

# Executive Board

## White Paper: Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education

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June 9, 2026

Darnell Hunt  
UCLA Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost (EVCP)

**Re: Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education White Paper and Elevating the Quality and Sustainability of Undergraduate Education White Paper**

Dear EVCP Hunt,

At the June 4, 2026, meeting of the Executive Board, members reviewed the white paper titled “Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education” and the white paper titled “Elevating the Quality and Sustainability of Undergraduate Education.” Members agreed to share the attached feedback from Senate committees and councils along with their feedback below and that of participants who attended a Senate faculty conversation on June 2, 2026, and a conversation with the Senate chair on June 3, 2026.

The Los Angeles Division of the UC Academic Senate shares your recognition that it is a time of change in graduate and undergraduate education due to external pressures and internal realities ranging from the federal government to technology to new fixed costs. Senate committees and councils have been considering and advising and making legislative decisions based on the evolving needs for teaching, research and creative activities. Senate faculty understand the value of Teaching Professors or Learning Assistants in supporting our massive pedagogical enterprise. Many faculty consider if and how to deploy Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in classrooms, studios, and labs.

At the same time, the divisional Academic Senate consensus is that the white papers are misguided efforts that fail to prioritize the academic mission and, if implemented, would weaken not only graduate and undergraduate education but also the research productivity of the campus. The white papers propose changing the financial architecture of graduate education without recognizing the immediate and potentially detrimental restructuring of graduate and undergraduate instruction. They fail to provide any evidence that the recommendations will improve teaching and learning or realize financial savings.

Many members fundamentally disagreed with the premise that there must be cuts to graduate education funding. They recognized the current campus financial situation is serious and needs solutions. However, given that Senate faculty have authority over curriculum and instruction, they advocated for Senate faculty in a leading role in the working groups that produced these white papers. Rather than share the financial constraints and ask Senate faculty to offer solutions, the working groups (comprised almost exclusively of administrators despite repeated request to you for Senate faculty representation) offered recommendations seemingly divorced from the academic mission.

Members warned that reducing the number of Teaching Assistants (TAs) would weaken the university's academic mission and research output, as graduate students provide invaluable contributions to labs, studios, and other research venues and represent the future professoriate. Structurally severing the

relationship between research and teaching so that undergraduates are increasingly taught by contingent staff who are uncoupled from UCLA's research would fundamentally change the value of a UCLA degree. Some feedback agreed that Learning Assistants (LAs) can and do play valuable roles, noting however, that they do not function in the same capacity as TAs.

Members recommended that departments should make decisions for their own disciplines including deciding if and how to integrate Large Language Models (LLMs) pedagogically. They agreed that wholesale deployment of LLMs would be pedagogically inferior or inappropriate. Due to broad differences across disciplines, courses, and graduate degrees, which were not sufficiently addressed in the current white papers, members agree that pedagogical decisions need to be left to individual faculty and disciplines.

Although it appeared to members that the motivation for the white papers was to address campus financial concerns, nowhere in either white paper are finances addressed. It is not clear how mandatory graduate student training will be financed. There is no analysis of costs involved to develop LLM support, increase Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) "services," sustain more online programs, or develop specialized TA training still needed within departments. Moreover, members noted that the money saved by shrinking graduate cohorts may be immediately lost to the rising costs of lecturer salaries and benefits, resulting in zero net savings for the university while introducing severe programmatic instability.

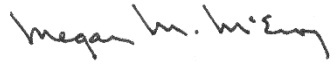
At a conversation on June 2, 2026, attended by 115 Senate faculty, the consensus was that the white papers are a top-down, financially motivated overreach rather than a genuine pedagogical effort. Faculty members denounced the deliberate exclusion of the Academic Senate from the working groups, calling it a direct usurpation of the authority delegated to them by the UC Regents. They strongly rejected proposals to centralize teaching under the TLC and to replace TAs with LLMs or LAs. Participants argued that the white papers devalue discipline-specific expertise, will damage undergraduate education, and dampen research productivity.

The event participants called out masking long-standing budget deficits as pedagogical issues, pointing out that the administration has vastly expanded its own size since 2008 while simultaneously demanding that academic units do more with less. A number of attendees voiced views that the proposals were bad-faith, technocratic attempts to undermine unionized labor. In response to a participant's question, almost half of attendees supported the idea of organizing a formal vote of no confidence in university leadership if administration was unresponsive to the deeply held concerns of Senate faculty about the white papers.

In light of this extensive feedback, the Executive Board recommended that the administration convene work groups comprised of primarily Senate faculty along with key administrators to revise the white papers based on the voluminous Senate feedback. And that those revised white papers receive thorough review by the Graduate and Undergraduate Councils where the authority for curricular changes resides.

Thank you for your engagement on this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Megan M. McEvoy". The signature is written in a cursive style and is enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Megan McEvoy  
Chair, UCLA Academic Senate

Encl.

Cc: Kathy Bawn, Immediate Past Chair, UCLA Academic Senate  
April de Stefano, Executive Director, UCLA Academic Senate  
Julio Frenk, Chancellor, UCLA  
Tim Groeling, Vice Chair/Chair Elect, UCLA Academic Senate  
Samantha Luu, Executive Assistant to the EVCP, UCLA  
Emily Rose, Assistant Provost and Chief of Staff to the EVCP, UCLA  
Julie Sina, Chief of Staff to the Chancellor, UCLA

# Decoupling Graduate Student Employment from Doctoral Education

Implementation of Graduate Education Task Force Recommendations

*Prepared by*

Working Group on Decoupling Graduate Student Employment from Doctoral Education  
March 2026

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## Context and Purpose

The UCLA Graduate Education Implementation Task Force<sup>1</sup> was convened in spring 2025 to evaluate and reimagine how UCLA supports doctoral education and undergraduate instruction in a sustainable, equitable, and forward-looking manner. Recommendations were initially presented as a draft in July 2025 to invite feedback from a focused group of academic and administrative leaders. Suggestions were incorporated into an amended draft of the recommendations. At the direction of the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, the Graduate Education Implementation Task Force is now preparing a series of focused white papers that build on the revised recommendations into operational models for campus consideration.

Relevant sections of the amended task force report were shared with working groups charged to translate recommendations into an implementation framework for UCLA. This white paper focuses specifically on the relationship between graduate student employment and doctoral education and should be read as the Task Force's implementation framework for this area. The associated working group consisted of faculty and staff who have knowledge of graduate student educational and employment experiences here at UCLA as well as administrative and/or academic oversight of relevant academic and labor processes.<sup>2</sup> Companion white papers authored by other working groups address related topics including doctoral program size and enrollment planning, instructional staffing under emerging constraints, and metrics for the strategic allocation of centrally funded graduate support.

This working group convened during winter term 2026 to discuss and articulate implementation strategies for decoupling employment as a Graduate Student Researcher (GSR) or Academic Student Employee (ASE) from the academic dimensions of doctoral education while preserving the educational value of research and teaching experiences. This approach aimed to

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<sup>1</sup> Taskforce members included: Vera Bakman, Director of Financial Analysis & Decision Support, Academic Planning and Budget; Paul Boutros, Vice Dean for Research (Interim), David Geffen School of Medicine; Adriana Galván, Dean and Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education; Reem Hanna-Harwell, Senior Associate Dean, Finance and Administration, Division of Humanities; Brian Kite (Chair), Dean and Vice Provost of Graduate Education; Jeff Lewis, Special Assistant to the EVCP for Academic Planning and Budget; Kim Picon, Manager, Labor Relations; Emily Rose, Assistant Provost and Chief of Staff to the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost; and Erin Sanders O'Leary, Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning.

<sup>2</sup> Working group members included: Ava Arndt, Program Director for Online and Accessible Pedagogy, Teaching and Learning Center; Nina Bjekovic, Director of Language Programs, European Languages and Transcultural Studies; Erika Chau, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs and Personnel; Elizabeth Goodhue (Co-Chair), Director of Graduate Student & Postdoctoral Scholar Engagement, Teaching and Learning Center; Elyse Gueidon, Associate Director for Graduate Student Professional Development, Teaching and Learning Center; Melissa Paquette-Smith, Associate Professor, Psychology; Brooke Scelza, Professor, Anthropology; Eric Wells (Co-Chair), Associate Vice Provost for Teaching & Learning; Daniel Wong, Assistant Dean for Graduate and Postdoctoral Success, Division of Graduate Education.

distinguish more clearly between students' academic development and their roles as employees, while maintaining flexibility for departments and aligning with systemwide policy and labor considerations.

Since the working group convened, a new Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) governing ASE and GSR appointments has been ratified. The implementation strategies and timelines outlined in this paper have been reviewed and, where feasible, adjusted to align with the updated agreement. Continued consultation with the Academic Affairs and Personnel Office (AAPO) and Employee and Labor Relations (ELR) will be essential as implementation planning advances.<sup>3</sup>

## Executive Summary

This white paper presents an implementation framework for decoupling graduate student employment from the academic dimensions of doctoral education at UCLA. Building on the Graduate Education Implementation Task Force's July 2025 recommendations, the proposed model distinguishes more clearly between students' roles as learners and as Academic Student Employees (ASEs)<sup>4</sup> and Graduate Student Researchers (GSRs), while preserving the educational value of teaching and research experiences that are central to doctoral training.

At present, UCLA's model partially conflates academic coursework, employment-related training, and broader professional development. This is most evident in the use of required pedagogy courses (e.g., 495) to deliver employment training for Teaching Assistants (TAs), and in the absence of clear distinctions between research training associated with Graduate Student Researcher (GSR) appointments and academic expectations tied to directed research courses. These overlaps create inefficiencies, introduce redundancy across training requirements, and complicate compliance with evolving labor frameworks.

The implementation model outlined in this paper addresses these challenges by reorganizing graduate student training into three distinct domains: (1) student onboarding, (2) employment-related training, and (3) academic and professional development. Across all areas,

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<sup>3</sup> The recently ratified Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) introduces a minimum 50% appointment requirement for doctoral students in ASE titles effective Fall 2026. This provision has direct implications for the current TA training model, which relies on approximately 40–50 Teaching Assistant Consultants (TACs) annually, many of whom are appointed at 25% time to facilitate peer-led instruction and support delivery of 495 pedagogy courses. Compliance with the new requirement will necessitate changes to this model. While the transition to a decoupled training structure was originally envisioned as a phased, multi-year effort, the updated CBA timeline may require an accelerated transition or the development of interim approaches to ensure continuity of training while aligning with contractual obligations.

<sup>4</sup> Academic Student Employee Titles include: Teaching Assistants, Associate Instructors, Teaching Fellows, Readers, Special Readers, and Tutors.

the guiding objective is to align required training with its appropriate domain, thereby improving clarity, reducing duplication, and enabling more effective use of institutional resources.

First, the paper recommends establishing a mandatory, campus-wide graduate student onboarding program, jointly administered by the Division of Graduate Education (DGE) and Student Affairs. This onboarding would expand UCLA's existing Graduate Student Orientation (GSO) into a more comprehensive introduction to graduate student life, covering topics such as academic integrity, research ethics, responsible use of artificial intelligence, community standards, and campus resources. Importantly, this onboarding would be explicitly tied to student status rather than employment and would not be compensated, aligning it with undergraduate orientation and other required student training. Consolidating these expectations in a single onboarding program will reduce redundancy currently present across multiple training modules and clarify that these expectations reflect institutional values rather than labor obligations.

Second, the paper proposes replacing the current course-based TA training model with a mandatory, compensated TA orientation delivered outside the curriculum. This new model would combine asynchronous modules with synchronous, practice-based workshops and would integrate key elements of existing Foundations of Teaching and Professional Standards and Ethics Training (PSET) content. By shifting employment-related training out of coursework and into a compensated orientation model, UCLA can maintain the quality and rigor of TA preparation while reducing administrative complexity and aligning with practices at peer institutions. The model is designed to be scalable, anticipating approximately 800–1,000 new TAs trained annually, and would be supported through strategic reallocation of existing resources, particularly those currently dedicated to the TLC's Teaching Assistant Consultant (TAC) program.

Third, the paper affirms the importance of discipline-based pedagogical development as a core component of doctoral education and recommends that departments retain primary responsibility for such training. While pedagogy courses should no longer be required as conditions of employment, departments are encouraged to incorporate them into degree program requirements where appropriate and to redesign them to focus more broadly on evidence-based teaching and academic career preparation. In parallel, UCLA should sustain and expand elective teaching development opportunities—including workshops, certificates, and co-curricular programming—coordinated through the Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) and other campus partners.

For GSRs, the paper recommends a more cautious approach. Given the significant variation in research practices across disciplines, the working group does not recommend establishing a universal, campus-wide GSR onboarding requirement at this time. Instead, the focus should be

on strengthening the academic integrity of directed research courses and clarifying expectations for mentoring relationships. This includes developing discipline-specific syllabus templates, mentoring plans, and assessment frameworks, as well as expanding mentee training integrated into degree programs rather than tied to employment. Faculty mentor training should be encouraged and incentivized—particularly through promotion and tenure processes—but not mandated at the campus level due to feasibility and capacity constraints.

Workforce data underscore that the impact of these changes will vary significantly across campus. Research-intensive units such as Engineering, Physical Sciences, Life Sciences, and the David Geffen School of Medicine employ large numbers of GSRs and will be most affected by changes to mentoring expectations and directed research structures. At the same time, units with high undergraduate enrollment—particularly within the College and Engineering—rely heavily on TAs and will be most directly impacted by changes to ASE training and onboarding. Units with high concentrations of both GSR and ASE appointments will face the most complex implementation environment and should be prioritized for phased rollout and targeted support.

Successful implementation of this model will depend on several key conditions. These include clear delineation of governance responsibilities between DGE and the Academic Affairs and Personnel Office (AAPO), alignment with the [Collective Bargaining Agreement \(CBA\)](#) governing ASEs and GSRs, and strategic reallocation of existing resources to support new training structures. Implementation will also require new compliance-tracking mechanisms, coordination across campus units, and sustained engagement with departments, the Academic Senate, and labor partners to build understanding and support.

Taken together, the recommendations in this white paper position UCLA to implement a more coherent, efficient, and sustainable model for graduate education—one that better aligns training with student and employee roles, reduces redundancy, and preserves the flexibility necessary to support the diverse needs of departments and disciplines. With careful planning and phased implementation, UCLA can advance a model that is both operationally feasible and aligned with its academic mission and values.

See Appendix 1 for a table of implementation strategies for reimagining doctoral student professional development and employment training, as well as a glossary of key terms and abbreviations used in this paper.

## Scope of Implementation Plan

As directed, this working group focused specifically on implementation recommendations in the context of doctoral education. However, the group would like to stress that subsequent

phases of this work must also address implications for master's and professional students, who are regularly employed as both GSRs and ASEs in many areas of the university.

When considering modifications to ASE training, this paper focuses on preparation for TA appointments because employment in other ASE titles (such as Readers and Tutors) is not currently coupled to doctoral coursework or degree progress in a meaningful way. Likewise, graduate students currently appointed as Associate Instructors and Teaching Fellows must first serve as TAs and complete training requirements for that appointment type.

The working group recommends that any revised training requirements apply only to first-time appointees after any new model is adopted and not retroactively to students who have already completed current requirements.

## Current Landscape of GSR and TA Training

### General Background

Academic Planning and Budget (APB) captures workforce data each fall; comparable workforce snapshots are not collected across all terms. The workforce data presented below therefore reflect fall 2025 rather than the full academic year. Despite this limitation, the fall snapshot provides a reliable indicator of both the scale and distribution of graduate student employment and can be used to anticipate where changes to GSR mentoring expectations and ASE hiring and training practices are likely to have the greatest operational impact.

As shown in Figure 1, UCLA's overall graduate population has remained relatively stable in recent years, with total enrollment holding near 14,000 students and doctoral enrollment just under 5,000. Table 1 demonstrates that a substantial share of this population participates in academic-student employment, with 3,971 unduplicated student employees recorded in fall 2025. This includes 1,626 Graduate Student Researchers (GSRs) and 1,935 Academic Apprentices (the majority of whom are Teaching Assistants), along with smaller numbers of Tutors and Readers.<sup>5</sup> While there has been a modest decline from the fall 2024 peak, these figures confirm that both research and instructional roles remain central to the graduate student experience and to UCLA's academic mission. Units with the highest concentrations of GSR and ASE appointments also tend to align with areas of significant research activity and high

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<sup>5</sup> Workforce data do not distinguish between undergraduate and graduate student status. While few, if any, undergraduate students are appointed as Graduate Student Researchers (GSRs), undergraduates are occasionally appointed as Teaching Assistants and more commonly as Tutors and Readers. Tutor and Reader appointments are generally below 25%, as these roles do not involve consistent workloads throughout the quarter.

undergraduate instructional demand, respectively, and therefore represent areas of heightened financial and operational sensitivity to changes in graduate employment policy.

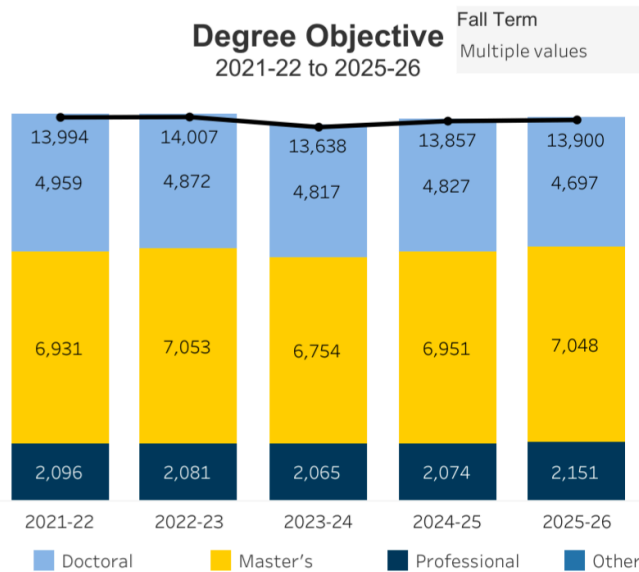


Figure 1: Degree Objective Trends from DGE’s [Enrollment Snapshot](#)

Workforce Category	Oct 2021	Oct 2022	Oct 2023	Oct 2024	Oct 2025
Academic Apprentice	2,179	2,185	2,034	2,139	1,935
Tutor	238	217	246	283	225
Reader	231	218	244	265	185
Graduate Student Researcher	1,673	1,754	1,756	1,804	1,626
Subtotal Academic - Student	4,321	4,374	4,280	4,491	3,971

Table 1: Unduplicated headcount trend data from APB’s [Workforce Dashboard](#)

Figure 2 shows that GSR appointments are heavily concentrated in research-intensive units. Engineering and the David Geffen School of Medicine (DGSOM) account for the largest GSR populations, followed by Physical Sciences and Life Sciences. Together, these units represent the core of UCLA’s externally-funded research enterprise and employ a substantial proportion of doctoral students as GSRs. Changes to mentoring expectations, directed research course structures, and distinctions between employment and academic progress will therefore be most acutely felt in these areas. Comparatively, Anderson, Undergraduate Education, Student Affairs, and many humanities and social science units have fewer GSR appointments and are likely to experience more limited direct impact from changes to GSR-related policies.

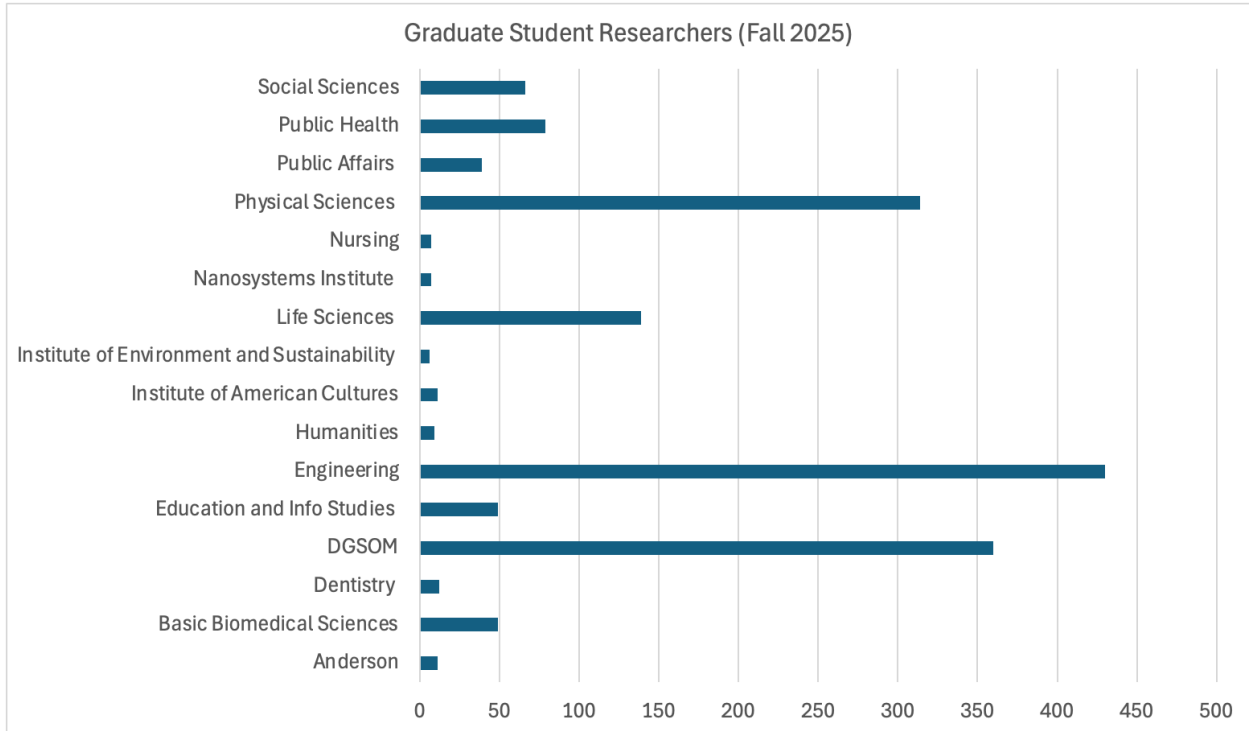


Figure 2: Fall 2025 Graduate Student Researcher Headcount by Organization (Organizations with fewer than 5 GSR appointments excluded). Source: [Workforce Dashboard](#)

Figure 3 shows that ASE appointments, particularly Teaching Assistant roles, are distributed more broadly but still show clear concentrations. Physical Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, Life Sciences (i.e. the College of Letters and Science) and Engineering all employ large numbers of ASEs, reflecting their reliance on graduate students to support high-enrollment undergraduate courses, laboratory instruction, and discussion sections. These units will be most directly affected by changes to TA training models, onboarding requirements, compliance tracking, and any future adjustments to limits on ASE employment. Other areas—such as Undergraduate Education, Theater/Film/Television, and certain professional schools—also show meaningful ASE activity and may face localized impacts depending on how training and hiring expectations evolve.

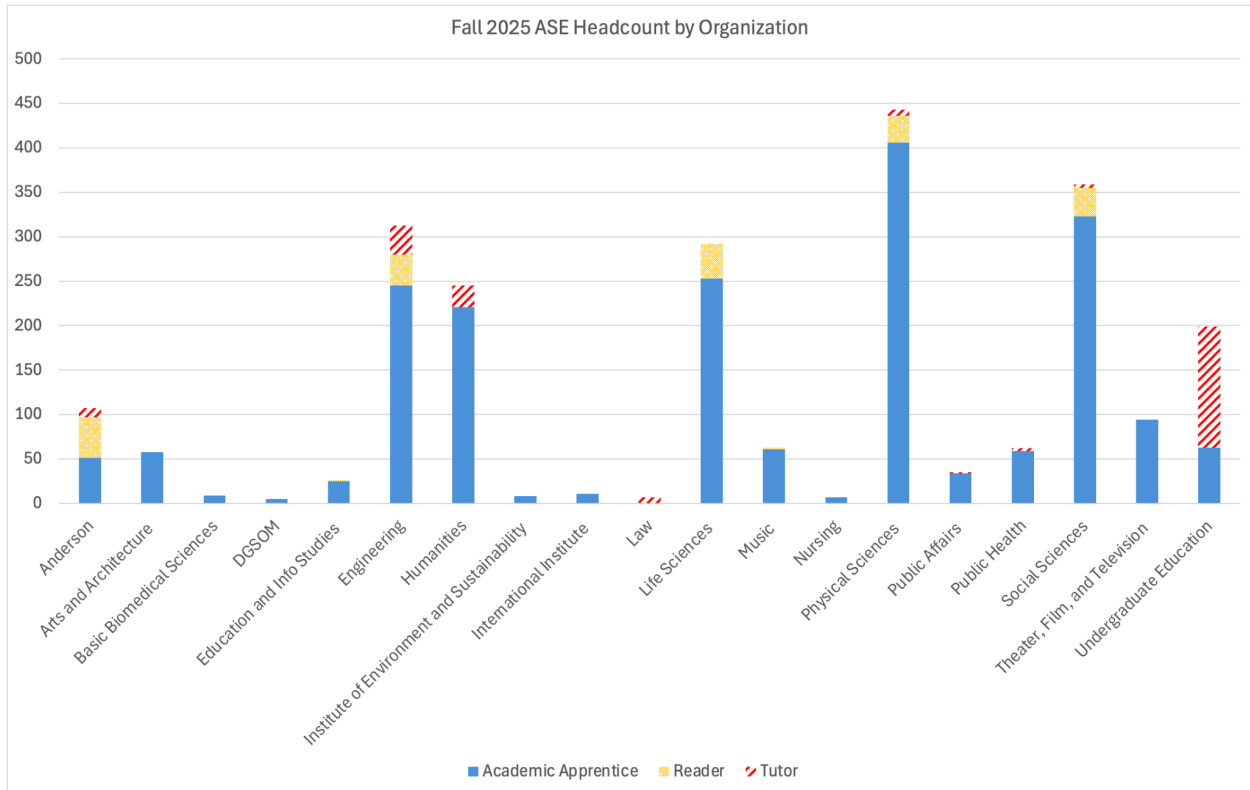


Figure 3: Fall 2025 Academic Student Employee Headcount by Organization (Organizations with fewer than 5 ASE appointments excluded). Source: [Workforce Dashboard](#)

Importantly, some units—particularly Engineering, Physical Sciences, and Life Sciences—have high concentrations of both GSR and ASE appointments. These units are likely to experience the most complex implementation environment, as they will need to adapt simultaneously to changes in research mentoring expectations and instructional training models. In contrast, units that rely primarily on one form of graduate student employment will experience more targeted, and potentially more manageable, transitions.

Taken together, these data underscore that implementation of the task force recommendations will not be uniform across campus. Instead, impacts will vary based on the extent to which units rely on graduate students for research, instruction, or both. This distributional reality should inform both the sequencing of implementation and the design of support structures, with particular attention to high-impact units that will bear the greatest operational burden. For a five-year analysis of ASE and GSR hiring trends, see Appendix 2.

## Current GSR Training Model

UCLA's [Academic Apprenticeship Personnel Manual](#) (AAPM) establishes general policy for both GSR and ASE appointments, and the Graduate Council has an oversight role with respect to

the AAPM and associated training requirements. At present, however, the AAPM does not establish campus-wide training requirements for GSRs.

In the absence of a campus-wide standard, responsibility for GSR training rests with Principal Investigators (P.I.s) and mentors or advisors serving as supervisors, and practices vary significantly across disciplines, departments, and individual appointments. In some cases, GSRs may be required to complete compliance-based or field-specific training, such as laboratory safety, human subjects, or animal research protocols. However, in many cases no formal training is tied to the GSR appointment itself.

Many doctoral students enroll in directed research courses concurrent with GSR appointments.<sup>6</sup> To clarify the relationship between GSR employment and enrollment in directed research courses, the UC systemwide Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs issued [guidelines for directed studies courses](#) in 2023, followed by [local guidance](#) from UCLA's Graduate Council in 2024. Both emphasize the need for directed research courses to include clear academic learning objectives and evaluation criteria. As discussed below, this paper recommends expanding campus resources to support more consistent implementation of that guidance across departments.

## Current TA Training Model

The Graduate Council is responsible for setting ASE training requirements. Currently, only graduate students appointed in TA titles (Teaching Assistants and Associate Instructors)<sup>7</sup> are required to complete campus-wide pedagogy training; training for Readers and Tutors is the responsibility of the hiring unit and varies considerably.

Beginning in 2017, all departments and programs hiring TAs at UCLA must ensure that TAs enroll in a 495 pedagogy course to receive discipline-based pedagogy training prior to or during the first quarter they are appointed as a TA. Since 2022, these courses must include the following TA Training requirements as part of student credit hours: Professional Standards and Ethics Training (PSET), a series of five asynchronous compliance modules in Bruin Learn; basic pedagogy training in five “Foundations of Teaching” areas; and disciplinary training.<sup>8</sup>

Although 495 courses vary by department, most are two-unit courses graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis, with structured in-class and asynchronous online components. Most meet for approximately two hours per week, with additional time spent

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<sup>6</sup> Typically, these courses are numbered in the 290 or 590 series.

<sup>7</sup> Per the newly approved CBA, the Teaching Fellow title is now a legacy title.

<sup>8</sup> See [Graduate Council TA Training and Compliance Modules Final Response](#).

outside of class to complete asynchronous online modules and other coursework, for a total of 20-30 hours of training.

The Graduate Council requires coverage of the following five basic pedagogy areas in all 495 courses: How Students Learn, Creating Inclusive Classrooms, Assessment and Grading, Active Learning, and Lesson Planning. Departments can satisfy this basic pedagogy requirement by using the TLC’s Foundations of Teaching curriculum or by assigning equivalent discipline-based content, subject to curriculum articulation through the TLC.<sup>9</sup>

Most 495 courses are facilitated by an instructor of record, often with support from a Teaching Assistant Consultant (TAC), an advanced graduate student in the field. The vast majority of TAC positions are funded by the TLC, and students appointed to these roles receive training from the TLC in evidence-based teaching and mentorship of new TAs.<sup>10</sup>

In 2024-25, 1,380 graduate students enrolled in 495 courses spread across 14 divisions and schools. Figure 5 shows aggregate enrollment trends from the last five years.

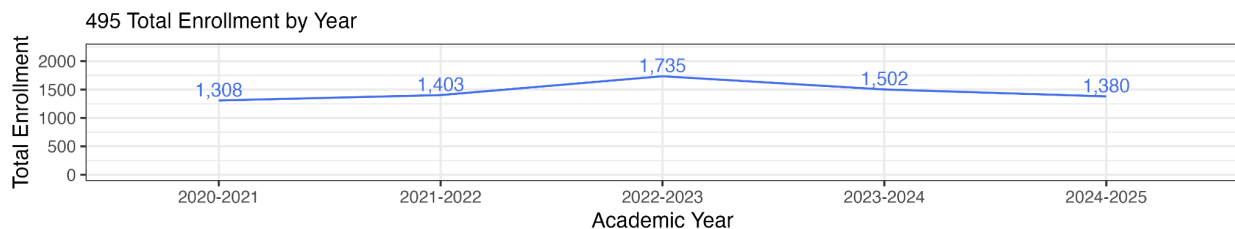


Figure 5: 495 Enrollment Trends

While reduction in graduate admissions may bring a slight drop in the number of new TAs needing to be trained in future years, it is still reasonable to anticipate that at least 800-1,000 graduate students are likely to need TA training annually for the next several years.<sup>11</sup> While the current model provides robust training, it also introduces inefficiencies by coupling employment-related training with academic coursework, contributing to redundancy and administrative complexity.

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 3 for an overview of learning objectives for current Foundations of Teaching and PSET units.

<sup>10</sup> In 2025-26, TLC is investing ~\$400,000 in salary support for TAC positions, with the campus contributing additional funding in tuition, fees, and benefits. As detailed in the implementation strategies that follow, sustaining this investment in TA training going forward while redeploying resources in innovative ways will be critical to UCLA’s ability to successfully decouple graduate education from employment while delivering training at scale that complies with the CBA governing TAs.

<sup>11</sup> 495 enrollment can be taken as a reasonable proxy for the number of new TAs needing to be trained in a given year, and is a useful metric since UC Path does not distinguish first-time TAs in payroll data.

## Other Noteworthy Graduate Student Training Areas

In addition to employment-specific training, graduate students complete an array of other training. Some are required upon matriculation, such as federal and state mandated Title IX training and required onboarding for international students (iSTART). Others are role-specific, such as laboratory safety or human subjects training. The Graduate Student Resource Center also deploys a fifty-minute online module that is required for new students and provides an orientation to campus resources and services.<sup>12</sup>

In preparing this white paper, the working group identified substantial overlap across these trainings, including redundancies across PSET, Foundations of Teaching, Title IX Training, and broader onboarding content related to inclusive climate and community expectations. Although some repetition may be beneficial, excessive redundancy is inefficient for the institution and frustrating for students. In what follows, we offer a model for restructuring graduate student training in ways that better distinguish between student onboarding, employment-related training, and broader professional development.

## New Models for Graduate Student Training

This section outlines options for streamlining training while maximizing effectiveness, mitigating risk, and preserving appropriate distinctions between training tied to employment and training tied to students' broader academic and professional development. We also identify areas where it would be advantageous to augment existing training with timely new content to support graduate student development as both students and employees of UCLA by ensuring (for example), early exposure to skill development in areas such as research ethics, responsible use of artificial intelligence, and digital accessibility. Together, the recommendations are intended to reduce redundancy, clarify governance, improve compliance, and preserve flexibility for departments and graduate programs.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This short asynchronous training – known as Graduate Student Orientation (GSO) Online – complements an optional in-person orientation event held the week before Week 0 of fall quarter. Student Affairs is currently collaborating with DGE to reimagine in-person programming for newly admitted graduate students in an effort to increase alignment and reduce costs. As part of this process, they are exploring alternative platforms for delivering GSO Online. See Appendix 4 for an overview of training topics and learning objectives from UCLA's 2025 GSO Online.

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 1 for a table of implementation strategies.

## Area 1: Mandatory Graduate Student Onboarding

### Implementation Leads: DGE in coordination with Student Affairs

Currently, Student Affairs requires all newly matriculated graduate students to complete a fifty-minute online onboarding module.<sup>14</sup> We propose expanding Graduate Student Orientation (GSO) Online and establishing it as a mandatory onboarding program for all newly matriculated graduate students. This onboarding should be explicitly framed as preparation for graduate student life, distinct from employment-related training, and aligned with the model used for undergraduate orientation, which requires all new undergraduates to complete [New Student Orientation](#) upon matriculation. DGE and Student Affairs would have joint responsibility over onboarding for graduate students.

#### **Format**

In order to ensure broad access and scalability, the curriculum should continue to be delivered through a series of self-paced asynchronous online modules similar in structure to GSO Online. If migration to a new delivery platform is needed, TLC instructional designers could support the development of the onboarding modules in Bruin Learn or another delivery platform.

#### **Curriculum Overview**

This orientation should focus on expectations associated with graduate student life at UCLA and not job-specific training. Existing GSO Online content provides a strong foundation. In addition, material currently included in PSET that is not specific to teaching, such as inclusive climate expectations, could be integrated into this orientation to reduce redundancy. The curriculum should also include an introduction to academic integrity, research ethics, the responsible use of artificial intelligence, community standards, inclusivity, and True Bruin Values. Where feasible, iSTART content for international graduate students should be aligned with this onboarding module to reduce duplication.

#### **Duration**

3-5 hours, fully asynchronous

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<sup>14</sup> This graduate student onboarding is delivered through MyUCLA. To ensure compliance, a “soft hold” is placed that permits new students to enroll in courses prior to completing the training but drops their study list if they have not satisfied the requirement by Friday of Week 2. This onboarding is not currently mandated by the Graduate Council, but doing so would likely be advantageous and could help ensure alignment with and differentiation from other trainings, making for a more integrated and efficient onboarding experience for students.

## ***Timing***

To give new graduate students maximum flexibility in accessing orientation content, we propose making modules available by July 1 each year, with a completion deadline of Friday of Week 2 of the first enrolled term.<sup>15</sup>

## ***Compensation***

This onboarding provides essential preparation for graduate student life and is not directly related to employment responsibilities. As such, completion of the modules would be unpaid, consistent with undergraduate orientation, GSO Online, and other mandatory training related to student life (such as Title IX training). Completion would not be treated as a condition of employment.

## ***Enforcement***

Because this requirement would attach to student status rather than employment, non-compliance should be addressed through academic rather than payroll/employment mechanisms. We propose that failure to complete onboarding by Friday of Week 2 of the first enrolled term should trigger a dropped study list or a registration hold for the following term until the requirement is satisfied.

## ***Advantages***

Consolidating onboarding for institutional expectations in a mandatory graduate student orientation clarifies that these are university values, not labor obligations. The proposed plan ensures that TA training can focus on pedagogical knowledge and skills while also ensuring that new students receive crucial orientation to campus policies, expectations, and resources to support their successful integration into the Bruin community.

## ***Limitations***

Implementation would require stronger coordination across units that currently share responsibility for graduate onboarding, as well as clear communication with schools and programs operating on different academic calendars or outside DGE's purview.

Operational feasibility will depend on having a delivery platform and compliance-tracking mechanism that can interface effectively with relevant student records systems. Manually tracking completion is not feasible given that nearly five thousand newly admitted master's,

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<sup>15</sup> Currently GSO Online launches in August but working group members suggested that an earlier launch date may be needed to support professional schools on semester calendars.

doctoral, and professional students would need to complete the onboarding modules annually.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Final Recommendation and Immediate Next Steps***

The working group recommends establishing a mandatory online graduate student orientation for all newly admitted graduate students. As an immediate next step, DGE and Student Affairs should develop a proposed action plan, including representation from both units and relevant subject matter experts, to outline a curriculum plan, implementation timeline, governance model, and budget.

## **Area 2: Mandatory and Elective Teaching Development**

### **Implementation Leads: TLC, Departments, Graduate Council**

#### **2A. Mandatory Paid Pedagogical Training for TAs (TLC-Led)**

In 2021, UCLA's Graduate Council established a minimum standard for essential pedagogical training for all graduate students employed as TAs. Preserving that standard while decoupling employment-related training from coursework will require administrative units and academic departments to collaboratively redesign TA training to eliminate reliance on enrollment in 495 courses. After reviewing models at many UC campuses and other peer institutions (see Appendix 6), the working group recommends replacing the current structure with a mandatory, paid orientation for first-time TAs delivered outside the 495 course framework.

#### ***Format***

In order to ensure that this one-time orientation to employment as a TA is pedagogically sound, efficient, and scalable, the working group recommends a hybrid approach that combines asynchronous modules with synchronous workshops facilitated by TLC staff and trained graduate student staff. Asynchronous modules would precede and prepare students for synchronous sessions, which would focus on application, discussion, and practice. This model builds on the structure already used in the TLC's Foundations of Teaching curriculum and aligns with approaches used at peer institutions.<sup>17</sup>

#### ***Curriculum Overview***

This orientation for first-time TAs would merge content currently covered in the Foundations of Teaching curriculum with content from PSET that relates directly to pedagogy, increasing

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<sup>16</sup> See Academic Planning and Budget's [enrollment trend data](#).

<sup>17</sup> The following UC campuses offer a pre-term TA orientation: UC Berkeley, UC Davis, UC Irvine, UC Santa Barbara, UC Santa Cruz, UC Riverside, and UC Merced. See Appendix 5 for more details about common training practices and notable variations among UCs.

efficiency and reducing redundancy. It would also feature opportunities for new TAs to gain practical experience through case study workshops and other hands-on activities often employed in 495 courses. TLC will lead efforts to redesign existing curricula to accommodate the new delivery format and will convene a working group to determine whether campus needs are best served by delivering the asynchronous portion through Bruin Learn, the UC Learning Center used for other forms of employment training, or another platform.

### ***Duration***

8 hours total; approximately 3-4 hours asynchronous and 4 hours synchronous.

### ***Timing***

Quarterly, ideally in Week 0 (or the first week of the term) with an additional session held in Week 3. This schedule would allow us to front-load training for TAs and departments that want to ensure training is completed prior to the first day of classes but would also allow us to accommodate late hires and allow fall TAs to elect to complete training after the official start of their pay period.

### ***Compensation***

Because this training is directly tied to employment responsibilities, it should be treated as compensable time in accordance with applicable labor agreements. One option would be to compensate new TAs for the new mandatory training by augmenting the employment percentage for first-time appointments. This expense could be offset by reallocating a portion of the TLC's current resources allocated to the TAC program.<sup>18</sup> Alternatively, departments could reduce duties for new TAs and re-allocate those hours to training. This could be accomplished by hiring readers to assist first-time TAs with grading, assigning fewer sections, or reducing other duties (such as office hours).<sup>19</sup>

### ***Oversight***

We envision that the TLC's existing Advisory Committee on Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Scholar Affairs—which includes senate and non-senate faculty as well as students and staff—can be leveraged to provide oversight and guidance for this new TA orientation. We also envision

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<sup>18</sup> The current hourly rate for Teaching Assistants is approximately \$60/hr. We estimate approximately 10-15 hours of training per TA, including time spent on the new TA orientation plus a streamlined version of PSET and any in-term requirements such as classroom observations for new TAs. We estimate a total of \$600,000-\$900,000/yr to train 800-1,000 new TAs a year through a microappointment model.

<sup>19</sup> Since most TAs have few duties in the first 1-2 weeks of the term, it may be possible for many departments to factor training into appointment hours without significantly interfering with course duties. However, since TAs are salaried employees with flex-time appointments, some departments may have workload plans in place that reallocate work hours from the start of the term toward peak grading periods.

that TLC will provide routine updates to the Graduate Council and invite input from members. Additionally, ELR and AAPO would have oversight responsibilities to ensure alignment with the CBA and AAPM.

### ***Staffing***

Delivering an orientation for approximately 1,000 new TAs each year, the vast majority of whom will need to be trained in the lead-up to fall, will necessitate increased staffing for the TLC's Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Scholar Engagement unit. To accomplish this without incurring additional cost to the campus, we propose reallocating a portion of the TLC's existing budget to fund additional staff who can help design and lead workshops at the orientation, support expansion of TLC's elective teaching development programming (see below), and otherwise expand campus capacity to deliver the new pedagogical training at scale.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Enforcement***

Since this updated training in foundational pedagogy and teaching-related policies fulfills a dimension of training that the Graduate Council has already designated as mandatory for new TAs, it is important to establish an enforcement mechanism that will ensure compliance by TAs and hiring departments. Responsibility should rest with AAPO, as the unit overseeing ASE employment, in coordination with other relevant stakeholders.

Current policy approved by the Graduate Council requires new TAs to complete PSET by the end of Week 2 or risk cancellation of fee remission allocation to the hiring department. To date, completion of the PSET requirement has been onerous to track and the recommended penalty has not been enforced. We propose amending the existing policy to require completion of the new mandatory training by the end of the first quarter of appointment as a TA, with clear thresholds established for what constitutes compliance. TAs who fail to comply should have a hold placed to prevent processing of future fee remissions until the training requirement is satisfied. A hold could also be placed on processing future appointments as a TA. Shifting from fee remission cancellation to a hold minimizes disruption to the instructional mission while retaining a penalty that withholds an employment benefit from TAs who fail to comply with employment-related training requirements.

### ***Advantages***

The proposed model offers several key advantages in terms of efficiency, scalability, and alignment with systemwide practices. This model is consistent with practices at peer institutions and sustains key components of the Graduate Council's existing resolutions

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<sup>20</sup> A job description will need to be developed and reviewed by AAPO and ELR to determine the appropriate payroll title for this position. Other UCs use a range of funding mechanisms to compensate graduate students engaged in such work, with some hiring them in ASE or staff titles while others use fellowship structures, course credit, or a combination.

regarding TA training, which specify that training should take place prior to or concurrent with the first appointment and should not be delivered entirely asynchronously (although it may include asynchronous online components).<sup>21</sup>

Delivering essential training prior to the start of the term also ensures that all new TAs receive critical employment training before their first day in the classroom. Currently, a subset of departments deliver their 495 courses prior to their students' first TAs (typically by scheduling the course during a first-year fellowship period) but many offer their 495 course concurrent with the first appointment.

There are also several budgetary advantages to the proposed model. By redeploying existing resources allocated to TA training, this model optimizes training for new TAs and minimizes investment of new resources.

### **Limitations**

Despite considerable advantages, the proposed model is not without limitations and areas that would require careful consideration before moving forward. These include:

1. ELR was consulted during the drafting of this white paper and identified the following potential limitations and considerations with this proposal:
  - a. Any proposed change in the delivery and compensation of employment training requires notice to the union representing TAs (UAW 4811) as well as review by UC AAPO, UC ELR, and other system-wide bodies since changes to the local training context could have implications for other campuses.
  - b. The timing of training relative to the first day of instruction and TA pay periods may pose challenges, particularly in fall when these dates are most out of sync for campuses on the quarter system.<sup>22</sup>
2. This group was charged with designing a training program that decouples education and employment for doctoral students. Modifications may need to be made to ensure that the model supports master's and professional students.

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<sup>21</sup> See [Graduate Council TA Training and Compliance Modules Final Response](#) (page 2).

<sup>22</sup> Local and systemwide labor relations and UAW 4811 have both advocated for greater alignment between pay periods and start dates. This proposal could provide an opportunity to revisit these conversations locally or systemwide, but UCLA ELR warns that in the absence of revision to the systemwide calendar for campuses on the quarter system, attempting to hold training in Week 0 could prove challenging. We hope to offset potential risk by giving TAs an option to attend employment orientation in Week 3 if they object to doing so before their pay period begins (a risk-mitigation strategy that ELR endorsed).

3. The proposed plan is only feasible if new basic pedagogy training requirements are mandated for TAs appointed for the first time after the requirements are updated. Applying the new standard retroactively for TAs who already completed earlier training requirements is both operationally infeasible and unnecessary when UCLA's current requirements are more robust and not less so in terms of both depth and duration.
4. This portion of the proposed plan focuses on outlining strategies for updating delivery of the basic pedagogy requirement set by the Graduate Council – but many departments also consider discipline-based pedagogy training to be essential. Streamlining and reorganizing the amount of basic pedagogy training required for TAs makes it feasible to implement in fewer hours than students currently spend in 495 courses, but we strongly encourage departments to continue to offer more advanced courses in pedagogy to support graduate students in honing their skills as instructors. In Section 2B, we describe models for this that still decouple coursework from employment training.
5. Currently, new TAs complete approximately 20–30 hours of training through 495 courses, including time spent on PSET and foundational pedagogy instruction. This proposal reduces the total time required for mandatory training, which may be perceived as a limitation—particularly by departments that currently incorporate 495 coursework into degree requirements.

However, this reduction in hours is intentional and is paired with a redesigned model that shifts a portion of pedagogical development from a universal requirement to a structured, incentivized elective framework (see Section 2C). To maintain—and potentially enhance—the quality of TA preparation, it is critical that departments actively encourage participation in these elective offerings. Departments are strongly urged to consider mechanisms such as integrating elective pedagogy training into degree milestones, offering academic credit, or otherwise incentivizing completion.

6. The proposed plan focuses on offering TA orientations at the start of fall, winter, and spring quarters. Further assessment will be needed to determine whether training in advance of summer session employment is necessary and feasible, or if Graduate Council and AAPO should instead consider directing departments not to hire first-time TAs in the summer. The latter is more operationally feasible and ELR did not foresee difficulties, but the AAPM may need to be modified to reflect this restriction.
7. The proposed plan focuses on updates to TA training because that is the only ASE title for which the Graduate Council has established training requirements currently delivered through coursework. The Graduate Council may consider establishing minimum training requirements for Readers and Special Readers or other ASE titles,

and if so, whether such training could be delivered through the new orientation model proposed here or if an additional training mechanism would be required.

8. The Graduate Council's input is sought regarding the overall structure and goals of the proposed onboarding and TA training framework, particularly as they intersect with graduate education and departmental practices. However, as TA training is being formalized as a requirement tied to university employment, exemptions from campus-wide onboarding and required TA orientation should not be allowed, even in cases where departments offer similar or supplementary programming.

This approach is consistent with other mandatory compliance-based trainings (e.g., Title IX), where centralized delivery and tracking are necessary to ensure consistency, equity, and institutional accountability. While departments play a critical role in augmenting training through discipline-specific or pedagogical programming, such efforts are intended to complement—not replace—required campus-wide components.

9. In addition to traditional 495 courses that provide department- or division-based pedagogical training, specialized areas of the undergraduate curriculum (e.g., Writing I and II, the Cluster Program, and Freshman/Transfer Summer Programs) have historically relied on dedicated coursework to prepare TAs. Under the proposed model, departments will need to develop alternative approaches to ensure first-time TAs in these areas receive appropriate preparation without relying on required academic courses.

To support this transition, we recommend that such training be incorporated into mandatory TA orientation and/or structured as compensated job duties tied to instructional appointments. This shift reinforces the framing of TA training as an employment responsibility while maintaining necessary preparation for specialized instructional contexts. Departments will be responsible for ensuring that training remains sufficiently rigorous and aligned with programmatic needs, even as delivery mechanisms evolve.

### ***Final Recommendation and Immediate Next Steps***

After considering a range of options, this group recommends that TLC, in consultation with the Graduate Council, lead development of a new mandatory, paid pedagogical training that updates PSET and draws from the Foundations of Teaching. We propose redeploying resources already allocated to the TLC for TA training to fund the new program. Accordingly, 2026–27 should be treated as a transition year, with interim measures to maintain compliance and continuity while the full model is developed and phased in. Given the complexity of this transition and the need to be responsive to the recently ratified collective bargaining agreement, a phased approach to implementation over the next one or two years will be

essential. In addition to curriculum development, implementation will require a new tracking system to record completion of the asynchronous training and workshop attendance, as well as a database or dashboard to enable departments to verify compliance. Additionally, campus units that oversee policy areas covered by the new training should work with the Graduate Council, DGE, and AAPO to keep the portions of the mandatory training they oversee up to date. An outreach campaign to engage departments and students and build buy-in should also be planned, and the Graduate Council should be regularly updated regarding the training and any proposed changes.

While these steps are underway, TLC should lead an interim transition plan to taper off reliance on mandatory pedagogy courses beginning in 2026-27 by pursuing a combination of strategies such as: consolidating the number of TAC appointments to comply with the new CBA appointment percentage requirements; expanding seats in 495 sections led by TLC staff to ensure all new TAs can still receive training under the current Graduate Council requirements until new requirements go into effect; piloting alternative forms of peer mentoring; and supporting departments with the transition to alternative models for delivering discipline-based pedagogy training (see Section 2B).

## **2B. Discipline-Based Pedagogical Development for Graduate Students (Department-Led)**

In recent resolutions related to TA training, the Graduate Council has stressed the importance of striking a balance between establishing minimum essential standards while granting departments maximum autonomy over their curriculum. The members of this working group share this sense that evidence-based teaching practices are both job knowledge and skills as well as core components of doctoral training that prepare graduate students for future careers both within and beyond higher education. Members believe it is therefore critical for the Graduate Council and deans to encourage departments to continue offering pedagogy courses, and give departments maximum autonomy over how they continue to situate pedagogical training within degree program objectives for the doctorate as well as other graduate degrees.

In this section, we outline possibilities for the evolution of course-based pedagogical development. We recommend that departments retain primary responsibility for discipline-based pedagogical development and consider incorporating such training into degree program requirements where appropriate.

We also recommend that departments be reminded that they are free to provide discipline-based employment training for TAs outside of coursework – such as through department-led workshops – as long as attendance is voluntary or included as an expected

paid job duty in hiring paperwork (See Appendix 6 for an example). Since these strategies do not require modification of current practices, we do not elaborate on them further in this white paper.

### ***Format***

Departments should continue to have the option to offer discipline-specific pedagogy training through a course-based structure. However, in keeping with the recommendations of the taskforce, such courses should no longer be required as conditions for employment as a TA. Coursework may be included among preferred criteria for appointments at the discretion of hiring departments provided that relevant campus policies and CBA stipulations are followed to ensure a fair and transparent hiring process.

In order to clearly separate employment training related to TAs from pedagogical development that is a component of graduate education, we propose 1) eliminating the use of 495 courses as employment requirements in the AAPM and hiring documents, 2) updating 495 course syllabi to focus on evidence-based teaching as a component of graduate education rather than as employment training, and 3) considering a transition to a new course number for pedagogy courses that are offered as degree program requirements or electives – such as 496. Since Course 495 is currently referenced in policy and hiring documents in ways that explicitly link coursework to employment training, transitioning to a new course number could help clearly signal a transition to a new type of educational experience that is distinct from employment conditions.

### ***Curriculum Overview***

To clearly separate TA-related employment training from pedagogical development within graduate education, departmental pedagogy courses would need to focus less narrowly on TA training concerns and instead more broadly on evidence-based teaching practices in the disciplines and preparation for academic careers. The 496 course number is already being used for elective pedagogy courses offered through the Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning (CIRTL@UCLA), and the first course in the CIRTL series—GRAD PD 496A: Introduction to Evidence-Based Undergraduate Teaching—provides a good example of a pedagogy course that uses an education lens rather than an employment lens to introduce graduate students to evidence-based teaching practices. See Appendix 7 for a copy of the latest GRAD PD 496A syllabus. TLC can assist departments interested in developing similar courses for their disciplines.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> A few departments are known to use the 496 course number interchangeably with 495, either to create the equivalent of an A/B sequence (as in World Arts and Cultures / Dance) or to differentiate between TA training experiences (as in a language pedagogy course offered by Near Eastern Languages and Cultures). But such use of 496 is relatively rare and not likely to pose a barrier to creating a new reserved course number if needed.

## ***Advantages***

Transitioning away from 495 TA training courses as a condition of employment and toward broader pedagogical development courses affords several advantages. It clearly decouples employment training from coursework and allows departments maximum autonomy for determining whether and how teaching development should figure into their degree programs. While departments could no longer require coursework as a condition of employment, they could still take steps to ensure that their students receive early exposure to discipline-based pedagogical practices by scheduling their reimaged 495 or 496 courses during the first year of degree programs, when many doctoral students are on fellowship. Additionally, groups of departments or entire divisions could maximize efficiency by collaborating to offer an interdisciplinary course for all entering students and rotating responsibility for instruction. Several collaborative 495 courses of this sort already exist and could be transitioned to the new model.<sup>24</sup>

## ***Limitations***

Ensuring that the transition from 495 TA training courses to the new curricular model is meaningful—and not merely a change in name—will require departments to take deliberate action to update syllabi, redesign curricula, and identify instructors with the appropriate expertise and interest in teaching pedagogy-focused courses. This is a substantial undertaking. Given UCLA's timelines for program review and catalog updates, we anticipate that departments will require one to two years to fully implement these changes.

Importantly, this transition is not occurring in a vacuum. The recently ratified CBA requires that doctoral students appointed to TA titles be employed at 50% time or greater, which effectively eliminates the current model of staffing 495 pedagogy courses with 25% Teaching Assistant Consultants (TACs). As a result, the existing TAC-supported instructional model will need to be significantly restructured regardless of the broader training redesign. This is not a hypothetical constraint—it will have a direct and immediate impact (effective Fall 2026) on the feasibility of continuing current approaches. At the same time, a portion of existing TAC program funding will likely need to be redeployed to support expanded onboarding, TA orientation, and peer mentoring efforts. Together, these changes will substantially limit the availability of TACs to support pedagogy course instruction going forward.

One viable path forward is to more intentionally leverage faculty instructors, including Professors of Teaching where available. However, not all departments or divisions have access

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<sup>24</sup> For example, Life Science, Nursing, Public Affairs, and Public Health all offer division-wide pedagogy courses, and the Humanities division is in the process of developing a course that will serve students from several of its departments.

to such faculty lines. In units with a higher concentration of research faculty, additional incentives and structural support will be necessary. This may include recognizing pedagogy instruction as part of standard teaching loads and/or providing financial support to departments to offset instructional costs.<sup>25</sup>

It will also be important to reinforce that preparing future faculty is not merely a service activity, but a core component of the instructional mission of doctoral education. The Graduate Council, as the Senate body responsible for doctoral education, has a critical role to play in reinforcing this expectation with departments, deans, and other Senate bodies, including the Council on Academic Personnel.

### ***Final Recommendation and Immediate Next Steps***

In keeping with the precedent set by the Graduate Council in prior resolutions related to TA training, we recognize departments and divisions as best positioned to help their students develop discipline-based teaching competencies, as well as metacognitive skills that support their ability to learn at the doctoral level in their field. This preparation equips graduate students for success on the academic job market and advances their success at UCLA. For these reasons, it is critical that departments continue to offer courses that introduce graduate students to evidence-based pedagogy and incorporate these courses into degree program requirements.

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<sup>25</sup> Teaching loads vary across departments, divisions, and schools, and may be assigned based on units, specific courses and their estimated effort, class size, or course type (e.g., laboratory courses, core major requirements, methods courses, or graduate seminars). While these approaches differ, departments should be deliberate and transparent in assigning responsibility and effort for TA pedagogical training.

Responsibility for this training may appropriately reside with departmental vice chairs for graduate studies, given its connection to the preparation of future faculty, or with other academic leaders overseeing instructional programs, including Professors of Teaching, other Senate faculty, lecturers, or academic administrators, as appropriate to the unit.

Departments should also recognize that certain instructional contexts require specialized pedagogical preparation beyond general TA training. For example, laboratory courses, writing-intensive courses, and foreign language instruction often require discipline-specific teaching approaches that are not interchangeable with other courses in the same department.

Accordingly, departments should explicitly identify these specialized training requirements and ensure that expectations are clearly communicated. Such requirements should be formally documented in written appointment notifications for TAs assigned to these courses, ensuring alignment between instructional responsibilities and required preparation.

TLC is available to support the (re)development of pedagogical courses that align with program learning outcomes and should work with the Graduate Council and departments to develop guidance for this transition. An outreach campaign to engage departments and divisional leadership and build buy-in for the proposed changes will be essential to mitigate perceptions of a top-down mandate.

Additionally, it should be clarified that departments are already permitted to provide discipline-based employment training for TAs outside of coursework – for example, through department-led workshops – as long as attendance is voluntary or included as an expected paid job duty in hiring paperwork.

## **2C. Elective Teaching Professional Development & Certification (TLC-Led)**

In addition to course-based pedagogical development opportunities administered by departments, it is equally important to sustain other forms of elective professional development related to teaching that can be delivered through both curricular and co-curricular means, such as workshops, consultations, and self-paced online tutorials.

The Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) is already charged with serving as the central campus hub for teaching and learning development, including the coordination, curation, and promotion of opportunities offered both within the TLC and across other campus units. In this capacity, the TLC should continue to lead efforts to ensure that these resources are visible, accessible, and aligned with campus priorities.

This work can be further strengthened by expanding centralized infrastructure to curate and disseminate recorded workshops, asynchronous materials, and other scalable resources, and by partnering with departments to increase awareness, participation, and integration of these offerings across the campus.

### **Overview**

UCLA already offers a range of elective teaching development opportunities, and these should be sustained and expanded to complement required training. For example, the TLC's TA and Postdoc Teaching Conference, currently offered annually in the lead up to fall quarter, will now be offered later in the year to avoid conflicting with the new TA orientation (see 2A) and will focus on advanced skill development and opportunities for peer-to-peer engagement and networking. TLC is also launching a new program in Spring 2026 – from PhD to Professor – which will provide an organizing umbrella for current and future programming and resources geared toward supporting doctoral students and postdocs seeking faculty careers. In addition to these signature efforts, TLC will continue to offer workshops, learning communities, and

asynchronous online resources, while increasing efforts to raise visibility of opportunities offered by other campus units.

UCLA also already offers elective course-based pedagogical development opportunities, such as the CIRTL@UCLA course sequence, the Collegium of University Teaching Fellows pedagogy seminar, and courses offered through Graduate Certificate in Writing Pedagogy. These course-based experiences should be sustained, but may need to be modified to ensure differentiation from employment training. Going forward, TLC also will develop a new graduate certificate in college teaching and/or non-credit microcredentials to further incentivize and reward graduate students across the disciplines who elect to participate in advanced teaching development.

### ***Advantages***

Sustaining elective teaching professional development through a combination of courses and co-curricular offerings affords numerous advantages. This model allows for maximum flexibility for students as well as the campus and ensures that students who are interested in teaching and/or intending to pursue careers in postsecondary education can access the training they need to be competitive candidates. Such opportunities are also already being delivered in ways that are accessible to master's and professional students. This existing infrastructure means that UCLA's current model for elective professional development can easily scale beyond the doctoral population as student demographics potentially shift.

### ***Limitations***

The most significant limitations of UCLA's current elective teaching development offerings are a limited coordination and uneven awareness across the campus. The TLC is actively working with campus partners to coordinate offerings, streamline messaging, and highlight benefits to students and campus partners. The launch of updates to required training will provide an opportunity to improve communication about elective training as well.

It may also be necessary to explore ways to help ensure that students who participate in elective teaching development have opportunities to apply what they learn in practice. Currently, UCLA primarily operationalizes teaching practices through coursework – such as dedicated independent study mentoring courses offered by Writing Programs for TAs employed for the first time as TAs for Writing I and II classes. These courses currently satisfy requirements for the Graduate Certificate in Writing Pedagogy but can be taken by other students as well.

New approaches to practicum experiences of this sort may be necessary if UCLA is to decouple coursework from employment, but eliminating teaching-related practice entirely risks diminishing both the educational and employment experiences of graduate students.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Final Recommendation and Immediate Next Steps***

In order to give graduate students maximum flexibility to develop their teaching skills, it is imperative that UCLA sustain and grow elective teaching development programs, with an emphasis on opportunities that complement rather than duplicate training provided in the new mandatory TA orientation (see 2A). Such opportunities prepare students to distinguish themselves on the job market and are a critical way that UCLA demonstrates its commitment to investing in the future of higher education. To facilitate these efforts, the TLC should continue to serve in a coordinating capacity for elective teaching development opportunities and provide periodic updates to the Graduate Council and other stakeholders.

## **2D. Considerations for Exploring Minimum and Maximum Teaching Experience Thresholds (Graduate Council Led)**

In addition to proposing an implementation plan for updating UCLA's TA training requirements in ways that align with the spirit of existing Graduate Council resolutions while also evolving training to meet emerging needs of UCLA, this working group identified next steps for exploring 1) a minimum expectation for the amount of TA experience deemed essential to doctoral education (three quarters was proposed by the taskforce); and 2) a stricter cap on the maximum number of quarters that a student may serve as a TA (currently set at 12 quarters, with the possibility of applying for exceptions up to a hard cap of 18 quarters).

The taskforce recommended engaging the Graduate Council in exploring these possibilities and we endorse the need to engage key Senate leaders with responsibility over TA training – as well as the Undergraduate Council, deans, and chairs, as any changes (particularly to the maximum number of quarters a student can serve as a TA) would have repercussions for how departments staff undergraduate and graduate courses. Additionally, any changes to minimum and maximum quarters of employment would require changes to the AAPM and may require

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<sup>26</sup> For example, departments could consider formalizing expectations for instructors of record who mentor graduate student instructors. Guidance that aligns with the new CBA could be developed by TLC in consultation with the Graduate Council and ELR.

notice to UAW 4811 or bargaining.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, because there is reason to believe that teaching across many terms may in some cases prolong time to degree, this flexibility should not rest on assumption alone. Assessment should be embedded in implementation. In particular, the campus should undertake a study to examine whether and under what conditions extended teaching service is associated with longer time to degree, with attention to variation across disciplines, funding models, and student populations. This analysis should also consider whether advanced students' appointments affect the ability of less advanced students to access meaningful teaching opportunities. As long as employing advanced students as TAs is not shown to have a negative impact on time to degree or on equitable access to relevant TA experience for other graduate students, we advocate for preserving departmental flexibility. The existing exception process for TA appointments beyond twelve quarters already provides an initial set of guardrails and could serve as one mechanism for supporting this ongoing assessment.

Setting a minimum expectation of teaching for all doctoral students is an intriguing proposition. The taskforce suggested a minimum threshold of three quarters, funded centrally. We support encouraging departments to prioritize teaching experience for doctoral students and do not object to encouraging a baseline of three quarters. However, we recommend that the Graduate Council carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of codifying this expectation in policy vs. making a recommendation and delegating authority to departments to assess the feasibility of implementing a minimum TAship requirement in their specific contexts.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Policy regarding academic employment limits for graduate students is set at the system level and terms of employment accumulate across campuses of attendance, which means UCOP Academic Personnel would need to be consulted about changes to requirements at UCLA. Additionally, in December 2025, [unfair labor practice charges](#) were filed against UCLA and UC Berkeley by UAW 4811 when departments unilaterally announced new policies limiting the hiring of individuals as TAs after 12 quarters of employment and 5 years of enrollment. Any resolution and potential repercussions of the unfair labor practice charges would need to be considered.

<sup>28</sup> For example, departments with a high proportion of graduate students funded by NSF or other grants that limit their ability to hold TAships may require more flexibility with teaching experience thresholds. Campus should consult with units that have previously implemented more restrictive models for graduate student teaching appointments (e.g., limits on the number of quarters of TA service) to better understand their rationale, outcomes, and any exemption processes that were used to maintain instructional continuity. Insights from these units may help inform both the design of future policy and the development of appropriate guardrails or exception pathways.

## Area 3: Training for GSRs and Faculty Mentors

### Implementation Leads: DGE in coordination with Graduate Council

As detailed above, UCLA does not currently have university-wide employment training or onboarding requirements for GSRs, nor does the campus have global mentor or mentee training requirements. Currently, employment-related training for GSRs is role-specific, such as lab safety training or human subjects training for graduate students conducting research in those fields. Below, we explore the feasibility of establishing global training requirements for GSRs, outline strategies to support effective GSR appointments and directed research courses, and recommend next steps for stakeholders.

### 3A. GSR Onboarding

The Graduate Council has oversight over eligibility and training requirements in the AAPM and should take up the issue of whether it is feasible and advantageous to establish university-wide employment onboarding for GSRs on par with requirements for TA eligibility.

#### *Advantages*

Establishing mandatory GSR onboarding requirements could potentially help promote equity across mentored research experiences and between GSR and ASE appointments (which has emerged as a priority in labor negotiations since UC graduate students formed a combined bargaining unit).

#### *Limitations*

Despite potential benefits, this working group recommends that the Graduate Council proceed with caution in considering the possibility of establishing universal GSR training/onboarding due to several limitations. For instance, while decades of pedagogical research has established a strong base of evidence-based teaching practices that are applicable across disciplines, the body of evidence-based research practices varies considerably by discipline, as do the tasks and deliverables assigned to GSRs. The variability of research practices across disciplines limits the effectiveness of a universal training model. Nor is such a model necessary since ELR indicates that the collective bargaining agreement grants the university the right to include role-specific training as part of job duties and thus part of work hours (which is, indeed, how most P.I.s currently conduct training).

In addition, university-wide GSR onboarding may need to be compensated through a mechanism paralleling any mechanism established for mandatory campus-wide TA training (e.g., see section 2A). Given the number of GSRs employed annually, this would likely result in substantial costs to the campus, whether through the need to fund microappointments for

training or through the reduction of work hours needed to offset incorporating campus-wide training into base workloads.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Final Recommendation***

Given the number of new GSRs and the likely need to compensate for training at the current salary rate, the costs associated with mandatory GSR training are likely to be prohibitive, especially relative to the potential benefits of a discipline-agnostic training for students and for the research enterprise. Continuing to grant faculty who serve as P.I.s and mentors or advisors autonomy over how they allocate appointment hours toward training affords advantageous flexibility with minimal grievance risk. The working group does not recommend establishing a universal, campus-wide GSR onboarding requirement at this time. Instead, further review should focus on whether more targeted, discipline-responsive guidance or supports are needed.

### **3B. Mentee Training**

UCLA's most recent taskforce on doctoral education recommended requiring all doctoral students to complete mentee training coordinated through DGE to develop skills in project management, professional ethics, and collaboration – but did not specify whether such training should be considered job training or a degree program requirement. This working group consulted with AAPO and ELR to explore the feasibility of requiring such training as part of GSR employment and/or coursework.

### ***Advantages***

Requiring doctoral students to complete mentee training could help ensure that all doctoral students build skills critical to success with independent research at the doctoral level. Such training could also help students advocate for themselves and “mentor up” if they find themselves in need of guidance they are not receiving from their dissertation chair or committee. AAPO and ELR recognize the value of such professional development but recommend delegating responsibility to departments to determine whether to require such skill-building as an assignment within directed research courses or other coursework, and advised against mandating mentee training as a global job training requirement for GSRs. Some departments and schools, particularly in scientific fields, already encourage or require their graduate students to participate in mentee training led by DGE, Graduate Programs in Bioscience, or the Center for Education Innovation and Learning in the Sciences.

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<sup>29</sup> Indeed, departments are already struggling to bridge gaps between funding caps set by federal agencies and salary scales set by the CBA that governs GSRs. Any additional costs would be exceedingly difficult for the campus to absorb.

## ***Limitations***

AAPO and ELR raised concerns about requiring mentee training as a condition of employment, citing difficulty envisioning a training that would be useful enough across disciplines to justify the cost of developing and delivering the training and compensating GSRs for completing it. Weaving mentee training into expectations for doctoral coursework instead affords more flexibility at significantly reduced cost to the campus.

## ***Final Recommendation***

As specified in the taskforce recommendations, mentee training should be centrally coordinated by DGE in consultation with the Graduate Council. Given the limitations with integrating such training into employment, DGE should develop a plan to integrate mentee training into degree programs through directed research courses, proseminars, reimagined pedagogy courses, or other means – in consultation with AAPO and ELR to ensure that the implementation plan does not run afoul of the collective bargaining agreement for GSRs. This approach ensures that all doctoral students in a department would be exposed to these crucial skills regardless of whether (or when) they are employed as a GSR.

## **3C. Mentor Training**

UCLA's most recent taskforce on doctoral education also recommended that all faculty advisors participate in a mentoring seminar, ideally as a condition of their approval to serve on doctoral student dissertation committees. Working group members and AAPO and ELR representatives recognized the intended benefit of such a requirement, but raised significant concerns about the feasibility of operationalizing this taskforce recommendation as a universal requirement.

## ***Advantages***

Research conducted by the nationally-recognized Center for the Improvement of Mentored Experiences in Research (CIMER) demonstrates that faculty members who engage in mentor training are more effective in their role, and the students they mentor report improved research experiences.<sup>30</sup> Working group members do not dispute these benefits, and encourage the Graduate Council to explore ways to incentivize faculty to participate in mentor training without mandating such training at the campus level as a condition of eligibility to employ GSRs or serve on dissertation committees.

For example, the Graduate Council could coordinate with chairs, deans, and relevant Senate committees (including the Council on Academic Personnel) to help ensure that faculty who take the initiative to complete mentor training are rewarded for doing so through the promotion and

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<sup>30</sup> See the [CIMER program website](#) for key research studies on benefits of mentorship.

tenure process. Individual schools and divisions or departments could also implement local requirements for their faculty. Indeed, the Samueli School of Engineering already requires mentor training, and faculty in the biological sciences are often motivated to complete mentor training in hopes of becoming more competitive candidates for federally-funded training grants that are valued in the tenure and promotion process.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Limitations***

UCLA does not currently have universal requirements for faculty to complete teaching or mentoring training, and both AAPO and ELR raised concerns about the feasibility of instituting such a requirement and enforcing compliance without causing undue disruption to UCLA's research enterprise. Additionally, AAPO raised concerns about instituting a policy that could make it harder for departments to manage the dissertation committee service load for their faculty, or increase the risk that faculty who already shoulder a high degree of service responsibility relative to peers would end up shouldering even more of that load. Rather than preventing faculty from serving on committees until they complete mentor training, it would likely be more efficient and effective to encourage participation through the positive reinforcement mechanisms identified above. In cases where concerns arise, additional mentoring support and development opportunities should be made available through existing academic and administrative processes.<sup>32</sup>

Funding and staff capacity may also pose constraints to UCLA's ability to scale up mentor training initiatives, and this potential limitation would need to be assessed and addressed in order to move forward. Additionally, UCLA's curriculum for training mentors, which draws heavily on research conducted in STEM fields, would need to be overhauled to ensure relevance for faculty in other disciplines.

### ***Final Recommendation***

Establishing a system of incentives and rewards (rather than a system of penalties for failure to comply with overly burdensome requirements) is more likely to be effective in achieving the goals of the taskforce with respect to mentor training for faculty. Such an approach would build on existing practices of honoring faculty who excel at mentorship with awards administered by DGE and departments. UCLA also currently offers a Distinguished Teaching Award for

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<sup>31</sup> To make it even easier for faculty to access mentor training and for the campus to deliver training at scale across the disciplines, UCLA could consider developing an intensive onboarding program for new research faculty—led by DGE and the Vice Chancellor for Research and Creative Activities—that could be offered as a complement to the New Instructor Teaching Institute offered by TLC. TLC's New Instructor Teaching Institute is optional but recommended by deans as valuable onboarding for new faculty. A similar structure of targeted outreach could work well for delivering introductory mentor training and would build on existing onboarding offered through UCLA's [Research Concierge Program](#).

<sup>32</sup> Such a requirement would likely require coordination by ELR and AAPO.

undergraduate mentorship and a parallel award could be established for graduate mentoring. Such infrastructure can support the recognition of effective mentoring; however, promotion and tenure processes will also play a critical role in encouraging widespread adoption of evidence-based mentoring practices at UCLA. This effort will require support from the Graduate Council, as well as deans and chairs.

### **3D. Recommended Next Steps to Support Effective GSR Appointments and Directed Research Courses**

In this section, we outline strategies to support effective GSR appointments and decouple them from directed research courses to the extent possible, organized as a series of recommended next steps for various stakeholder groups. The UC systemwide Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA) and UCLA Graduate Council have already issued guidance on delineating expectations for academic research versus employment; rather than rehashing that guidance, we have focused on strategies to operationalize those recommendations in our local context.<sup>33</sup>

#### ***Recommended Actions for Graduate Council***

1. Review the AAPM eligibility requirements for GSRs and assess the advantages and disadvantages of establishing university-wide employment training/onboarding for GSRs on par with requirements for TA eligibility.
2. Revisit 2024 Graduate Council [Guidance on Graduate Directed Studies Courses](#) and consider expanding guidance to provide additional support for departments and faculty mentors. For example, the Graduate Council could clarify the expectation that departments develop a program-specific syllabus template for directed research courses that aligns with program-level learning outcomes for the doctoral degree; and the expectation that individual faculty mentors develop more specific learning outcomes and a mentoring plan for each mentee. See Appendix 8 for an example of directed research syllabus templates from the Psychology department that are discipline-specific.
3. Collaborate with DGE to develop a plan to scale up mentee training that could be integrated into directed research courses or other areas of the doctoral curriculum, such as proseminars in the first year.
4. Collaborate with deans and department chairs to incentivize faculty to participate in mentor training by leveraging the tenure and promotion process, and collaborate with DGE to develop a plan to scale up and promote mentor training to faculty.
5. Consider whether mentor training should be incentivized for postdoctoral scholars, academic researchers, or others who mentor GSRs but are not employed as faculty. If

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<sup>33</sup> See [Interim Guidance for Faculty on the Delineation of Expectations for Academic Research versus Employment](#) (Aug 2023) and [Interim Guidance from CCGA on Directed Studies Courses](#) (Aug 2023) from CCGA and UCLA [Guidance on Graduate Directed Studies Courses](#).

so, consider how recommending such training aligns with collective bargaining agreements for employees in various non-faculty titles and provide guidance for departments on implementation.

### ***Recommended Actions for Degree Programs***

6. Develop program-specific goals for directed research courses that align with degree program goals, and adapt syllabus templates developed by TLC (in consultation with the Graduate Council) for program contexts.
7. Explore opportunities to weave mentee training into degree program requirements through directed research courses, proseminars, or other means.
8. Establish departmental incentives to encourage faculty to participate in mentor training.

### ***Recommended Actions for Principal Investigators and Faculty Mentors***

9. Develop mentoring plans for each advisee that distinguish employment expectations for GSRs from academic expectations for directed research coursework.
10. Engage in mentor training through DGE or another campus unit, such as Graduate Programs in Bioscience or the Center for Education Innovation and Learning in the Sciences.

### ***Recommended Actions for DGE and Campus Partners***

11. Supplement the modest bank of example syllabi for directed research courses curated by the [system-wide CCGA](#) with a repository of local syllabus templates, assessment plans, and rubrics developed in collaboration with TLC, Graduate Programs in Bioscience, and other campus partners. See Appendix 8 for samples from the Psychology department.
12. Expand DGE's existing [repository of mentorship agreements](#) that align with evidence-based frameworks, such as those developed by the nationally-recognized Center for the Improvement of Mentored Experiences in Research and currently employed by Graduate Programs in Bioscience.
13. Collaborate with the Graduate Council to develop a plan to scale up mentee training that could be integrated into directed research courses or other areas of the doctoral curriculum, such as proseminars in the first year.

## **Conclusion**

UCLA is well-positioned to implement a model that more clearly distinguishes between graduate students' academic development and their roles as employees, while preserving the strengths of its current training ecosystem. By aligning onboarding with student status, shifting employment-related training into appropriately compensated formats, and sustaining

discipline-based and elective professional development, the university can reduce redundancy, improve clarity, and better support graduate student success.

Effective implementation will depend on clear governance, strategic reallocation of existing resources, and phased rollout prioritizing units with the highest concentrations of GSR and ASE activity. With these conditions in place, UCLA can advance a model that is both operationally feasible and aligned with its academic mission.

## List of Appendices

[Appendix 1](#): Summary of Implementation Strategies & Glossary of Abbreviations

[Appendix 2](#): Fall 2021-Fall 2025 5-year Trend Analysis of ASE and GSR Hiring Trends

[Appendix 3](#): Overview of Foundations of Teaching and Professional Standards and Ethics Training Curriculum

[Appendix 4](#): Overview of Graduate Student Orientation - Online Curriculum

[Appendix 5](#): Summary of Other UC Approaches to TA Training

[Appendix 6](#): Sample departmental description of TA job duties including discipline-based training workshops

[Appendix 7](#): Syllabus for GRAD PD 496A: Introduction to Evidence-Based Undergraduate Teaching

[Appendix 8](#): Sample directed research syllabus templates that are discipline-specific

# UCLA MEMORANDUM

FACULTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
*College of Letters and Science*

A265 Murphy Hall  
Box 951571  
Los Angeles, California 90095

**To:** Megan McEvoy, Chair, Academic Senate, UCLA  
**Fr:** Erin Debenport, Chair, College Faculty Executive Committee  
**Date:** May 28, 2026  
**Re:** **Response to the White Paper Decoupling Graduate Student Employment from Doctoral Education Implementation of Graduate Education Task Force Recommendations**

The College Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) at UCLA appreciates the opportunity to comment on the White Paper *Decoupling Graduate Student Employment from Doctoral Education Implementation of Graduate Education Task Force Recommendations*. While the committee recognizes the need to rethink graduate education in light of the complex labor landscape and the effort required to address any shift, the FEC finds the recommendations lacking evidence and rushed. The paper reflects a muddled understanding of the complex and interconnected parts of graduate training, faculty workload, and departmental finances. As written, the recommendations appear to prioritize administrative convenience over educational integrity; moving forward with this model without a full accounting of its costs would invite many unintended consequences that would undermine the University's research and teaching mission.

### *Threats to Shared Governance and Departments*

First, the committee would like to comment on the grossly insufficient review time for this white paper. This was one of several high-stakes items recently sent to the FEC with an inadequate window of time for the thorough analysis these recommendations require. Shared governance is not a matter of simply informing faculty of changes; it requires that faculty remain the primary drivers of the educational mission. By treating departmental needs as secondary to administrative expediency, these recommendations signal a move to consolidate authority without any data, which is a direct erosion of the faculty's governing mandate.

The paper also fails to treat departments and other teaching-focused campus instructional units, that are heavily involved in TA training and mentoring, as equal partners in the design and implementation of graduate training. Any programmatic plan that centers administrative interests, without including a concrete plan for departmental partnership is destined to fail. This paper does not read as though departmental expertise was ever at the core of the committee's goal.

Furthermore, the FEC is alarmed by the prospect of centralizing discipline-specific training through the TLC. Pedagogy is not one size fits all; the strategies required for a 60-person English GE course are vastly different from those for a 600-person Biology course. Displacing the training to an administrative level doesn't just erode quality, it creates a framework for grievances. If a faculty member's disciplinary instructions conflict with a generic and centralized training, the conflict becomes grievable, further favoring expediency over educational integrity. A centralized model also overlooks the necessity of training in transdisciplinary instructional skills, such as training in writing pedagogy, which is essential to a TA's instructional effectiveness across many disciplines.

### *Financial Impacts and Unfunded Mandates*

While the FEC recognizes the helpfulness of centralizing certain parts of employee training, such as HR-related employment laws and regulations, we are deeply skeptical of the proposed centralization of pedagogical training through the TLC. We question the benefit this brings to individual departments. Without a clear financial accounting, there is a legitimate fear that departmental funds will be rerouted to the TLC, leaving departments without the resources to meet their own disciplinary needs.

The white paper is full of unfunded mandates and lacks any functional understanding of how graduate training, workload, and finances actually intersect. By failing to include an accounting (or projections) of the financial and time costs required for implementation, the paper shifts the administrative and economic burden without offering resources in return. For example, the paper admits (p.17) that training 1,000 new TAs annually will "necessitate increased staffing" for the TLC. Expanding a centralized administrative bureaucracy is the wrong approach. Maintaining the status quo by training new TAs directly within their home departments may likely be just as cost-effective as centralization, while ensuring the educational quality that only local oversight can provide. The administration has provided no evidence or financial analysis to justify such a sweeping change; proceeding without this baseline data is a major institutional risk. Departments do not merely augment training; they provide essential disciplinary expertise that the TLC is not equipped to replace.

The FEC views this proposed centralization as a threat to departments, particularly through potential rerouting of existing funds. There is a concern that the funds currently allocated for and sustaining successful departmental initiatives, such as the 495 pedagogy courses, will be redirected to the TLC to cover the costs of this centralization, leaving departments unable to ensure their specific pedagogical needs are met. The paper fails to acknowledge that these essential disciplinary courses are largely sustained by TAC funding. If this money is pulled, departments will be forced to maintain the same level of disciplinary rigor, while being stripped of the financial resources to do so.

Separating this training from local faculty oversight ignores the reality that TA preparation requires hands-on mentorship. By treating mentorship as optional within a centralized structure, many TAs will simply skip it. This approach overlooks the vital role that department-level preparation and ongoing faculty mentoring play in graduate student professionalization. Ensuring that graduate students develop into excellent instructors, as well as excellent scholars, gives them the flexibility and preparedness they need for a highly competitive and changing job market.

This fiscal oversight is particularly troublesome given the vastly different financial/economic realities across the College. The recommendations consist of a blanket approach, assuming that departments are all struggling with the same challenges or in the same financial situation. Without a data-driven model that accounts for these differences and the total cost of labor, these recommendations remain irresponsible and underdeveloped. Any further discussion must be preceded by a transparent report, including a proposed budget, breakdown of projected resources, and an assessment of current and scaled capacity.

### *Lack of Evidence, Data, and Assessment*

The white paper as written lacks the necessary detail and data required for introducing changes of this scale. It offers broad assertions without providing the substantial findings required to assess the instructional integrity and feasibility of the recommendations. The ideas shared fail to identify required resources, funding sources, or realistic timelines that would demonstrate how such a massive shift could actually be managed.

The white paper fails to recognize that TA training is not just a matter of immediate job preparedness; it is foundational to long-term professional development and overall instructional soundness. Research shows that opportunities for mentorship, feedback, and reflection on teaching practices are essential to graduate student professional development, as well as future success and marketability as university educators. To ensure the quality of undergraduate teaching across the campus, these opportunities should not be reserved solely for students who voluntarily participate in the elective teaching professional development programs opportunities on campus. We know the pressures that graduate students are under to focus on their research and scholarship, often to the detriment of their teaching.

While the white paper clearly states the importance of department and/or discipline specific professional development, it appears that departments would maintain the responsibility of that training without any mention of the corresponding resources required. The FEC was alarmed by the number of these unfunded mandates, whether in diverted financial resources for a centralized or the significant strain on faculty and teaching professor time. Historically, supportive funding at the department level has often become overly prescriptive; we are concerned that orientation funding will be used as a leverage point to force departments into standardized training models, further encroaching on faculty time.

The recommendations rely heavily on the Teaching and Learning Center without providing any data on its current capacity, funding, or the proven effectiveness of the cross-campus TA training they are currently delivering. From a logistical standpoint, the paper fails to explain how a mandatory, centralized onboarding for over 1,000 TAs could be completed in 8 hours during Week 0, especially when accounting for inevitable interruptions or emergency absences.

### *GSR Landscape*

By explicitly side-stepping Graduate Student Resources (GSRs), the paper ignores the one area where employment and education are arguably the most inextricably linked. This is a glaring omission. In avoiding the GSR topic, the paper misses any real opportunity for a comprehensive analysis or helpful recommendations on the “decoupling” it claims to address. Furthermore, the limited discussion that is provided regarding GSRs reflects a misunderstanding of the role.

The paper unnecessarily conflates GSR work with dissertation research. In practice there are distinct types of GSR experiences, one where a student is simply an employee performing a specific job (ex. data analysis) unrelated to their dissertation, and another where the research is the dissertation. By assuming the latter is universal, the report wrongly assumes that all GSRs can or should be mentored in a standardized way.

Additionally, GSR training is so diverse across and within departments that it would be impossible to imagine a centralized training program that would be worth the administrative cost. Even with a single research group, a student headed for industry requires different training than one headed for academia. GSR training should be left entirely to the mentor. The current system is not broken in a way that a top-down administrative mandate could fix. Faculty have successfully trained GSRs for their respective careers for decades; the suggestion that a centralized committee or the TLC could provide a better alternative or replacement is improbable.

Ultimately, by dodging the GSR topic, the paper fails to address the actual pedagogical issues at the heart of UCLA's research mission. It proposes an expansion of administrative authority without justification or a feasible solution to the existing challenges. There is no need for a mandate to fix a system where the current expertise of faculty is a feature, not a failure.

#### *Impact on Promotion and Tenure*

One member expressed concern about the potential impact on research and excellence. However, other members noted that mentorship in its many forms is meant to be considered for P&T, and important for many, particularly teaching instructors.

#### *Failure to Address*

The paper fails to solve actual problems at hand: supporting graduate students without them having to teach and teaching undergraduate students without over-reliance on graduate labor.

The concept that employment must be separated from education, only to recommend that departments re-incorporate such training into degree requirements, is legally and logically incoherent. This puts departments into a situation where they are held responsible for pedagogical outcomes while being stripped of the authority and resources to manage them. Also, if a student's degree progress is halted due to a pedagogical training that the university has classified as employee training, departments face accusations of Unfair Labor Practices and/or grievances. The paper acknowledges that such courses can no longer be conditions for employment yet fails to offer a solution to the problem it creates.

The FEC also questions the TLC-led onboarding that would include topics such as research ethics and transdisciplinary training in the essential skills associated with the teaching of writing. The report does not provide any justification for why an administrative body is better suited to these discipline-specific or transdisciplinary topics than faculty members.

The idea of a mandatory minimum of TA quarters for a doctoral degree is impractical. Teaching experience is not a universal need for all doctoral paths. Such a mandate could wreak havoc on

different departmental funding models. Some departments, such as Geography, carefully leverage a mix of TA and GSR funds to balance class sizes and support students based on available resources. Forcing a student who is 100% grant funded as a GSR to TA for three quarters would strip TA funding away from other students whose advisors don't have grants, in turn, harming some students in the process.

The Writing II subcommittee of the FEC raised some additional concerns related to transdisciplinary skills and teaching writing. First, TA preparation simply fails without direct faculty mentorship, yet the white paper treats this as optional. This means that many TAs will opt out entirely. The proposed set up bypasses the mentoring that is vital to graduate student professional development. Training our graduate students to be excellent instructors, as well as excellent scholars, increases their flexibility and preparedness for the shifting job market after completing their degrees. Second, TAs who teach stand-alone seminars, such as History 96W, English 4W, Comp. Lit. 4W, Cluster Seminars, and a range of summer Writing II courses, require highly individualized mentoring. Neither general campus onboarding, nor standard department training covers the unique transdisciplinary issues (e.g., the integration of writing instruction) in curriculum or course development.

The College FEC cannot endorse the recommendations as presented until more specific numbers, budgets, and coordination plans are provided. As with previous rushed items, any ideas or suggestions need to be engaged with in a more transparent and data-driven manner. The committee requests that any further discussion around such recommendations be done with more evidence, such as a proposed budget, projected resources, capacity (current and scaled) information, and implementation plans. Also, we recommend that another working group be tasked with researching the pedagogical models of training that are currently offered at UCLA.

As always, our membership appreciates the consultative process and welcomes the opportunity to participate in the discussion of important matters like this. You are welcome to contact us with questions.

The College Faculty Executive Committee

May 7, 2026

To: Megan McEvoy, Chair, Academic Senate

From: Dorota Dabrowska, Chair, Graduate Council

**Re: Decoupling Graduate Student Employment from Doctoral Education**

At its meeting on May 1, 2026, the Graduate Council discussed the *Decoupling Graduate Student Employment from Doctoral Education* white paper. Members offer the following for consideration.

While members generally supported the mandatory paid training model, some members had concerns about how the training would be funded. Members queried whether central resources would cover the mandatory training and if academic programs will be reimbursed if the compensation came from the program's funds.

While there were some concerns about adding the mandatory training hours to the 220 hours for a 50% appointment, some members were also concerned about adding the mandatory training hours on top of the teaching assistant's 50% appointment. Several members noted that it may be beneficial to make the mandatory training available for students to complete prior to starting the first teaching assistant appointment.

In addition to the mandatory training, members and a student representative stressed the importance of discipline-specific training. Some members recommended exploring opportunities for field and area-specific training within the mandatory training framework, as well as department-specific discipline training. It was noted that teaching assistant opportunities are not necessarily limited to the student's home department. Students appointed as teaching assistants outside their home department may have different training needs.

In regards to the minimum and maximum teaching requirements, some members commented that the minimum requirements should be set by the academic programs. Some members noted that there may not be enough teaching opportunities for all doctoral students within some professional schools. It would be difficult for some programs to have a minimum requirement without exploring pathways to increase teaching opportunities for students.

Some members queried how the training would affect students appointed as teaching assistants in self-supporting degree programs. Members also requested clarification on how mandatory training will be funded for teaching assistants employed by self-supporting degree programs.

Some members noted that the white paper focused on teaching assistants and would like to see more details specific to graduate student researchers, particularly regarding the mentee and mentor roles. A student representative suggested that proponents obtain feedback from graduate students regarding the potential training models.

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We appreciate the opportunity to express our views on this matter. The Graduate Council looks forward to receiving any proposals for changes to graduate student employment training. Any changes to the campuswide TA training require the Council's approval. If you have any questions, please contact us via Graduate Council Analyst, Emily Le, at [ele@senate.ucla.edu](mailto:ele@senate.ucla.edu).

To: Megan McEvoy, Chair, UCLA Academic Senate

From: Raphael Rouquier, Chair, Committee on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Date: May 28, 2026

**Re: White Paper: Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education**

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At its meeting on May 5, 2026, the Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (CODEI) discussed the white paper on Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education. Members are in favor of efforts to decouple graduate student employment from doctoral education and found the framework laid out in the white paper promising. Members shared the following additional feedback for consideration.

- Members agreed with the white paper's assertion that discipline-based pedagogical courses be considered a component of doctoral education and that departments should have the main responsibility for this training.
- Members agreed that it is important for faculty to receive training on mentorship, and that a system of incentives and rewards would be most effective. In recent years, many faculty have struggled to navigate their role as mentors in the context of employment and graduate education. Incoming department chairs would benefit from this training in particular.
- In addition, members suggested that the university-wide graduate student training include discussion on the role of faculty mentorship and how effective faculty mentorship might differ from employer-employee supervision relationship. Members agreed there is often an assumption that graduate students, like faculty, should be familiar with effective mentorship practices already when they often are not.
- Members suggested that the university consider clarifying guidelines on how to handle a leave of absences for a graduate student in a way that clearly separates the employment and academic progress concerns.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [rouquier@math.ucla.edu](mailto:rouquier@math.ucla.edu) or via the Committee analyst, Tara Hottman, at [thottman@senate.ucla.edu](mailto:thottman@senate.ucla.edu).

cc: Kathy Bawn, Immediate Past Chair, UCLA Academic Senate  
April de Stefano, Executive Director, UCLA Academic Senate  
Tim Groeling, Vice Chair, UCLA Academic Senate  
Tara Hottman, Senior Policy Analyst, UCLA Academic Senate

May 22, 2026

To: Megan McEvoy  
Chair, Academic Senate

From: Richard Desjardins  
Chair, Council on Planning and Budget

**Re: White Paper: Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education**

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At its meeting on May 4, 2026, the Council on Planning and Budget (CPB) discussed the white paper on Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education. Members offered the following comments.

CPB members noted that the white paper does not clearly explain its purpose or how the revised training structure will support graduate students in their teaching and research roles. Members also questioned whether the reduced-hour model provides sufficient preparation and expressed concern that costs may shift to departments without clear justification. Members also observed expectations for TAs are described in greater detail than those for GSRs, and that the paper does not yet present a coherent or fair approach to training across roles. Members suggested that additional clarity and concrete recommendations would be needed to ensure consistent implementation across departments.

Several members noted that the white paper alludes to broader financial pressures but does not clearly address how graduate education and employment will be sustainably funded. Members emphasized that rising labor costs can no longer be absorbed by PIs and that a clear long-term funding strategy is essential to maintaining a high-quality graduate education system.

Finally, members warned that the proposed changes may redirect funding away from the Teaching and Learning Center toward departments offering 495 courses and stressed the importance of understanding these consequences before proceeding.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [desjardins@ucla.edu](mailto:desjardins@ucla.edu), or via the Council's analyst, Elizabeth Feller, at [efeller@senate.ucla.edu](mailto:efeller@senate.ucla.edu).

cc: Kathleen Bawn, Immediate Past Chair, Academic Senate  
Tim Groeling, Vice Chair/Chair Elect, Academic Senate  
April de Stefano, Executive Director, Academic Senate  
Elizabeth Feller, Associate Director, Academic Senate  
Members of the Council on Planning and Budget

May 21, 2026

To: Megan McEvoy  
Chair, Academic Senate

From: Dimitri Shlyakhtenko  
Chair, Council on Research

**Re: White Paper: Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education**

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At its meeting on May 6, 2026, the Council on Research (COR) discussed the white paper in Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education.

COR members noted that several elements of the proposal would require additional instructional or supervisory resources, without clarity on how such support would be funded. Some members noted that there was no representation from laboratory sciences on the working group. They also expressed concern about the elimination of TA consultant roles, observing that this would remove a specialized pedagogical resource rather than supplement it. Similarly, members emphasized that the revisions appear to create an unfunded mandate that would ultimately fall on departments. They also raised questions about the feasibility of the minimum 50% TA appointment requirement and its uneven impact across disciplines.

Several members recommended that the policy adopt a more holistic approach to graduate student labor, rather than addressing GSRs, TAs, and other roles in isolation. They noted that distinctions between teaching, learning, and work are often difficult to draw, particularly in performance-based fields, and that changes to TAships could affect union dues and representation.

Finally, members reiterated concerns about the potential loss of discipline-specific training. They emphasized that TAships serve multiple purposes across departments and that any policy revision should reflect the broader realities of graduate student life at UCLA, not solely labor-relations considerations.

If you have any questions for us, please do not hesitate to contact me at [shlyakht@ipam.ucla.edu](mailto:shlyakht@ipam.ucla.edu) or via the Council's analyst, Elizabeth Feller, at [efeller@senate.ucla.edu](mailto:efeller@senate.ucla.edu).

cc: Kathleen Bawn, Immediate Past Chair, Academic Senate  
Tim Groeling, Vice Chair/Chair Elect, Academic Senate  
April de Stefano, Executive Director, Academic Senate  
Elizabeth Feller, Associate Director, Academic Senate  
Members of the Council on Research



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April 21, 2026

To: Megan McEvoy, Chair, UCLA Academic Senate

From: Jeff Maloy, Undergraduate Council Chair

**Re: White Paper on Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education**

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At its meeting on April 17, 2026, the Undergraduate Council reviewed the Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education White Paper.

Some members supported the recommendation to replace the current structure of 495 pedagogy courses with mandatory paid training for first-time TAs in order to minimize redundancy and clarify the distinctions between employment-related responsibilities and academic coursework. However, members expressed concern with the amount of training this shift would leave graduate student TAs with prior to working with undergraduate students – moving from 20-30 hours of training in the current model to ~8 hours of required training in this new model.

While agreeing with the broad rationale to decouple academic training from employment, however, several members expressed concerns about centralization at the expense of discipline-specific pedagogy. Such a shift represents a significant transition of instructional responsibility and pedagogical expertise from departments to the Teaching and Learning Center (TLC). Members pointed out a divergence in the white paper, between “affirm[ing] the importance of discipline-based pedagogical development as a core component of doctoral education” (p. 4) and the recommendation that “discipline-specific pedagogy training [...] courses should no longer be required as conditions for employment as a TA” (p. 22). In the absence of required courses, it will be difficult or impossible to ensure that TAs will receive any disciplinary specificity in their pedagogical development. Some members suggested encouraging departments to require 496 practicum courses in graduate curricula to ensure a specialized focus on teaching, pedagogy, and professional practice. Another suggestion is to reallocate resources currently dedicated to the Teaching Assistant Consultant program toward hiring 50% TAs or GSRs within TLC, in order to provide School- or division-level pedagogical support and thus retain some measure of localized expertise while streamlining training.

More broadly, the Undergraduate Council notes that it is misguided to rush towards implementing the recommendations without a deeper analysis of their impacts on undergraduate instruction. The white paper does not fully consider the effects of centralized strategies in the larger context of increasing undergraduate enrollment and shrinking graduate cohorts, beyond the statement that fewer graduate admissions “may bring a slight drop in the number of new TAs needing to be trained in future years” (p. 11). Reduced graduate admissions are already affecting many departments’ ability to offer large GE courses with discussion sections—a shift whose effects will be felt more urgently in the years to come. The University must grapple more deeply and comprehensively with the scale and implications of this change for undergraduate education.

Thank you for the opportunity to opine. With any questions, please contact the Undergraduate Council Analyst.

cc: Kathleen Bawn, Immediate Past Chair, Academic Senate  
April de Stefano, Executive Director, Academic Senate  
Tim Groeling, Vice Chair/Chair Elect, Academic Senate  
Julia Nelsen, Principal Policy Analyst, Undergraduate Council

May 20, 2026

**To:** UCLA Academic Senate

**From:** Catherine Crespi, Chair, Faculty Executive Committee

**Re:** White Paper: Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education

The Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) of the Fielding School of Public Health discussed the white paper on Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education at its May 4, 2026 meeting and solicited additional input during departmental meetings. We offer the following feedback.

The FEC supports the goal of clarifying the distinction between graduate students' roles as learners and as employees and recognizes the need to adapt to evolving labor conditions. However, members expressed significant concerns regarding feasibility, implementation, and alignment with the realities of graduate training.

The FEC supports replacing the 495 pedagogy course with a standardized, mandatory TA training. A one-time, 8-hour training during a student's graduate career was viewed as reasonable and could improve consistency and quality across programs. Members also support a mandatory onboarding program for graduate students covering academic integrity, ethics, and related topics, and introducing students to UCLA's community, values, and resources.

At the same time, several concerns were raised. It remains unclear how TA training and onboarding will be funded, particularly if costs fall on departments. In addition, the interaction with the 50% TA appointment requirement raises concerns about student workload and potential overcommitment.

The proposal to decouple Graduate Student Researcher (GSR) roles from doctoral education was viewed as insufficiently developed. In many cases, GSR work is closely aligned with dissertation research, making separation impractical. GSR roles should not be treated as purely transactional employment. Relatedly, limiting GSR involvement in administrative tasks was seen as unrealistic and detrimental to the education of the students, as such activities are often integral to research and professional development.

Members also expressed concern about the increased administrative burden that could accompany new rules for decoupling GSR roles from doctoral education, including additional bureaucracy, compliance tracking, and faculty workload. The FEC supports clearer expectations for directed research, including articulation of learning objectives and mentoring structures, but cautions against overly rigid requirements. Faculty emphasized the importance of flexibility and noted that responsibility for appropriate mentoring rests with faculty.

In summary, the FEC supports improved and compensated TA training as well as formal graduate student onboarding, but raises concerns about the feasibility of decoupling GSR roles from

academic training. The committee emphasizes the need for flexibility across disciplines and requests greater clarity regarding budget, implementation, and administrative impact. Continued faculty engagement will be essential to ensure that any changes are practical and aligned with the goals of graduate education.

To: Megan McEvoy, Chair, Academic Senate

From: Deborah Nadoolman Landis, Chair, 2025–26 Faculty Executive Committee

Date: May 27, 2026

Re: Request for Senate Consultation: Decoupling Graduate Student Employment from Doctoral Education

Dear Chair McEvoy,

At its May 13, 2026, meeting, the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) reviewed and discussed the request for Senate consultation. We appreciate the opportunity to provide input on the proposal titled “Decoupling Graduate Student Employment from Doctoral Education.”

Our faculty responses expressed strong concern that the proposed decoupling of graduate student support from doctoral education would significantly weaken UCLA’s ability to recruit and retain top PhD candidates, diminish the integration of research and teaching, and undermine the quality of undergraduate education. We would like to emphasize that doctoral students are essential to the university’s academic mission, contributing to research, instruction, mentorship, and institutional competitiveness. We are concerned that this proposal could have long-term negative consequences for departments across the humanities and arts.

### **Statements on Decoupling Graduate Student Employment from Doctoral Education**

#### **From Professor Jeff Burke, Chair of the Department of Theater**

1. As with the last report we reviewed, this document focuses exclusively on doctoral education—as its title indicates—to the apparent exclusion of the MFA, M.Arch., and other graduate degrees. Given previous comments to the task force on this issue, the omission appears purposeful. **Could we request clarification regarding how this document applies to other graduate degrees, particularly the MFA?** Notably, TFT’s ASE headcount is included in Figure 3, but that number includes many MFA TA appointments.
2. For implementation-focused recommendations that explicitly outline next steps for doctoral programs (e.g., “Considerations for Exploring Minimum and Maximum Teaching Experience Thresholds”), **how should these recommendations be interpreted for other graduate degrees?** The lack of clarity makes it difficult for our department to plan and respond. The document’s focus on 495 courses as the primary conflation of employment and education also seems oversimplified.

## **Elevating the Quality and Sustainability of Undergraduate Education**

1. In Section 3's discussion of educational technology, the term "AI" is used—largely without definition. Given the broad and evolving range of capabilities, as well as the differing impacts across disciplines, greater definitional clarity seems important in guiding documents of this kind.
2. The discussion of AI appears to have displaced conversation about other critical technology needs and long-standing infrastructure gaps. These challenges will make it difficult to implement the recommendations consistently and in discipline-specific ways across campus. A broader discussion of the complete "technology stack" envisioned for the future of undergraduate education—and its relationship to faculty research and graduate education—is essential.

### **From Professor Denise Mann**

1. This proposal would create a series of cascading issues for doctoral programs such as Cinema and Media Studies (CMS). Due to ongoing budgetary reductions, the CMS doctoral program is already facing a major financial crisis because we cannot offer financial packages comparable to those at other R1 universities. As a result, we are losing top candidates to peer institutions. We rely heavily on TA appointments as part of the five-year financial packages offered to doctoral students. In addition, teaching discussion sections provides essential professional training for future faculty careers.
2. The white paper appears to respond directly to the current collective bargaining agreement, which "may impact appointment structures, cost assumptions, and flexibility of staffing models." However, decoupling TA appointments from degree programs would, in my view, do greater harm to the department's long-term viability. If we are unable to recruit four to six qualified doctoral candidates each year, we will no longer be able to sustain the range of seminars we currently offer, damaging both our reputation and the program's future stability.
3. The white paper also focuses on the quality and management of the 495 training program, arguing that these aspects adversely affect undergraduate education. In CMS, doctoral candidates assigned to teach have typically completed multiple seminars and served as TAs in large undergraduate lecture courses. On occasion, MA students are hired as TAs because it is the only form of financial support available to them. While they may have less experience than doctoral students, they are encouraged to seek guidance from both PhD students and Senate faculty. In our experience, the 495 courses taught under faculty supervision function effectively when led by seasoned doctoral candidates.
4. While I am less qualified to address the MFA areas discussed by Professor Burke, a strong argument can also be made that graduate students teaching hands-on production sections are especially well-suited to support undergraduate production courses because of their advanced training and professional experience.
5. The "Relevant Task Force Recommendations" report (p. 4) concludes by emphasizing the need to maintain the quality of undergraduate education while reducing structural reliance on doctoral student instructional employment.

6. My concern, however, is that the central issue motivating this proposal is the impact of the new TA contracts across campus, which are forcing departments to hire fewer TAs. In my view, the solution is not to target doctoral students, who represent the next generation of Senate faculty and who depend on these positions for both financial support and professional development.
7. I do agree with the proposal's recommendation that UCLA should hire more professional professors to teach some undergraduate courses. The accompanying chart indicates that UCLA employs approximately 30 such faculty members, whereas comparable campuses employ more than 100.

Sincerely,



Deborah Nadoolman Landis  
Chair, 2025–26 Faculty Executive Committee  
UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television



**Response to the White Papers “Decoupling Graduate Student Employment from Doctoral Education: Implementation of Graduate Education Task Force Recommendations” and “Elevating the Quality & Sustainability of Undergraduate Education: Implementation of Graduate Education Task Force Recommendations”**

Submitted by the SE&IS FEC  
May 28, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to reply to these white papers. In the opinion of the SEIS FEC, these are substantial proposals that recast fundamental elements of education at UCLA. We are thus dismayed at the extremely brief timeframe to compose our response.

Our first and most fundamental concern is procedural, and it bears directly on the legitimacy of everything that follows in both papers. The Graduate Education Implementation Task Force, which issued the recommendations these white papers translate into operational frameworks, appears to have been composed entirely of administrators acting solely in administrative capacity.

Under the principles of shared governance for this university, decisions bearing on curriculum, degree requirements, and conditions of instruction fall within the Senate's primary sphere of authority. The appropriate posture for the administration, when it identifies fiscal or operational pressures affecting those areas, is to bring those concerns to the Senate for shared deliberation--not to constitute a task force, generate recommendations, move expeditiously to implementation working groups, and present the resulting frameworks to faculty bodies on a compressed timeline for comment.

The proposed solutions in both papers have a consistent direction: functions currently distributed across departments and governed by faculty are to be standardized, centralized, or placed under administrative units such as APB, DTS, and the TLC. Whatever the merits of individual recommendations, this pattern warrants scrutiny. The administration has, in effect, contributed to constraints affecting the delivery of instructional programs and proposed solutions that expand administrative authority. The Senate should examine that pattern before engaging the substance of any specific proposal.

Had faculty members been fully involved in formulating the Task Force's recommendations, they likely would have explained that the notion of “decoupling graduate teaching from doctoral employment” is absurd and unworkable. Teaching and research are deeply intertwined undertakings; a scholar's research informs her teaching and vice versa. This is the premise of an R1 university: that students benefit when their instruction is provided by teachers who are at the



forefront of research in their fields.<sup>1</sup> Thus the recommendation to “decouple” graduate employment from undergraduate or graduate education is incoherent on its face and suggests a deep misunderstanding of scholarly work.

Intellectually, teaching is irrevocably connected with research. Pragmatically, too, the two are (and should be) intertwined. First, academic employment for Ph.D. graduates depends a great deal on their teaching experience. Without a demonstrable, discipline-specific, and substantial track record of teaching assistantships, our Ph.D. students will be deeply disadvantaged in an already difficult academic job market. Graduate students are, of course, aware of this relationship. Without the ability to guarantee and allocate TAs, departments are likely to struggle to attract and retain the best graduate students. This, in turn, lowers departments’ reputation and prestige, which of course in aggregate reflects on the entire university.

## Learning Assistants

[Learning Assistants](#) (LAs) are undergraduate students who, with the assistance of the Teaching and Learning Center, receive course credit to serve as unpaid “peer learning collaborators” in undergraduate classes. The LA program was conceived and is billed as a learning experience for LAs. These undergraduate students are explicitly prohibited from providing instruction or replacing TA labor—and rightly so, since they have neither the experience nor the education to instruct their fellow undergraduate students. Thus any suggestion that LAs might amplify TA labor is inconsistent with the stated purpose of the LA program and potentially in violation of the ASE CBA. The white paper avoids recommending outright that LAs replace TA labor, but the intention is clear. Why otherwise mention the program in this context?

## Artificial Intelligence

Scholarship on the role and efficacy of artificial intelligence in student learning is still emerging.<sup>2</sup> The outlook for AI in education is ambiguous at best, but one thing is clear: the use

<sup>1</sup> For historical background, see Harold Perkin, “History of Universities,” in *International Handbook of Higher Education*, ed. James J. F. Forest and Philip G. Altbach (Springer Netherlands, 2007), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-4012-2\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-4012-2_10).

<sup>2</sup> This literature includes Joshua Weidlich et al., “Teacher, Peer, or AI? Comparing Effects of Feedback Sources in Higher Education,” *Computers and Education Open* 9 (December 2025): 100300, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.caeo.2025.100300>; Mark Steyvers et al., “What Large Language Models Know and What People Think They Know,” *Nature Machine Intelligence* 7, no. 2 (2025): 221–31, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s42256-024-00976-7>; J. Weidlich et al., “ChatGPT in Education: An Effect in Search of a Cause,” *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* 41, no. 5 (2025): e70105, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcal.70105>; Taryn Eames et al., “Computer-Assisted Learning in the Real World: How Khan Academy Influences Student Math Learning,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 123, no. 1 (2026): e2507708123, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2507708123>; Hamsa Bastani et al., “Generative AI without Guardrails Can Harm Learning: Evidence from High School Mathematics,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 122, no. 26 (2025): e2422633122, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2422633122>; Conrad Borchers and Tianze Shou, “Can Large Language Models Match Tutoring System Adaptivity? A Benchmarking Study,” arXiv:2504.05570, preprint, arXiv, April 7, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2504.05570>.



of AI in any educational capacity is a hugely consequential decision, and one with the potential to completely reshape students’ ability to learn and faculty’s ability to reach them. Individual departments or faculty members may choose to use AI in their research and teaching, in accordance with guidelines devised by the faculty-led working group on AI. It is not the administration’s role to recommend the use of these tools in education or research, and emphatically not as a substitute for paying for TA labor. We reject this suggestion out of hand as detrimental to the very heart of what UCLA offers to its students.

We note, also, that measures like ensuring “equitable access to AI” and “AI literacy” are not widely agreed-upon, commonsense imperatives but hugely controversial efforts to cast LLMs as a neutral or even universally beneficial technology. It’s not clear, for example, that the best way to ensure technological equity is to supply every student with a tool whose biases are deep and well-recognized.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, one might ask if the best approach to “AI literacy” is to encourage the use of a tool whose effects on cognition are extensively documented and whose interior workings are opaque by design.<sup>4</sup>

### Teaching and Learning Center (TLC)

Throughout both white papers, the TLC is cited as the campus’s experts on education. The papers suggest that UCLA should follow the TLC’s recommendations for redistributing academic labor, subscribe its doctoral students to TLC’s centralized control of pedagogical training, and assure us that, according to the TLC, instructional quality will be maintained. This is not the TLC’s job to determine. There are significant shortcomings of this approach. The TLC reports directly to campus administration. The faculty do not. We are dismayed at what we view as a move toward positioning TLC staff as our ‘antagonists’ in the attempt to preserve the strength of teaching at UCLA.

While we respect the integrity and expertise of our colleagues within the TLC, we reject these measures to increase this administrative unit’s control over education at UCLA. Members of the faculty depend on TLC staff as collaborators and consultants. TLC staff members are not, however, qualified or authorized to make consequential decisions about curriculum. Fortunately, UCLA boasts one of the world’s top Education departments, should the administration wish to benefit from expertise in that domain.

The white paper emphasizes the importance of “evidence-based instruction” practices in university teaching. We agree. Fortunately, faculty are well-trained at gathering, weighing, and analyzing evidence. One of the faculty’s particular strong suits is identifying the corporate

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<sup>3</sup> Yufei Guo et al., “Bias in Large Language Models: Origin, Evaluation, and Mitigation,” preprint, arXiv, November 2024, <https://doi.org/arXiv:2411.10915v1>.

<sup>4</sup> Again, this literature is vast and growing, but examples include Jenna Burrell, “How the Machine ‘Thinks’: Understanding Opacity in Machine Learning Algorithms,” *Big Data & Society* 3, no. 1 (2016): 2053951715622512, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951715622512>; Nataliya Kosmyna et al., “Your Brain on ChatGPT: Accumulation of Cognitive Debt When Using an AI Assistant for Essay Writing Task,” arXiv:2506.08872, preprint, arXiv, December 31, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2506.08872>.



capture of public educational institutions and the incursion of market-based priorities into educational infrastructure.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, these factors are part of the reason that decisions about curriculum rest with the faculty rather than with staff: we are demonstrably able to meet reflex- and market-driven teaching initiatives with our own priorities of disciplinary rigor and long-term educational integrity. Moreover, as experts in our own disciplines, we bring to our teaching a deep understanding of the different—often drastically different—teaching methods demanded by our various fields.

### Allocation of Teaching Assistants

“Elevating the Quality and Sustainability..” claims that lecture courses’ “secondary section structure has evolved incrementally over time, with section size, meeting duration, and meeting frequency sometimes reflecting pedagogical considerations and at other times reflecting available TA resources rather than intentional curricular design” (10). This is a troubling allegation to cast without supporting evidence. We contend that the reason that student:TA ratios and staffing mechanisms differ across disciplines and departments is that different disciplines have different priorities and teaching models. Teaching assistants are not modules that can be snapped in and out of different disciplines, but highly trained, carefully mentored disciplinary experts who are becoming field-leading scholar-teachers in their own right. Centralized control over the allocation of teaching assistants threatens departments’ ability to respond to the needs and abilities of their student populations.

The white paper also recommends the collection of metrics about TA allocations: it suggests a “structured process using common criteria” in order “to support consistency across units within a division or school” (14). We view the collection of these metrics as a step toward the algorithmic apportionment of TA labor, a possibility we reject. Moreover, within the Information Studies discipline, UCLA is fortunate to boast experts on how the collection of even statistically valid metrics can distort our understanding of reality and skew our priorities.<sup>6</sup> This is particularly true in cases in which reality is subtle, case-dependent, situational, highly contested, and likely to fluctuate. We do not, of course, reject data out of hand, but we understand the critical importance of maintaining local control over the collection, conception, and use of metrics. We therefore recommend against this ill-conceived effort to collect and centralize teaching data across the university.

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<sup>5</sup> Luke Herrine, *The Neoliberalization of Higher Education: Changes in State Funding and Governance Throughout the 20th Century* (The Roosevelt Institute, September 30, 2020), <https://rooseveltinstitute.org/publications/the-neoliberalization-of-higher-education/>; Ben Williamson, “Big EdTech,” *Learning, Media and Technology* 47, no. 2 (2022): 157–62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2022.2063888>.

<sup>6</sup> For an introduction to this vast and robust literature, see Bernard J. Jansen et al., “The Illusion of Data Validity: Why Numbers about People Are Likely Wrong,” *Data and Information Management* 6, no. 4 (2022): 100020, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dim.2022.100020>.



## Teaching Professors

Recommendation 1.2 of “Elevating the Quality and Sustainability...”, “Expand Strategic Use of Teaching Professors,” suggests the more widespread “strategic deployment” of faculty in the Teaching Professors professional series (16). Teaching professors at UCLA are talented, highly trained professionals, and we are fortunate to benefit from their presence within the Faculty Senate and at UCLA. However, the Teaching Professor series represents a shift from UCLA’s historical conception of professors as scholar-teachers; that’s why Teaching Professors have their own professional series.<sup>7</sup> We therefore observe that increasing the ranks of teaching professors is likely to change the substance and composition of faculty labor at UCLA, and even the nature of UCLA as an institution. This, therefore, is a conversation that the larger Faculty Senate must have among itself. It is not sufficient for “senior leadership” to “examine the rationale other UC campuses have used to expand this series in order to identify best practices and incorporate lessons learned into a UCLA strategy” (16).

## Instructional Technology

In both white papers, instructional technology is treated as an administrative component of university infrastructure, akin to BruinBuy or PeopleAdmin. Faculty understand, however, that “course delivery” technology is enormously consequential for our ability to teach as our disciplines, expertise, and principles demand. In our view, the campus is long overdue for a discussion about faculty control over the purchase and deployment of educational technology. We have already witnessed how decisions in which we have had no hand have changed the nature of teaching at UCLA; the recent Canvas outage is just one example of how IT decisions can erode faculty control over methods of course delivery.

We are currently witnessing—but not determining—the implementation of technologies that are deeply consequential for our ability to teach. For example, future upgrades to Canvas may include an AI “research assistant” that offers to summarize course materials.<sup>8</sup> Some faculty members may find such a product helpful, but for faculty members in other disciplines, this tool directly threatens the ability to engage students in the way their disciplines’ principles require. It should not be the Campus IT department or other administrative units’ role to introduce or decline to introduce these tools, as recommendation 3.1.3 (“Ensure All UCLA Students Have Equitable Access to AI Tools and Opportunities to Develop Baseline Proficiency in Educational Contexts,” 29) suggests. As a 2025 AAUP report concludes, “faculty members are best positioned to understand and improve teaching and learning conditions, including the development and implementation of institutional policies around educational technology.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Perkin, “History of Universities.”

<sup>8</sup> “Introducing IgniteAI,” Instructure, accessed May 22, 2026, <https://www.instructure.com/en-au/resources/webinars/introducing-igniteai>.

<sup>9</sup> AAUP Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence and Academic Professions, *Artificial Intelligence and Academic Professions* (American Association of University Professors, 2025), <https://www.aaup.org/reports-publications/aaup-policies-reports/topical-reports/artificial-intelligence-and-academic>.



Thank you again for the opportunity to share these comments.

*For questions and/or additional information, please contact:*

Teresa L. McCarty, 2025-2026 SE&IS Chair

Distinguished Professor and G.F. Kneller Chair in Education and Anthropology

Teresa.McCarty@ucla.edu

May 28, 2026

To: Megan McEvoy, Chair, Academic Senate

From: Elizabeth Rose Mayeda, Chair, Faculty Welfare Committee

Re: **White Paper: Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education**

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At its meeting on May 5, 2026, the Faculty Welfare Committee (FWC) reviewed the Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education White Paper and offers the following comments.

### **General Concerns**

The FWC views the direction outlined in this White Paper with significant concern. A central theme is the implicit move to reduce the number of graduate students as a strategy to address rising labor costs. While such reductions may offer short-term financial relief, they risk undermining the core pillars of UCLA's identity as an R1 institution: the integration of research, teaching, and doctoral training.

### **Role of Doctoral Students in the Academic Mission**

Doctoral students are essential contributors to the university's academic system. Graduate Student Researchers (GSRs) and Teaching Assistants (TAs) directly support both faculty research and undergraduate education. Substantial reduction in their numbers would shift the institutional balance, potentially weakening the research mission and altering what it means to be faculty at UCLA. The FWC urges the administration to carefully weigh these long-term consequences against any projected near-term savings.

### **Doctoral Student Employment and Training**

The dual role of doctoral students as both learners and employees warrants particular attention. Doctoral students are central to faculty research programs, and it is especially challenging to define the boundary between academic training and employment. The proposed procedures for governing that boundary are well-intentioned – designed to protect students from exploitation – but in practice, they can be difficult to apply in ways that reflect the deeply integrated nature of research training. The FWC supports protecting doctoral students while advocating for frameworks that are flexible enough to accommodate the realities of research mentorship without imposing undue administrative burden on faculty. An additional challenge is that PIs face increasing pressure to fund GSRs while sustaining their research programs. This burden calls for greater institutional support. In addition, as noted in the White Paper, strengthening TA training programs should also be a priority, not only to improve instruction and for the professional development of doctoral students themselves.

### **Recommendations**

The FWC offers the following recommendations:

- Avoid across-the-board reductions in doctoral student enrollment as a primary cost-control strategy, given the long-term risks to research capacity and institutional identity.
- Develop a more balanced funding model for GSRs that reduces reliance on individual PIs and incorporates meaningful institutional support.
- Invest in robust TA training programs, recognizing their importance for both educational quality and graduate student professional development.

- Establish clear mechanisms to evaluate and monitor any new changes to graduate student employment and doctoral education, ensuring transparency, accountability, and the ability to adjust based on evidence.

### **Conclusion**

The FWC urges the university to sustain its commitment to research and doctoral training as a defining institutional priority. Cost-containment strategies must be pursued in ways that preserve, rather than erode, that foundation.

Thank you for the opportunity to opine. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [mayeda@g.ucla.edu](mailto:mayeda@g.ucla.edu) or the Committee analyst, Renee Rouzan-Kay, at [rrouzankay@senate.ucla.edu](mailto:rrouzankay@senate.ucla.edu).

CC: Tim Groeling, Vice Chair/Chair-Elect, Academic Senate  
Kathleen Bawn, Immediate Past Chair, Academic Senate  
April de Stefano, Executive Director, Academic Senate  
Renee Rouzan-Kay, Senior Policy Analyst, Academic Senate  
Members of the Faculty Welfare Committee

**DATE:** May 28, 2026

**TO:** Megan McEvoy, Chair, UCLA Academic Senate

**RE:** White Paper: Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education

The Faculty Executive Committee for the Luskin School of Public Affairs wishes to provide the following comments regarding the proposed White Paper: Graduate Student Employment and Doctoral Education.

The Faculty Executive Committee of the Luskin School of Public Affairs has reviewed the white paper on “Decoupling Graduate Student Employment from Doctoral Education,” I remain opposed to the proposed framework and have significant concerns about both its feasibility and its potential impact on graduate education at UCLA. The proposal represents an extraordinarily large institutional change that would fundamentally restructure long-standing systems for TA preparation, mentorship, instructional staffing, and doctoral training across the university. I do not believe the proposal adequately accounts for the operational, financial, and educational consequences of such a transition.

My concerns are several.

First, the proposal creates substantial labor and compliance risk. Many components—including paid orientations, training requirements, workload expectations, and appointment structures—would require ongoing coordination with UAW 4811 and UC labor offices. Given the recently ratified CBA and unresolved implementation questions, this proposal risks creating significant administrative instability and grievance exposure.

Second, the framework depends on new infrastructure and compliance systems that do not currently exist. The proposed onboarding, tracking, and enforcement mechanisms would require major investments in staffing, technology, and oversight at a time when many units are already resource constrained.

Third, I am concerned that the proposal prioritizes administrative separation over educational quality. Existing pedagogy courses and mentoring structures, while imperfect, provide discipline-specific preparation and sustained developmental support for graduate students. Compressing or relocating these experiences into centralized training models risks weakening the rigor, depth, and mentorship that are central to doctoral education.

Finally, the financial assumptions underlying this proposal remain unclear. The paper repeatedly references reallocating existing resources, but it is difficult to see how UCLA can absorb the added costs

of compensated training, expanded staffing, compliance systems, and transition support without reducing the quality or availability of current programming.

For these reasons, I do not support moving forward with this proposal in its current form. I believe UCLA should instead focus on targeted improvements to existing systems rather than pursuing a sweeping restructuring that introduces substantial financial, operational, and educational risks.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "CARLOS SANTOS". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Carlos E. Santos, Ph.D. (he/él/ele)  
Associate Professor of Social Welfare  
Chair, Faculty Executive Committee (2025-2026)  
Luskin School of Public Affairs, UCLA