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**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** August 12, 1982

**TO:** Presidents

**FROM:** Glenn S. Dumke  
Chancellor

**SUBJECT:** Definitions of Graduate Level Instruction

In the fall of 1979 the Statewide Academic Senate established an ad hoc committee on graduate education. The committee included faculty, graduate deans, a Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Chancellor's Office staff. Its charge was to review the mission and goals of graduate education in The California State University, recommending modes of instruction appropriate to those missions and goals, evaluating resources available for graduate education in the CSU, examining national trends in graduate education, and reviewing position papers of the Council of Graduate Schools and other national organizations for their applicability to graduate education in the CSU.

In January 1981, the statewide Senate received the report of the ad hoc committee and endorsed the "Definitions of Graduate Level Instruction," which appeared as Part IV of the report. These definitions were designed to respond to a 1979 recommendation of the Project Team on Academic Programs that guidelines outlining minimal qualitative standards for graduate programs be developed.

In March of 1981, the Senate approved a second resolution in this area, recommending a revision in Title 5 to require that students successfully complete a thesis, project, or comprehensive exam before the master's degree is awarded. We expect this revision to Title 5 to be presented for action by the Board of Trustees in November, 1982.

**CSU Campuses**  
Bakersfield  
Channel Islands  
Chico  
Dominguez Hills  
East Bay

Fresno  
Fullerton  
Humboldt  
Long Beach  
Los Angeles  
Maritime Academy

Monterey Bay  
Northridge  
Pomona  
Sacramento  
San Bernardino  
San Diego

San Francisco  
San José  
San Luis Obispo  
San Marcos  
Sonoma  
Stanislaus

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The "Definitions of Graduate Level Instruction," endorsed by the Senate, are attached. They have been carefully reviewed, and we strongly endorse them. We believe that campuses will find them useful and recommend that they be considered and adapted, as appropriate, to the needs of each campus. The "Definitions" are general guidelines which should be considered as a whole by individual departments when developing new programs and reviewing existing ones. We expect that use of these guidelines will lead to an improvement in the quality of graduate education in The California State University, and we appreciate the contributions of the ad hoc committee and the Academic Senate in their development.

GSD/sgp

Attachment

cc: Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs (w/a)  
Deans of Graduate Studies (w/a)  
Chair, Campus Academic Senate (w/a)  
Legislative Analyst (w/a)  
Chair, Statewide Academic Senate (w/a)  
CSSA Liaison Office (w/a)  
Chancellor's Office Staff

#### IV. DEFINITIONS OF GRADUATE-LEVEL INSTRUCTION IN THE CSU

##### A. The Graduate Course

1. It is assumed that students who enroll in graduate courses possess:
  - a. Maturity, responsibility, and scholarly integrity appropriate to study beyond the baccalaureate level.
  - b. A broad base of knowledge, usually represented by the possession of the bachelor's degree.
  - c. Competence in the specified field, usually represented by a substantial body of upper division study in the field or in a closely related field.
  - d. A command of basic techniques and skills essential for independent, self-directed study in the field.
2. The graduate course deals with more complex ideas, materials, techniques or problems than the undergraduate course, and demands searching and exhaustive analysis.
3. The graduate course requires:
  - a. The identification and investigation of theory or principle.
  - b. The application of theory to new ideas, problems, and materials.
  - c. Extensive use of bibliographic and other resource materials with emphasis on primary sources of data.
  - d. Demonstration of competence in the scholarly presentation of the results of independent study.
4. Satisfactory completion of a graduate course requires more creative thinking than an upper division course.
5. Performance expectations for graduate students enrolled in undergraduate-level courses normally are such that students complete at least one additional assignment. The quality of their written and oral performance in the course normally would be at least one grade point higher than that of an undergraduate. Performance expectations for undergraduate students enrolled in graduate-level courses are such that where campus policy permits undergraduate enrollment in a graduate course, the quality of the written and oral performance of undergraduates

in the course normally would be at least half a grade point higher than that of an undergraduate enrolled in an undergraduate course.

B. Lecture-Discussion

The lecture-discussion course conforms to the criteria for graduate courses in general, and

1. Is an organized course with regularized content.
2. Is a combination of lectures and group discussion, based on specialized studies and research.
3. Involves a consideration of a series of vital problems, reviews trends, examines different points of view, and interprets issues.
4. Involves problem analysis, research, and high level participation in discussion.
5. Involves the use of a wide variety of material and resources which provide a range and depth beyond that obtainable through a single textbook, although the use of a basic textbook may be appropriate in some lecture-discussion courses.
6. Provides an opportunity for synthesis and analysis through scholarly writing and through course examinations that go beyond simple recall of fact.

C. Seminar

The seminar conforms to the criteria for graduate courses in general, and

1. Is organized around a series of related problems significant to the discipline.
2. May have a focus which varies from semester to semester within the framework of the general objectives.
3. Limits the lecture, when it does occur, to setting the stage and clarifying issues.
4. Requires that students assume primary responsibility for an investigation that will contribute to the objectives of the seminar and that they report, interpret, and defend their findings orally as well as in writing.
5. Within the framework of general goals, may allow student participation in course planning and in course evaluation.
6. Has class meetings primarily to develop, share, and critically examine independent investigations by members of the group. Time devoted to individual or small-group conferences under the direction of the professor may on occasion replace general class meetings.

D. Laboratory

Laboratory course work conforms to the criteria for graduate courses in general and focuses on data gathering and analysis, with an emphasis on research and investigation rather than on laboratory techniques. Its chief distinguishing characteristic is the use of specialized facilities and relatively independent investigation.

E. Field Work and Clinical Practice

Field work and clinical practice require that

1. The students have a high level of theoretical competence and a mastery of the basic skills necessary to perform professional duties with a minimum of direction.
2. The selection of experiences provides opportunity for the student to
  - a. Bring to bear and apply a high level of theoretical knowledge.
  - b. Exercise judgement of a high order.
  - c. Assume responsibility for determining procedures as well as for implementing them.
  - d. Report the experience to a supervising instructor in such a way as to point out its significance, to explain the rationale behind his/her major decisions, and to evaluate their adequacy.

F. Graduate Independent Study

At the graduate level independent study is based upon the assumptions set forth in part in the section above entitled, "The Graduate Course." Furthermore, such independent study

1. Has a specific objective related to the student's educational goals and to a graduate program.
2. Is precisely defined as a result of joint planning by the professor and the student.
3. Requires periodic and final demonstration of competence in scholarly presentation of the result of the independent study.

G. The Culminating Experience

The culminating experience for the granting of a graduate degree is the successful completion of a thesis, project or comprehensive examination. The quality of work

accomplished, including the quality of the writing, is the major consideration in judging the acceptability of the thesis, project or comprehensive examination.

1. Thesis

A thesis is the written product of the systematic study of a significant problem. It clearly identifies the problem, states the major assumptions, explains the significance of the undertaking, sets forth the sources for and methods of gathering information, analyzes the data, and offers a conclusion or recommendation. The finished product must evidence originality, critical and independent thinking, appropriate organization and format, clarity of purpose, and accurate and thorough documentation. Normally an oral defense of the thesis will be required.

2. Project

A project is a significant undertaking of a pursuit appropriate to the fine and applied arts. It is more than the presentation of a mere outline, plan, depiction, description or demonstration, though it may include these. It must evidence originality and independent thinking, appropriate form and organization, and a rationale. It usually takes the form of a creative work such as a literary or musical composition, a group of paintings, a performance, a film or other endeavor. It must be described and summarized in a written abstract that includes the project's significance, objectives, methodology and a conclusion or recommendation. An oral defense of the project may be required.

3. Comprehensive Examination

The results of a written comprehensive examination, which has been prepared by either the appropriate department or TSA faculty, should demonstrate the student's ability to integrate the knowledge of the area, evidence critical and independent thinking, and in general show the mastery of the subject matter. The results of the examination must evidence independent thinking, appropriate organization, critical analysis and accuracy of documentation.