

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

**Friday / September 19, 2025
2:00 p.m. in SSB 201**

Members Present: Maria Pour, COE
Aubrey Beal, COE (proxy for: Kader Frendi)
Sophia Marinova, COB
Yi Tan, COB
Christina Steidl, CAHS*
Molly Johnson, CAHS
Joe Conway, CAHS
Ryan Weber, CAHS
Lingze Duan, COS*
Max Bonamente, COS
Haihong Che, COS
Seyed Sadeghi, COS
Nilsa Black-Mead, CON (proxy for: Lenora Smith, Tracy Lakin)
Amanda Giles, COEd
Laura Senn, COEd
Jon Hakkila, Chair*
Amy Smith, Registrar*

Members Absent: Mike Anderson, COE*
Kader Frendi, COE
Wafa Orman, COB*
Yeow Chye Ng, CON*
Lenora Smith, CON
Tracy Lakin, CON
Jeremy Elliott, COEd*
David Moore, Library*
Misty McFadden, OIREA*

Guests: Jodi Price, CAHS
Judy Schneider, Materials Science
Susan Knight, Graduate School
Simone Frazier, Graduate School
Michelle Massey, Graduate School
Audrey Jupiter, Graduate School
Kya Walton, Graduate School
Zeke Aguilera, Registrar's Office

**Non-Voting Member*

1. Roll Call & Introduction of New Members and Guests

A record of attendance was recorded as noted above as attendees introduced themselves. Dr. Hakkila also introduced new graduate school staff assistant, Ms. Kya Walton, and welcomed all new Graduate Council members for the new academic year.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Dr. Hakkila made a motion to approve the Graduate Council meeting agenda, which was seconded by Dr. Laura Senn. Motion carried.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the Meeting of April 18, 2025

Dr. Nilsa Black-Mead made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of April 18, 2025; motion was seconded by Dr. Ryan Weber. Motion carried.

4. Announcement(s)

- a. Recent Graduate School Event(s)
 - i. GTA Training Workshop – August 12
 - ii. Fall Orientation/Graduate Students – August 15
 - iii. GRFP Grant Writing Workshop – August 27
 - iv. Thesis/Dissertation/DNP Writing Workshops – September 4 (in person); September 5 (Zoom)
- b. Upcoming Graduate School Event(s)
 - i. 3MT Workshop – September 23, 3-4pm, SSB 201
 - ii. Graduate School Policies & Procedures Workshop – October 16, 2-3:30pm, SSB Theater

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

OLD BUSINESS

5. Master's and Bachelor's Entry Points into Doctoral Programs

Dr. Hakkila explained that, as a result of SACSCOC reaffirmation, this topic needed to be addressed to bring UAH into alignment with UA and UAB. A new approach has been developed to provide clarity to faculty, advisors, and students regarding the steps leading to doctoral programs. He referenced the supporting document (attached), noting that the page containing the flowchart offers the simplest overview of the progression requirements.

Dr. Hakkila emphasized that it would be difficult to maintain consistency if programs had different expectations for things such as transfer credits, exam timing, or qualifying exam definitions. Therefore, an effort was made to standardize these elements across programs. One of the most significant issues identified was transfer credit, particularly the transfer of international credits into UAH as if they were earned here. He explained that this practice is not acceptable to our accreditor, since we are expected to accept grades only from accredited U.S. institutions.

Additionally, some programs had not been evaluating transcripts, resulting in improperly mapped credit hours and grades—for example, grades based on 8- or 10-point scales being misaligned with UAH's 4-point scale, and course topics not being correctly translated into English. Dr. Hakkila questioned how the university could defend these practices to our accreditor if we were asked for written documentation.

He noted that initial efforts to resolve the issue included adding a re-evaluation process for international credits, now included in the current catalog. However, the Provost recommended a change that shifted the discussion and aligned UAH with UA and UAB regarding minimum credit hours for doctoral programs. Historically, UAH required 48 hours of coursework plus 18 dissertation hours, while UA's standard is 36 plus 18. Aligning these requirements makes sense, especially under UA System Board Rule 108 and given joint programs among the universities.

This alignment also relates to the broader SACSCOC principle that each successive degree (master's, doctorate, etc.) must include more credit hours and a higher level of rigor. UAH defined this as a minimum of 36 unique credit hours for a PhD beyond the 30 required for a master's degree. However, this raised

challenges: if a PhD program required 36 coursework hours plus 18 dissertation hours (54 total), both degrees could not be offered within the same program and still meet SACSCOC standards.

To address this, we developed a two-entry-point system within the doctoral progression pathway:

1. Entry with a Bachelor's degree
2. Entry with a Master's degree

Dr. Hakkila reminded everyone that programs have been given one year to review and, if necessary, revise their curricula to align with this model, recognizing that not all programs could immediately adopt it due to differing entry requirements and limited course offerings that would have to be worked on.

An additional concern involved research hours taken before candidacy. Since dissertation credit (course 799) begins after candidacy, Dr. Hakkila asked how research conducted prior to candidacy should be handled. He suggested that such research hours could be incorporated into program requirements through the creation of new research courses.

Dr. Hakkila summarized the new plan as follows:

- Bachelor's entry:
 - Minimum of 54 total credit hours (36 coursework + 18 dissertation).
 - Transfer credit may be allowed for students with incomplete master's work from an accredited U.S. institution, but only up to the maximum permitted by current policy.
- Master's entry:
 - Minimum of 36 total credit hours (18 coursework + 18 dissertation).
 - No transfer of individual courses required; the master's degree itself fulfills prior generalization requirements in that degree program.

This plan ensures that UAH no longer evaluates how students earned their master's degrees (no more worries about transferring/matching courses), since credit is awarded only for the degree, not the individual courses. Programs will determine appropriate coursework for all incoming students. Students then proceed through qualifying exams, dissertation research (minimum 18 hours), and defense.

The new structure aims to simplify the doctoral process, provide clear timelines and expectations, and ensure that progress is defined by credit hours rather than years. It also helps prevent excessively long doctoral durations that negatively affect institutional reporting on time-to-completion.

Dr. Schneider asked whether research courses must be graded to count as research; Dr. Hakkila replied that this issue is currently being reviewed with the Registrar's Office. He expressed a preference that they not be graded, but further clarification is needed. Dr. Schneider also commented that uncertainty makes it difficult for faculty to plan progression paths; Dr. Hakkila advised her to assume that research can be added as a course component for now, with grading details to be resolved later.

Dr. Pour asked about limits on research hours; Dr. Hakkila stated there would be a limit of six credit hours of research. (**Note:** A subsequent discussion with the College of Science chairs led to an alternative suggestion of nine hours. The actual minimum to be accepted is currently under review.)

Dr. Hakkila reminded attendees that these guidelines represent minimum institutional requirements. Programs may include additional hours or requirements as desired when designing their programs of study.

He then discussed two additional related topics:

1. Progress Reports – These reports track student progress through their doctoral programs. The Graduate School plans to standardize these reports this year so that all programs use the same format.

2. Course Validations – The 10-year rule for validating old coursework will be revised since it does not serve the purpose that it was designed for. Programs will have flexibility to re-validate expired courses using their preferred process.

Dr. Hakkila began to close the discussion by restating that the overall goal of these changes is to help students progress efficiently through doctoral programs, reduce time-to-degree completion, and increase the number of PhD graduates annually for UAH. This, in turn, supports our efforts to regain R1 status without increasing faculty workload and making the process of earning degrees more efficient overall.

Dr. Pour identified a correction needed in the supporting document: on the first page, first paragraph, fourth line, the figure “36” should be changed to “18.” Dr. Hakkila agreed, confirming that the document will be corrected and presented at the next Graduate Council meeting.

Dr. Pour also asked when the first progress report is required; Dr. Hakkila clarified that it should be completed after candidacy.

6. Shared Credits between Two Master’s Degrees

Dr. Hakkila explained that this topic was raised by Dr. Suzanne Simpson, UAH’s former SACSCOC liaison, who identified that some programs were double-counting courses across master’s degrees. This practice resulted in one or both master’s degrees totaling fewer than 30 credit hours, leading to non-compliance with SACSCOC requirements. Consequently, the university had to cease the practice immediately.

Dr. Hakkila clarified two key points:

1. Credit Hour Requirement:

Each master’s degree must include a minimum of 30 credit hours, except when part of JUMP. The university is awaiting the outcome of the SACSCOC review regarding JUMP, as there are ongoing concerns about the number of credit hours being counted in that program.

2. Concurrent Master’s Degrees:

Some institutions offer “concurrent” programs allowing students to earn two master’s degrees simultaneously. SACS has ruled on this matter, and UAH does not have any official concurrent programs. Therefore, a student pursuing two master’s degrees at UAH cannot complete both in the same semester; they must finish them in different semesters to remain compliant. Additionally, courses may not be double-counted; students must complete a minimum of 60 total credit hours across the two degrees.

Dr. Hakkila noted that these requirements are established by SACSCOC, and UAH is documenting them in its policies.

NEW BUSINESS

7. Generative AI Guidelines for Theses, Dissertations, Graduate Capstone, & DNP

Dr. Hakkila explained that a committee had been formed and worked throughout the previous year to develop guidelines for the use of Generative AI in theses, dissertations, graduate capstone, and DNP projects. He commended the work of the AI Committee, which consisted of the following members:

- Ms. Simone Frazier, Graduate School
- Dr. Jon Hakkila, Graduate School
- Dr. John Mecikalski, COS
- Dr. Wafa Orman, COB
- Dr. Judy Schneider, Materials Science
- Dr. Darlene Showalter, CON
- Dr. Ryan Weber, CAHS

Dr. Hakkila noted the concern that students may be using AI in ways that are inappropriate for these types of scholarly projects, which are intended to demonstrate the student's own critical thinking and the committee's ability to review that work. He emphasized that verifying AI use is extremely difficult, as there is currently no reliable validation check to detect whether AI tools have been used. Given this limitation, the committee determined that the most practical approach is to require students to disclose any use of AI tools. In some programs, such as the COB, certain AI tools may be permitted or even recommended. Therefore, as long as the use of AI is disclosed and approved by the program, it will be allowed. However, if it is later discovered that a student used AI in a manner not approved by their program, it should be reported as an academic integrity issue.

The responsibility for defining what constitutes acceptable use of AI rests with individual departments, not with the Graduate School. Departments are required to publish their AI standards in advance so that students are fully aware of the expectations.

Dr. Hakkila also reported that the Graduate School was asked to develop a "default" set of AI guidelines to be applied in cases where programs do not create their own. He referenced various sections of the draft document that was developed (attached).

Following an extended discussion among Graduate Council members, Dr. Hakkila moved to approve minor changes to the document. The motion was approved by Dr. Max Bonamente and seconded by Dr. Nilsa Black-Mead. The motion carried, and the final, revised document will be shared at the next Graduate Council meeting.

8. Curriculum Items

Dr. Hakkila started the curricular item discussion by explaining that the new Kuali Academics process will not allow the addition of a new degree program until the individual courses exist; that is why there is no program proposal yet to accompany the PY courses below.

- a. CAHS: PY 511 – The Helping Relationship (*new course*) – **Approved**
- b. CAHS: PY 512 – Group Dynamics, Processing, & Counseling (*new course*) – **Approved**
- c. CAHS: PY 540 – Professional Orientation (*new course*) – **Approved**
- d. CAHS: PY 620 – Lifestyle & Career Development (*new course*) – **Approved**
- e. CAHS: PY 630 – Assessment (*new course*) – **Approved**
- f. CAHS: PY 632 – Substance Abuse Therapy (*new course*) – **Approved**
- g. CAHS: PY 633 – Trauma-Focused Therapy (*new course*) – **Approved**
- h. CAHS: PY 636 – Crisis Intervention (*new course*) – **Approved**
- i. CAHS: PY 645 – Correctional Counseling (*new course*) – **Approved**
- j. CAHS: PY 698 – Counseling Internship (*new course*) – **Approved**
- k. CAHS: PY 750 – Consultation on Forensic Assessment (*course change: title*) – **Approved**
- l. COS: Software Engineering (Graduate Certificate) (*program change: inactivate*) – **Approved**
- m. COS: Education Concentration/Biological Sciences MS (*correct errors due to problems with transfer of information between academic catalogs*) – **Approved**
- n. COS: Optics & Photonics Technology Concentration/Physics MS (*correct errors due to problems with transfer of information between academic catalogs*) – **Approved**
- o. COS: Biological Sciences, General, Concentration/Biological Sciences MS (*correct errors due to problems with transfer of information between academic catalogs*) – **Approved**

9. Graduate Faculty Nominations – For Membership Consideration

- a. COS: 1258 Kaiser, Scott – PhD/Physics (serve on supervisory committee) – **Approved**
- b. COS: 1206 Dobbs, James – PhD/Materials Science & Engineering (teach graduate courses: MTS601, MTS602) – **Approved**
- c. COS: 1216 Cecil, Daniel – PhD/Atmospheric Science (supervisory committee) *NASA – **Approved**
- d. COS: 1120 Higgins, Melanie – PhD/Biochemistry (supervisory committee) – **Approved**
- e. COS: 1119 Reed, Laura – PhD/Ecology & Evolutionary Biology (supervisory committee) – **Approved**
- f. COS: 1048 Wadiche, Linda – PhD/Physiology (supervisory committee) – **Approved**
- g. COS: 1181 Sengupta, Arnab – PhD/Interdisciplinary Biotechnology Science & Engineering (supervisory committee) – **Approved**
- h. COS: 1195 Jackson, Enrique – PhD/Materials Science (teach graduate courses: PH 5xx, PH 6xx; supervisory committee) – **Approved**
- i. COS: 1090 Stough, Sarah – PhD/Atmospheric Science (supervise student research; serve on supervisory committee) – **Approved**
- j. COS: 1064 Engel, Annette – PhD/Geological Sciences (serve on supervisory committee) – **Approved**
- k. COS: 1047 Sessa, Alessandro – PhD/History & Philosophy of Science (teach graduate courses: HY670) – **Approved**
- l. COS: 1035 Benz, Arnold – PhD/Physics (serve on supervisory committee) – **Approved**
- m. COS: 1058 Mason, John – PhD/Physics (serve on supervisory committee) *Army – **Approved**
- n. COE: 1225 Lowe, Robert – PhD/Mechanical Engineering (serve on supervisory committee) – **Approved**
- o. COE: 1226 McDonald, Brian – PhD/Aerospace Engineering (supervisory committee) – **Approved**
- p. COE: 1097 Ludwick, Kevin – PhD/Physics (serve on supervisory committee) – **Approved**
- q. COE: 1044 Kendrick, Kip – PhD/Chemistry (serve on supervisory committee) – **Approved**
- r. COE: 1039 Davis, Andrew – PhD/Industrial and Systems Engineering & Engineering Management (teach graduate courses: ISE526, ISE623, ISE690) – **Approved**
- s. COE: 1001 Jones, Benjamin – PhD/Business Management, Strategy & Innovation (teach graduate courses: IS512, IS601, IS691) *18+ hours of courses taken in MIS *SAIC – **Approved**
- t. COE: 1009 Mulligan, Phillip – PhD/Explosive Engineering (serve on supervisory committee) – **Approved**
- u. CON: 1228 Wenger, Korinne – DPT/Physical Therapy (DNP mentor) – **Approved**
- v. CON: 1227 Vazquez, Kelly – DNP/Nursing (DNP mentor) – **Approved**
- w. CON: 1229 Tyon, Warren – MD/Emergency Medicine (DNP mentor) – **Approved**
- x. COEd: 1193 Fanning, John – EdD/Administration & Supervision (teach graduate courses: various ED, EDL) – **Approved**
- y. COEd: 1201 Gohanna, Symmetris – PhD/Reading (teach graduate courses: ED531) – **Approved**
- z. COEd: 1202 Hayslip, Loretta – PhD/Special Education, EdS/Superintendent, EdM/Reading (teach graduate courses: various ED, EDC) – **Approved**
- aa. COEd: 1174 Ogle, Sidney – EdD, EdS/Leadership; MEd/Curr & Inst (teach graduate courses: various ED, EDL) – **Approved**
- bb. COEd: 1182 Russell, Gia – EdS/Instructional Leadership (teach graduate courses: various EDL, EDC 511) – **Approved**
- cc. CAHS: 1117 Wetmore, Stacy – PhD/Cognitive Psychology (serve on supervisory committee) – **Approved**
- dd. CAHS: 1116 Ballmann, Christopher – PhD/Exercise Physiology (serve on supervisory committee) – **Approved**
- ee. CAHS: 1073 Odom, Brian – PhD/Public History (teach graduate courses: HY 539) *NASA – **Approved**
- ff. CAHS: 1125 Walker, Friend – MS/Criminal Justice (teach graduate courses: PSC 562) *Gov't – **Approved**
- gg. CAHS: 1157 Stamps, Katherine – MS/Historic Preservation (teach graduate courses: HY 598) – **Approved**
- hh. COEd: 1203 Stump, Mary – MA/Special Education (teach graduate courses: ED 593, EDC 511) – **Approved**

10. For the Good of the Order

Dr. Maria Pour asked for confirmation of the upcoming defense deadline; Ms. Simone Frazier confirmed the date of Monday, October 27, 2025.

11. Reminder: Next Graduate Council Meeting – October 17, 2025, 2-3:30pm, SSB 201

12. Adjourn – The meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

/srk