllabus development for graduate-level individual study or research courses.

Guidelines for Clarifying the Research and Mentorship Component of 299 Courses:

The following may help clarify the academic expectations from the faculty member to the student and mentorship involved with 299s.

Articulating the academic coursework expectations of the instructor establishes the basis for grading as well as the scope of academic coursework effort (separate and apart from any employment responsibilities) to be undertaken by the student. Such articulation should also specify the types of activities that will be mentored and overseen by faculty.

CCGA affirms that:

- (i) The definition and clarification of the expectations in terms of scheduled time for graduate students taking 299 courses is at the discretion of faculty members.
- (ii) At the beginning of each term, faculty should clearly describe to their graduate students the expectations for their academic progress as part of a 299 course.
- (iii) Underlying statement (ii) is the recognition that while activities performed for academic goals and expectations may be similar or even the same as activities performed for employment, their purposes are different, and the standards by which these activities must be measured are different. While employment is performed as service for defined periods of time or for specified sets of activities, academic effort is undertaken in pursuit of defined academic goals and expectations that are not always associated with defined periods of time or specified sets of activities.
- (iv) Disagreements about academic effort should be handled through existing procedures.

The following are some suggestions faculty members and programs may want to consider:

1. Faculty mentors may articulate their expectations for the graduate student taking a 299 course in the form of a syllabus, a course description, or a course add form. Faculty are encouraged to formalize grading criteria to create clarity for the students and to prevent misunderstanding. The scope of the research as well as the basis for grading the research

should be defined by the professor, and understanding of these should be acknowledged by the student. Other factors to consider include the number of meetings to be held, the timeline for completing research projects, milestones in the process, and criteria for the evaluation. We emphasize that Senate Regulation 760 states: "The value of a course in units shall be reckoned at the rate of one unit for three hours' work per week per term on the part of a student, or the equivalent." Consequently, it is important that students enroll for the number of units consistent with stated expectations.

2. In order to set, assess and gauge expectations in 299s, faculty may use different tools, including self-assessment surveys provided by the graduate division or graduate groups, Gantt charts, and meetings with the student.
3. For 299s taken in the context of lab research, the faculty PI can clarify expectations that are part of the academic training of the graduate student.
4. Academic credit may be based on research activities conducted by a student such as: writing a paper, preparing research towards a thesis chapter, designing an experiment, preparing or compiling a research survey or questionnaire as part of an experiment, writing a play or screenplay, creating a performance, or developing an original work of art.
5. 299s are not used for teaching/TAing responsibilities.
6. Departments may collate a repository of examples and templates of expectations or course syllabi for 299 courses to share with faculty members. Alternatively, there could be a program-level syllabus template with example language, such as wet lab-specific sentences that a faculty may use.



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
Executive Directors of the divisional Academic Senates

Graduate Council

Guidance on Syllabus Development for Graduate-Level Individual Study or Research Course

Background

A critical part of most PhD and many masters graduate programs are individual independent study and research courses that cover topics beyond the material covered in conventional or special topics courses normally offered to graduate students at the beginning of their course of study. Traditionally, these courses have been taught without any detailed syllabus that are the norm for other classes and relied on tacit agreements between faculty and students on the contents covered each quarter. This is the source of potential conflict between students and faculty in cases where faculty assign unsatisfactory grades. The Chair of the Academic Senate therefore requested that the Graduate Council clarify its policy statement from 5/9/2019 on graduate-level individual study or research courses.

Programs are required to provide a form of written research expectations or a syllabus for master's and doctoral students enrolled in graduate research units. The written research expectations should state how student research performance is assessed and graded. Expectations should be devised by participation through students and faculty in individual programs.

Our existing policy makes it clear that it is already a program-level requirement that a default version of such a syllabus (or "written research expectations ") be available to students for these courses. However, the intent was that this requirement should be customized to the specific needs of the research by agreement between the student and faculty in the specific course.

We believe that it is in the best interest of both the faculty and of the students that all additional expectations and evaluation criteria be agreed upon at the beginning of the quarter for each course in all cases where individual faculty would like to modify the program-level syllabus. Employment-related activities cannot be evaluated as academic progress.

Recommendation for Independent Research Courses

We propose to expand our guidance with the following additional paragraphs:

A syllabus should detail the learning activities and goals for the course and therefore will commonly include: frequency of meetings, expected outcomes, timelines, milestones, student mentoring activities and which of these components would be evaluated. A student should be made aware in writing of any course requirements beyond the standard program syllabus for these courses at the beginning of each quarter. Student performance must only be evaluated on the basis of creative and learning activities; Student performance cannot be evaluated on the basis on any employment-related activities as graduate student researcher or teaching assistant. The basis of the assigned grades should be documented and clearly communicated to the student in relation to the syllabus and expected outcomes. Faculty should keep copies of the individualized outcomes as well as the basis for their grades.

One unit corresponds to three hours of weekly academic time. In order to maintain their student status, full-time students must be enrolled in at least 12 units, part-time students in 8 units or less.

We expect programs to communicate to their participating faculty that such written documentation is in the best interest of both parties. We further propose that associate deans of graduate research enforce the program level requirements by collecting the default, program-level syllabi and to inform the faculty that they should customize them as necessary if they wish to add or modify requirements listed in them.

Last but not least, we expect that there will need to be program-level clarification for participating faculty on how to delineate time and effort dedicated to employment vs academic progress for graduate student researchers' own academic progress as well as how to explicitly communicate expectations to their students.

Recommendation for Teaching-Related Courses

We propose to expand our guidance with the following additional paragraph:

Students employed as Teaching Assistants should not receive academic credit for regular teaching and grading activities. Such practice is inconsistent with provisions of the ASE contract and should cease immediately. If students are receiving academic credit in teaching-related courses, a syllabus with explicit pedagogical training components and academic expectations should exist for each of these courses.