

**The University of Alabama in Huntsville
Graduate Council Meeting
Minutes**

**Friday / March 28, 2025
2:00 p.m. in SSB 201**

Members Present: Maria Pour, COE
Keith Hollingsworth, COE
Nicholas Loyd, COE
Wafa Hakim-Orman, COB*
Sophia Marinova, COB
Xiaotong Li, COB
Jodi Price, CAHS*
Dylan Baun, CAHS
Lisa Vangsness, CAHS
Ryan Weber, CAHS
Lingze Duan, COS*
Larry Carey, COS
Haihong Che, COS
Seyed Sadeghi, COS
Yeow Chye Ng, CON*
Nilsa Black-Mead, CON
Lenora Smith, CON
Jeremy Elliott, COEd*
Amanda Aguilar, COEd
Laura Senn, COEd
Jon Hakkila, Chair*
David Moore, Library*
Amy Smith, Registrar*
Suzanne Simpson, OIREA*

Members Absent: Mike Anderson, COE*
Tracy Lakin, CON (Proxy: Nilsa Black-Mead)

Guests: Lingling Zhao, CSPAR
Isaac Torres-Diaz, COE
Judy Schneider, Materials Science
Susan Knight, Graduate School
Simone Frazier, Graduate School
Michelle Massey, Graduate School

**Non-Voting Member*

1. Roll Call

A record of attendance was recorded as noted above.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Motion was made by Dr. Dylan Baun to approve the Graduate Council meeting agenda. Motion was seconded by Dr. Lisa Vangsness. Motion carried.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the Meeting of February 21, 2025

Motion was made by Dr. Lenora Smith to approve the minutes of the meeting of February 21, 2025. Motion was seconded by Dr. Keith Hollingsworth. Motion carried.

4. Announcement(s)

a. Recent Graduate School Event(s)

- i. Graduate Poster Session Workshop – February 27, 3-4pm, SSB 201
- ii. Dinner with the Graduate Dean – March 4, 5-7pm, SSB 112
- iii. GRFP Grant Writing Workshop – March 5, 10-11am, SSB 201
- iv. Slate Training for Graduate Reviewers – March 21, 9-10am, SSB 201
- v. Graduate Poster Session Competition – March 26, 2-5pm, SSB 112
 - a. 1st place winner: Shivangi Gupta (COS)
 - b. 2nd place winner: Chinenye Ojobor (Interdisciplinary Studies)
 - c. 3rd place winner: Josephine Jackson (CON)

b. Upcoming Graduate School Event(s)

- i. JUMP Workshop – April 9, 10:30-11:30am, SSB 201

Ms. Simone Frazier, Ms. Michelle Massey, and Dr. Hakkila provided information about the recent and upcoming graduate-focused events/topics listed above.

OLD BUSINESS

n/a

NEW BUSINESS

5. Curriculum Items

- a. CAHS: HY 575/475 – Conflict and Coexistence in the Middle East (*course change*) – **Approved**
- b. COE: CPE 512/412 – Introduction to Parallel Programming (*course change*) – **Approved**
- c. COE: INDU – Industrial Engineering (*concentration change*) – **Dr. Loyd (proposal originator) requested item be withdrawn for further review**
- d. COE: ISE 623 – Engineering Economic Analysis (*course change*) – **Approved**
- e. COE: SYSE – Systems Engineering (*concentration change*) – **Dr. Loyd (proposal originator) requested item be withdrawn for further review**
- f. CON: NUR 609 – Advanced Health Assessment Nurse Educator (*new course*) – **Approved**
- g. CON: NUR 609L – Advanced Health Assessment Nurse Educator / Clinical (*new course*) – **Approved**
- h. CON: NUR 630 – Theoretical Foundations for Nurse Administrators (*course change*) – **Approved**
- i. COS: CERT CPH – Computational Physics (*certificate change*) – **Approved**
- j. COS: MS BYS – Biological Sciences (*program change*) – **Approved**
- k. COS: MS CS – Computer Science (*program change*) – **Approved**
- l. COS: MS PH – Physics (*program change*) – **Approval pending re-formatting the proposal to reflect credit distribution across entire program**
- m. COS: MSPH – Physics, General (*concentration change*) – **Approval pending re-formatting the proposal to reflect credit distribution across entire program**
- n. COS: MSSE CS – Computer Science (*program change*) – **Approved, given this notification that previously requested correction (per 2/21/25 Graduate Council meeting) was made**

6. Graduate Faculty Nominations – For Membership Consideration

- a. COE: Bao, Yuping – PhD/Materials Science & Engineering (*request to serve on supervisory committee*) – **Approved**
- b. COEd: Mann, Davina – MA/Elementary Education (*request to teach graduate course: ED 520*) – **Approved**
- c. CON: Rager, Michael – PhD/Higher Ed Leadership; DNP (*DNP Mentor*) – **Approved**
- d. CON: Maples, Belinda – MD/Family Practice, Obstetrics (*DNP Mentor*) – **Approved**
- e. CON: Andrabi, Mudisor – PhD/Health Education & Promotion (*request to teach graduates course: NUS 766; and serve on supervisory committee*) – **Approved**
- f. CON: Thomas, Sandra – PhD/Educational Psychology & Counseling (*DNP Mentor*) – **Approved**
- g. COS: Pinta, Alexander – PhD/Mathematics, Physics (*request to serve on supervisory committee*) – **Approved**
- h. COS: Smith, David – PhD/Physics (*request to serve on supervisory committee*) – **Approved**

7. Student Advancement to Doctoral Candidacy

The Graduate School proposed to add a new section to the UAH academic catalog's "Degree Requirements, General Doctoral" section to define at what point doctoral students advance to Doctoral Candidacy.

The proposed new language follows:

Doctoral Candidacy

A doctoral student must fulfill all formal degree requirements including the completion of coursework, any prior examinations (if required by the program), and the Qualifying Exam, in order to be considered a doctoral candidate in the Ph.D. program. Students will demonstrate their readiness to conduct independent research through completion of these preliminary requirements. Upon completion, students may register for dissertation (799) credits.

Dr. Hakkila explained the reason for this proposal is that, due to our progression requirements, we want to ensure there is a clear delineation between the time when students do NOT have a dissertation approved and when they DO have a dissertation approved.

There was discussion regarding the definition of "Doctoral Candidacy" and the need for the development of a research course for programs in order to implement the change in policy.

Dialog followed concerning whether faculty would be able to plan and prepare so quickly for adding a new research course to their PhD curricula. Dr. Carey commented that the issue was not a simple one and moved that the new language not be enforced for at least one academic year so that he could have a conversation with his faculty about how they would implement the change. Dr. Hakkila offered the solution to enter the definition of Doctoral Candidacy into the catalog after the deadline for the 2025-26 catalog so the language would not actually be published and, thus, not enforced until the 2026-27 catalog; he explained this timing would give the departments time to develop research courses and provide the structure needed to comply with the new policy upon official publication.

Dr. Hakkila pointed out two other pieces to this that should be considered: (1) The issue of entry into the doctoral program because of problems with time-to-degree completion, course transfer credit, programs with 72 credit hours that start with the assumption of a bachelor's degree but really aren't. He said most of these programs start with a master's, so students should be admitted as master's students because of the well-defined time-to-degree completion. Right now, he said, the only requirement at UAH is the qualifier as the delineator. (2) There is also an alignment issue between UAH and our sister institutions, particularly with regards to joint programs, because both UA and UAB have clear definitions of candidacy and well-designed, orchestrated paths to degree completion.

Other discussion included questions from graduate council members such as using 699 as a research course or whether there is a way to track when students complete 18 hours of 799 post-qualifying exam. Dr. Hakkila stated that "candidacy" simply means that a student has completed a qualifying exam and has an approved project that will allow them to take their 18 hours of 799; it implies nothing about what happened before.

Dr. Hakkila continued: How do we put a limit on how many credit hours students take in 799, pre-qualifier, because right now we aren't doing that. Right now, there are students who have 10 and 15 years of continuous enrollment in 799 without regard for the 10-year rule and, sometimes, without having passed their qualifying exams. We cannot track these students. Not only is this a SACSCOC issue and a best practices issue, but it is an issue with retaining our R1 status. He explained that one of the ways we can help our R1 status is by reducing the time-to-degree completion, which means cleaning up the students that are not graduating. Dr. Hakkila asked, how can we do that if we can't track PhD students? All of these things are meant to help us solve several problems addressed here, and what we are proposing is the standard and what other universities are doing.

Dr. Hollingsworth asked whether students could take 699 thesis hours for their PhD in addition to their master's until they get to candidacy, so that the programs don't have to invent a new course. Dr. Hakkila agreed this might be possible, but Dr. Carey said that would be confusing in their program.

Dr. Duan expressed concern that we are trying to create a very rigid system. Dr. Hakkila asked that he compare that with the benefit of standardization and shared that there is nothing that was being proposed here that differs from the vast majority of institutions.

Dr. Vangsness asked for clarification of the phrase "completion of coursework" in the accompanying new proposed language and asked whether it could be revised to encompass different standards for coursework completion by different programs. It was ultimately agreed that the reference to "completion of coursework" would be deleted altogether.

Dr. Hakkila explained that we already have a clearly defined definition in all of our handbooks, but he wants that definition to mean that "Doctoral Candidacy" indicates students are making the transition that was approved by their committee to move fully into the dissertation. Then, once they do that, they can take 799 hours that count toward graduation.

Dr. Pour asked if they could count some of the 799 credit hours prior to the qualifying exam, which is what Dr. Duan proposed. Dr. Hakkila explained that the 799 hours prior to the qualifier would have to be labeled and tracked as being different than the 799 hours after the qualifier. He said we could consider that but went on to say there's nothing different between that and what he is proposing because, ultimately, somebody is going to have to track what happened before the candidacy was reached, and it will either be the faculty creating a course that makes it easier to track and follow, or the Graduate School will have to work with the Registrar's office to develop a whole new system that will tag research credit hours as being either pre-qualifier or post-qualifier. He stated the end result would be the same.

Dr. Carey pointed out that he is certainly willing to consider creating another course that will qualify as research, but because it is not in their program, they must decide how it is going to be included. He said they can't simply create a course and tell students to take it but that it doesn't apply toward the minimum degree requirements. Dr. Carey said Dr. Hakkila might argue that students were already taking 799 before, but what that is going to do is to force the conversation toward whether we should give credit to students for doing research if it's outside of 799. Dr. Hakkila referred back to the problem that we have right now in that students are taking 799s anyway and, in many cases, students most always take at least a year after they've passed the qualifier. He posed the questions: So what do you do with those courses that they took before? How are you counting them toward your degree requirements? Dr. Carey said they are not counting them. Dr. Hakkila said that whether faculty know it or not, every course that students take that count toward their degree programs must eventually be added to their POS; he said we have to list them and we have to report them, regardless of minimum degree requirements.

Dr. Carey said he felt like those are different issues, but Dr. Hakkila said they aren't different even though they may appear that way; he explained, to those who are trying to track the courses, it's the same issue. Dr. Carey went on to say that he felt a lot of what is driving this proposal are problems but said the reality is that most of the time things go quite well and we get excellent outcomes, so we're going to do a bunch of work to deal with the one percent and he is worried that, in the end, the solutions we come up with won't actually change those outcomes because the problems are not being caused by documentation but that there's something going on with the student or faculty, or both.

Dr. Hakkila responded that faculty most likely don't realize how many non-compliant students there are. He said we need standardization that is broad enough to capture 90-95% of the problems that do occur and what the Graduate School is proposing is something that will do that, because it will provide a marker.

Dr. Carey further commented that he does want to help solve the problem but that he needed to know in what direction we are headed in order to have a discussion with his program's faculty. Dr. Hakkila said he is happy to present this as a straw man to take back to the various programs for further discussion but he did strongly recommended that we get the new language into this year's, or at least next year's, catalog as soon as possible because the catalog will soon be frozen for our SACSCOC review during which all of our programs will be audited and recommendations will be made on how we are running our programs. He said if we can't show that we are in the process of identifying that we have a problem and are trying to correct it, then we will be in trouble with SACSCOC.

Dr. Pour asked how this might impact our part-time students; Dr. Hakkila replied that it seems that many of our problems exist because we have implemented policies that consider our part-time students more than our full-time students.

Dr. Hakkila said we will review all of the options that have been discussed. The discussion was tabled and will be addressed again at the next Graduate Council meeting on April 18, 2025.

8. For the Good of the Order

Dr. Baun asked about the UA doctoral candidate who was detained this week by ICE agents and whether we had received any guidance from the UA System office on how to respond to faculty and students who are concerned about this issue.

Dr. Hakkila said that our International Services office was made aware of the situation as soon as it happened and immediately notified our administration and Office of Counsel. He did not know the reason why the student was detained but explained that, at the moment, we don't intend to make any formal statement. However, he said, concerned students may make an appointment to speak with Ms. Joy Werka or Ms. Audrey Jupiter in International Services. In closing, Dr. Hakkila said that if ICE were to appear on campus, that staff and faculty should contact Mr. Michael Huff, Chief University Counsel, at x6633.

Dr. Price commented that faculty might want to encourage their international students to carry copies of their immigration papers with them at all times.

9. Reminder: Next Graduate Council Meeting – April 18, 2025, @ 2:00 p.m. in SSB 201

10. Adjourn – The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:45 p.m.

/srk