



April 19, 2024

Provost Katherine Newman and Academic Council Chair Jim Steintrager, Co-Chairs, Academic Planning Council

RE: EXPECTATIONS FOR NON-GRADED ACADEMIC EFFORT IN PhD AND MFA PROGRAMS

Dear Provost Newman and Senate Chair Steintrager:

We recognize that UC faculty, who have both the authority and the responsibility to assess academic progress and outcomes for graduate students, are seeking guidance on how to advise their students regarding expectations for academic effort that is neither graded nor associated with academic course credit (for example, during the summer period). To frame our recommendations, the APC Workgroup builds on the following UC principles for graduate education:

- Each PhD and MFA program is defined by a set of requirements and expectations that include, but are not limited to, conventional required and elective coursework, non-course-related exams (e.g., qualifying and candidacy exams), regular and occasional check-ins (e.g., meetings with the dissertation/thesis advisor and dissertation/thesis committee, research group meetings and sub-group meetings), as well as conducting the research and/or creative activities to acquire the results needed to prepare, to write, and eventually to defend a dissertation or thesis.
- PhD and MFA students enroll in directed studies courses during the academic year (fall/winter/spring) to provide them with regular and sustained access to faculty advice and expertise. In such courses, they are expected to develop and refine the skills they need to accomplish their research and/or creative activities at the high intellectual level expected in a terminal graduate program.
- Graduate education in the pursuit of a research-focused graduate degree is a process that is more than a set of tasks, assignments, jobs, or work products. A PhD dissertation or MFA thesis is a long-term (multi-year) project largely unconnected to the short-term rhythms of the undergraduate quarter/semester system.
- For this reason, each PhD and MFA program specifies a normative time, in years, in which a student pursuing the degree is expected to be able to finish all requirements, up to and including the defense and filing of the dissertation/thesis.

Adequate progress towards the dissertation/thesis is expected of each PhD/MFA student throughout the calendar year. This progress includes the regular academic terms (fall/winter/spring), times between instructional dates in these terms, and during the summer, at a pace that is likely to result in completion of the degree program within its normative time. The amount of effort required will vary depending on the ability and efficiency of each student. Oversight mechanisms for academic progress reside principally with the faculty, as well as (to a lesser extent) with academic administration. Departmental graduate advisors and individual faculty advisors are experienced in judging the pace of progress in research and/or creative activities necessary to meet the expectations of academic achievement within normative time.

In our March 2023 memo to you regarding the delineation of directed studies efforts from employment, the APC Workgroup acknowledged the need to articulate distinctions between activities undertaken for academic credit and work done for pay when a graduate student is concurrently employed as a Graduate Student Researcher for work that

contributes to a student's dissertation or thesis project. Any periods during which a graduate student invests academic effort *without* formal coursework and is also employed part-time in this way pose a different challenge for the delineation, because academic expectations are not articulated in a course syllabus.

For PhD and MFA students in many fields, the summer period is an essential time to make academic progress. The scholarly contributions that make up a dissertation/thesis may arise in part from a GSR appointment, but academic progress does not *and should not* emerge mainly from this paid employment. In fields in which students employed as GSRs perform tasks that overlap with and provide results or insights that will appear in the student's doctoral dissertation or MFA thesis, the additional effort required to advance the dissertation/thesis is usually considerably more than the time a student spends performing GSR duties.

We affirm again that faculty have the authority to set expectations regarding overall academic progress in graduate programs and are responsible for providing regular feedback to their advisees about their progress. This authority applies not only to graded directed studies coursework, but also to any other academic effort required to make satisfactory academic progress. The pace of academic progress should be sufficient to complete all degree requirements within normative time. It should be assessed regularly in meetings with the dissertation advisor, dissertation committee, and as part of annual reviews typically conducted by the program. For example, the advisor and advisee *may* find it useful to schedule meetings during ungraded periods to discuss academic progress. Such meetings may also involve the setting or measuring of annual goals. Programs *should* implement annual academic reviews of all PhD and MFA students if they do not already have such a practice in place, with the outcome being a written notice to the student of their academic progress as judged by the program faculty.

We hope this guidance for academic expectations outside of formal coursework is useful, even as we recognize that it may need to evolve as we collectively clarify these expectations and adapt our procedures.

Sincerely,



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cc. Academic Senate Vice-Chair and Chair-Elect Steven Cheung
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