CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
LONG BEACH
Office of Academic Programs and Graduate Studies

Memorandum of Understanding

This MOU has been read and approved by:

Interim Dean, Graduate Studies : _____ Date: 4/24/2025
Dina Perrone

Interim Vice Provost Academic Programs: _____ Date: 4/24/2025
Pei-Fang Hung

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Program Review Summary
Memorandum of Understanding
Graduate Center and Thesis and Dissertation Office
April 2025

This document serves as a summary of the Program Review findings and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the consensus reached by the Graduate Center (GC), Thesis and Dissertation Office (TDO) and the Division of Academic Affairs, based on the recently conducted program review with a Self-Study received on October 1, 2024. The Dean of the College of Graduate Studies, Dr. Tracy Love (San Diego State University) completed the external review on January 30, 2025. This report and MOU describe the goals to be achieved and the actions to be undertaken by all parties to this MOU by the next program review cycle.

Graduate Center

The Graduate Center (GC) was established in 2016 and quickly became CSULB's "one-stop-shop" resource center for current and prospective graduate students. Currently, GC has three full-time staff members, student workers, and one intern. All three FT staff serve graduate students in stateside and self-support programs and undergraduates interested in graduate school.

The Center started via a Promoting Postbaccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans (PPOHA) grant and was institutionalized under the Dean of Graduate Studies in 2019. It promotes student success for those students currently enrolled in CSULB graduate and post-baccalaureate programs and supports prospective students (from CSULB or outside community) seeking to apply to graduate and post-baccalaureate programs. Most recent data reveal that the students seeking support from the GC are 57% Hispanic or Latinx, 17% White or Caucasian, 12% Asian or Pacific Islander, 8% Black or African American, and 6% Other.

The GC aids the Office of Graduate Studies in achieving its goals. Specifically, it helps to: 1) Develop and promote a culture of graduate studies; 2) Promote a sense of belonging and self-efficacy for graduate students; 3) Provide support, preparation, and development opportunities for graduate students; 4) Improve graduate student communication and messaging, and 5) Increase access and outreach to diversify our graduate students.

Thesis and Dissertation Office

The Thesis and Dissertation Office's (TDO) mission is to promote and maintain academic excellence in graduate scholarship, while supporting our diverse student population. The TDO office and staff were originally located under Library leadership, and they were moved under the Office of Graduate Studies in 2018 where they are currently led by the Interim Dean of Graduate Studies. Their office is located in the library, within the Graduate Studies space on the

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2nd floor. The TDO consists of two full-time staff members and interns who support graduate students from about 35 departments across 6 Colleges (excluding the College of Business).

The TDO begins working with students as they complete writing their thesis or dissertation and are poised to receive approval on the content from their committee. The TDO reviews each thesis submission for format, grammar, and citations. TDO staff complete all thesis and dissertation review and approvals and do not rely on an editing and formatting agency to support their work. Thesis submissions typically undergo three rounds of reviews/revisions before they are publication ready. Data from the 2022–2023 academic year show that approximately 300 theses and dissertations were processed by the TDO across colleges, with the majority submitted during the spring term. For the spring 2023 term, the time from student submission to the completion of the first review was reported as six weeks. Theses and dissertations were typically published about four weeks after the first evaluation.

The TDO has established the following goals:

1. To maintain academic excellence in graduate scholarship and promote a highly valued graduate degree by verifying that each thesis/dissertation meets the format criteria prescribed by the department or degree program and by the University and is ready for online publication.
2. To guide students through the submission and revision processes by offering various online and in-person resources.
3. To help students progress toward timely thesis or dissertation clearance.
4. To collaborate with the Graduate Center, academic departments, and thesis/dissertation chairs in promoting the goals of the Office of Graduate Studies.

This is the first program review for GC and TDO; there are no previous MOUs.

Resources Reviewed for the Report:
1. Self-study reports 2024
2. External review 2025
3. Graduate Center websites
4. Thesis and Dissertation Office websites

Strengths Identified in the Reports

Graduate Center
1. **Space**. In 2021 the Graduate Center (GC) moved from the 5th floor to the 2nd floor of the library. The new space has allowed the GC to conduct workshops and special programming in-house to promote graduate culture.
2. **Graduate student-centered events**. The GC offers receptions designed to celebrate and recognize graduate students, as well as offer networking opportunities for graduate

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students. These include an open house, grad student "Mix N' Mingle" events, programming to recognize fellows for the Sally Casanova Pre-Doctoral Program and the Chancellor's Doctoral Incentive Program (CDIP), GradMentor Mixers, and reception for the Graduate Equity Fellowship awardees.

3. **Support for Research, Scholarly, and Creative Activities (RSCA)**
   a. The CSU Sally Casanova Pre-Doctoral Scholars Program provides $5,000 to students from underrepresented backgrounds for them to explore and prepare to apply to PhD programs. The Graduate Writing Specialist coordinates this program and provides guidance and feedback on application materials. Over the past seven academic years, an average of 10 students per year have received this award (range: 4–15 per year).
   b. The Graduate Travel Fellowship provides up to $1,000 to CSULB graduate/post-baccalaureate students to defray the cost of attending professional or academic conferences. Support was provided to 64 students in the 2023-24 academic year.
   c. The Graduate Center has hosted the CSULB GradSlam competition since 2020. In addition, CSULB hosted the systemwide competition for the CSU in 2023-24.
   d. The Graduate Center collaborates with the Office of Research and Economic Development (ORED) and the Office of Undergraduate Research Services (OURS) to plan and coordinate the Annual SRC, which showcases excellence in scholarly research and creative activity by CSULB undergraduate and graduate students.

4. **Support for Graduate Student Mental Health**
   a. GradMentor Program: Starting Fall 2020 the Graduate Center initiated a peer mentoring program to help support mental health, increase sense of belonging, and support advising. A total of 2,646 mentees were supported over the past four academic years. Survey data from 2022-23 show that the GradMentor program has had positive impacts on students' sense of belonging at CSULB with mentees showing a 7.7% and mentors a 23.4% increase in sense of belonging.
   b. Intern: Starting in Spring 2024, the Graduate Center partnered with Student Health Services to secure office hours for a graduate student mental health intern on the second floor who can provide workshops, drop-in counseling/advising, and mental health referrals for graduate students who may be managing mental health challenges.

5. **Graduate Writing Support**. The GC has a full-time graduate writing specialist who offers 1:1 writing support to all currently enrolled graduate students. He is also available for consultations with faculty and staff on writing-related topics. Feedback on a survey regarding the support received from the GC Writing Specialist has been consistently positive. Of the 315 students who responded to the survey as of August 2024, 90% ($n = 284$) rated the overall quality of writing support as "Outstanding," 8% ($n = 26$) rated it "Above Average," and 1% ($n = 4$) rated it "Average".

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6. **Graduate Student Orientation**. Starting in 2021, the Graduate Center has conducted a 2-hour virtual (i.e., via Zoom) New Graduate Student Orientation each August for all new graduate students joining the university in the fall. Various units on campus are invited to provide an overview of key resources and services for all incoming graduate students.

7. **Workshops**. The Graduate Center and Writing Specialist offer multiple workshops every semester. A total of 85workshops were offered in the 2023-24 academic year, doubling the number offered in the year the Center opened. In the 2023-2024 academic year, 75.91% rated the overall quality of Graduate Center workshops a 5 (Outstanding), 20.44% rated it a 4 (Above Average), and 3.65% rated it a 3 (Average) indicating the workshops were highly valued.

Thesis and Dissertation Office (TDO)

1. **Improved Operational Efficiency**. Over the years, the TDO has enhanced its operations by modernizing several processes. These include the use of ProQuest for theses, ScholarWorks for projects, the adoption of electronic signatures through DocuSign, the development of data-informed, tailored workshops, and the establishment of an innovative internship program with English MA students.

2. **Improved Communications with Students**. The TDO staff keeps regular contact with graduate students via ProQuest notifications and via email. During the Spring 2022 term, the TDO began using BeachConnect (EAB), an online communication tool/platform, to immediately connect with thesis/dissertation students and remind them of deadlines.

3. **Workshops**. Every semester, the TDO presents two general/interdisciplinary workshops on thesis formatting and submission processes for its graduate students. In these workshops, graduate students engage with TDO staff, and the formatting process is demystified with an activity element that has proven useful in reducing graduate student anxiety surrounding these crucial final steps. In addition to these general sessions, the TDO also offers program-specific workshops and classroom visits tailored to the needs of individual departments.

Concerns Noted in the Reports

Graduate Center

No major concerns were observed in the self-study and external review

Thesis and Dissertation Office (TDO)

1. **Continue to Improve Operational Efficiency**. Consider upgrading the current infrastructure, which still relies on spreadsheets, by implementing software designed to

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track information and facilitate communication with stakeholders. Currently, staff manually enter all tracking information into a shared spreadsheet, a process that is inefficient and time-consuming and increases the risk of data entry errors.

2. **Staffing**. While the use of interns is innovative, it may not be sustainable due to frequent turnover and the ongoing need for training and oversight. Although adding a full-time staff member would provide additional support, the TDO should also explore ways to reduce the volume of extensive revisions to improve overall workflow.

Opportunities for Development Noted in the Reports

Graduate Center

1. **Outreach and Recruitment**: The GC conducts outreach and recruitment via attendance at Grad Fairs and the California Forum for Diversity. It is unclear if these activities yield any results in terms of applications and enrollments, particularly for the lower enrolled programs. Sharing recruitment efforts with the colleges may maximize the effects of recruitment activities.

2. **Advising Appointments**. Data suggest growth in appointments and interest in the Graduate Center with a peak of 2730 visitors/appointments in 2018-2019 and a significant dip following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Post pandemic, visitors leveled off to a "new normal" of approximately 1,100 visitors/appointments annually, with a significant increase in the number of online meetings requested. It should be noted that changes were made to how visitors/appointments were tracked. Therefore, direct comparisons between pre- and post-pandemic numbers does not fully reflect how services are currently accessed and recorded.

3. **Problem-Solving Based Guidance**. While GC offers a variety of support to graduate students, incorporating topics on soft skills training and strategy development into current workshops is recommended. This may better support graduate students' career development.

4. **Improve Visibility of Graduate Center**. The exit survey includes a question about visiting the GC. In 2022 and 2023, 25% of student respondents reported using GC resources, while 39% stated they were unaware of them. This presents an opportunity for the GC to better market its services to all students.

5. **Assessment**. The GC conducts multiple forms of assessment, primarily indirect survey assessments. GC should incorporate more direct assessments. For example, the GC plans to compare retention rates between students who participated in peer mentoring (as mentors or mentees) and those who did not.

6. **Scope of Work:** Graduate Center Coordinators and the Writing Specialist spend a significant amount of time managing administrative tasks, including website management, timesheets, hiring students, ordering, billing, and fellowship processing.

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This limits their ability to meet with prospective and current graduate students and host events and workshops to support them.

Thesis and Dissertation Office (TDO)

1. **Improve Clearance Time**
   a. The TDO received a total of 300 submissions during the 2022-23 academic year, with the highest number of submissions occurring in Spring 2023 (n=170). In Spring, the time from submission to the completed first review was six weeks, while the time from the first review to clearance was four weeks. Notably, the time from the first review to clearance is exceptional, given that each thesis undergoes an average of 2.4 revisions before clearance.
   b. Any student who submits their thesis by the deadline is guaranteed a graduation within that same semester as long as all revisions are completed prior to the beginning of the next fall or spring term. Between Spring 2021 and Spring 2024, the TDO cleared an average of 99.4% of the theses and dissertations that graduate students submitted.

2. **Include Faculty and Graduate Programs in the Process.** The TDO is encouraged to collaborate more closely with faculty advisors and graduate programs to update style formats annually and streamline the follow-up on corrections. Establishing clearer communication and expectations among the TDO, students, thesis/dissertation committee chairs, and graduate advisors can help enhance efficiency and consistency.

3. **Artificial Intelligence and Academic Integrity**. In the Fall of 2023, the TDO revised its thesis approval page to include an AI clause, allowing both the student and thesis chair to affirm that AI content was not plagiarized. For the TDO, graduate students' use of AI tools has required staff to gain more specialized knowledge of this evolving technology and reinforced the need for careful citation review. The TDO staff must continue to critically consider how AI could (and should) impact thesis and dissertation writing and review and should develop procedures and guidelines accordingly

4. **Assessment**. The TDO engages in multiple forms of assessment, primarily indirect survey assessment and usage data. The TDO has the opportunity to close the loop by both continuing to rely on, while also expanding explicit assessments. Examples are listed below.
   a. Submission and Review Tracking System. The Manuscript Evaluator builds and manages a data tracking spreadsheet for each submission period, e.g., Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall. It includes submission data; revision numbers (i.e., the number of formatting notes given during each review); the main formatting issue; each graduate student's department, college, program, and thesis advisor; and the dates on which staff and graduate students posted new versions (feedback and edited versions, respectively).

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b. The internship rubric was created by the TDO Lead and the then Associate Dean of Graduate Studies to assess the TDO graduate interns' learning outcomes and performance.

c. Workshop Assessments. The TDO relies on workshop attendance and post-workshop evaluation data to assess success of the workshop and progress toward TDO goals. Average workshop ratings range from 4.5 to 5.0, with a maximum allowable rating of 5.0. The TDO did close the loop to assess revision averages for submissions from the School of Social Work (the largest program they serve) before and after workshops provided in Spring 2024. Revisions decreased to 141 from 187 in the prior year. However, this could have been part of a larger downward trend - an average of 201 revisions were required in the Spring 2022. This trend could also reflect the TDO's intentionality in supporting MSW students. Further assessment is needed to determine causal relationships.

d. The ProQuest's ETD Administrator site has a statistics feature where administrators (the TDO staff) can view various metrics on the reach of its published scholarship. Data include comparisons in searches and views across both R2 institutions and Times Higher Ed World Universities, data on the universities that frequently access a campus's theses and dissertations, and top disciplines retrieved. From 2018-2024, benchmarks indicate that CSULB retrieval rate of 154 is above the mean among other R2 universities and well above the mean among other Times Higher Ed World Universities.

Recommendations

It is therefore agreed that the Graduate Center and the Thesis and Dissertation Office will collaborate with the Division of Academic Affairs to implement the program's assessment plan for conducting annual assessments using both direct and indirect methods and report on "closing the loop" activities to demonstrate how data inform decision making.

An annual update (due June 1) on progress toward MOU actions must be provided to the Dean of Graduate Studies, the Vice Provost for Academic Programs, and the Coordinators of Program Review and Assessment. The review cycle will run from 2024 to 2031. A comprehensive self-study will be due in June 2031 for the 2031-2032 academic year review process. Program-specific recommendations are listed below.

Graduate Center

1. Evaluate current activities and develop a strategic recruitment plan for graduate students in collaboration with the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Colleges. *(GC Opportunity #1)*

2. Determine the optimal sign-in process for students seeking GC services. Collect appropriate data to enhance service delivery. *(GC Opportunity #2 & 3)*
3. Enhance the visibility, utilization, and sustainability of the Graduate Center by increasing student awareness of its resources through targeted outreach, and by identifying and pursuing funding opportunities to support its continued impact on graduate student success university-wide. *(GC Opportunity #4)*
4. ~~Develop~~ and implement a comprehensive assessment plan that incorporates both direct and indirect assessment methods and clearly demonstrates how collected data are used to inform decision making and close the loop. *(GC Opportunity #5)*
5. Enhance the sustainability and efficiency of staffing by evaluating alternatives to student employees, such as, if resources permit, hiring a full-time administrative staff member. *(GC Opportunity #6)*

Thesis and Dissertation Office (TDO)
1. Continue developing and implementing interventions to reduce the number of revisions per thesis/dissertation, thereby improving clearance time. *(TDO Concern #1 and Opportunity #1)*
2. Enhance operational efficiency by upgrading infrastructure and improving stakeholder communication. *(TDO Opportunity #1 and 2 and TDO Concern #2)*
3. Continue efforts to address the impact of artificial intelligence on academic integrity in theses and dissertations. *(TDO Opportunity #3)*
4. Develop and implement a comprehensive assessment plan that incorporates both direct and indirect assessment methods and clearly demonstrates how collected data are used to inform decision making and close the loop. *(TDO Opportunity #4)*

Additional Recommendations
1. Consider establishing a dedicated graduate admissions unit to streamline the application process.
2. Work with the Graduate Studies Advisory Committee (GSAC) to ensure all graduate programs maintain up-to-date student handbooks.

This MOU has been read and approved by:

Interim Dean for Graduate Studies: Dina Perrone
Interim Vice Provost for Academic Programs: Pei-Fang Hung

Note: DocuSign signature page on file.