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*Chair of the Assembly of the Academic Senate
Faculty Representative to the Regents
University of California
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August 10, 2023

ACADEMIC SENATE DIVISION CHAIRS

Re: Guidelines for Directed Studies Courses

Dear Colleagues:

At its July 26 meeting, the Academic Council approved the attached set of guidelines developed by the Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA) to assist in clarifying the academic and mentorship expectations for directed studies courses. These courses, commonly numbered as 299s, 599s, or some version of that numbering, provide graduate students with opportunities to engage in research or independent study under the guidance of a professor, and are typically required for students completing a thesis or dissertation or used to recognize academic efforts during graduate studies such as preparing for graduate exams.

The guidelines are intended as a general reference for campuses; they offer flexibility and avoid excessive detail or prescription. They allow for variability in distinguishing between students' academic work and the tasks covered under specific employment contracts. They emphasize that instructors are responsible for defining the academic expectations for each course and underscore the importance of open and transparent communication throughout the course, beginning with the syllabus, to prevent any confusion between a student's academic commitments and their employment obligations.

I ask you to circulate the guidelines to graduate council chairs, graduate deans, and other relevant and interested faculty and administrators on your campus. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Cochran".

Susan Cochran, Chair
Academic Council

Cc: CCGA
Provost & Executive Vice President Newman
Vice Provost Haynes
Associate Vice Provost Lee
Academic Council
Senate Division Executive Directors
Executive Director Lin



COORDINATING COMMITTEE ON GRADUATE AFFAIRS (CCGA)

Erith Jaffe-Berg, Chair
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ACADEMIC SENATE

University of California
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor
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August 7, 2023

ACADEMIC SENATE CHAIR SUSAN COCHRAN

Dear Chair Cochran:

In July, CCGA re-presented some guidance to Council on 299s to help faculty navigate in the wake of the unionization of the graduate students. As had been the case in June, Council had some feedback on the document; these suggestions have been incorporated, and the new guidance has been reviewed and approved by CCGA, UC Legal, and Academic Personnel and Programs.

As we noted in our previous letter, many of the campuses have forged ahead in this effort, working to clarify the student/faculty relationship. CCGA asks that this guidance be shared as soon as possible with the graduate deans, graduate council chairs, and the divisional senate chairs.

Thank you for your support of this effort. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Erith Jaffe-Berg
CCGA Chair

c: James Steintrager, Academic Senate Vice Chair
Monica Lin, Academic Senate Executive Director
Michael LaBriola, Academic Senate Assistant Dir
CCGA Members
Amy K. Lee, Associate Vice Provost, APP
Martha Kim, Principal Counsel, UC Legal
James DiCaprio, Academic Labor and Employee Relations Director, APP
Nick Weston-Dawkes, Academic Labor and Employee Relations Associate Dir., APP

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.