

6/16/08 DD

Excerpted from Graduate Council minutes, especially April 17, 2008  
For Continued Discussion by the Graduate Council

## **Graduate-level Academic Culture**

### **The Graduate Council California State University, Stanislaus**

#### **WASC Standards-Graduate Academic Culture**

The Graduate Council reviewed the WASC Standards, Criteria for Review, and Guidelines, specifically 2.2b, related to a graduate academic culture: *"Institutions offering graduate-level programs employ at least one full-time faculty member for each graduate program offered and demonstrate sufficient resources and structures to sustain these programs and create a graduate-level academic culture."*

The following are questions related to a graduate-level academic culture and the responses by the Graduate Council.

#### **1. What is our definition of a graduate-level academic culture?**

Graduate-level academic culture is defined by the Graduate School Mission Statement and Student Learning Goals. "The Graduate School is committed to the development of scholarly leaders through outstanding graduate and post-baccalaureate programs that require students to demonstrate critical thinking and analysis, the ability to integrate theory and practice, and creativity in scholarly endeavors. Students emerge equipped to face real-life challenges and contribute to the body of knowledge in their fields of study. The Graduate School develops plans, assesses, improves, and administers the policies and procedures established by the Graduate Council, the chief governance body for graduate and post-baccalaureate programs."

To ensure the quality of the advanced programs and student learning experiences, the Graduate Council established six student learning goals for graduate/post-baccalaureate students. Students are expected to demonstrate:

- Advanced knowledge, skills, and values appropriate to their discipline.
- Ability to be creative, analytical, and critical thinkers.
- Ability to work as individual researchers/scholars as well as in collaboration with others in contributing to the scholarship of their disciplines, as appropriate.
- Relevant knowledge of the global perspectives appropriate to their discipline.
- Knowledge of new and various methods and technologies as appropriate to their discipline.
- Advanced oral and written communication skills, complemented as appropriate to the discipline, by the ability to access and analyze information from a myriad of primary, print, and technological sources.

**2. What are examples of the ways in which graduate program faculty currently promote and sustain a graduate-level academic culture?**

The graduate program faculty promote and sustain a graduate-level academic culture in many ways:

- Engagement of students by building strong student/student interactions and strong faculty/student interactions – in and outside of classroom through planned group work, social activities, collaborative learning opportunities, thesis support
- Cohort model for building learning community
- Rigorous academic standards are expected and achieved -- readings, assignments, writing, research, and grading.
- Research, scholarship, and creative activity permeate course work.
- Faculty co-create knowledge with students.
- Faculty mentor students.
- Opportunities are provided for students to participate in professional/disciplinary organizations.
- Student learning goals are established and evaluated, with emphasis on critical, analytical, and creative thinking.
- Culminating activity (thesis, project, comprehensive examination) paramount for demonstrating academic achievement.
  
- The Graduate Council ...
  - advocates for graduate education.
  - establishes and evaluates graduate curriculum policies and procedures; standards for course rigor/academic quality of course syllabi, program proposals, and academic program reviews.

**3. What institutional structures do we have for supporting a graduate-level academic culture?**

Institutional structures that have been put in place to support a graduate-level academic culture are the Graduate Council and the Graduate School, graduate-level library resources, subscriptions to research databases, graduate student research funds, graduate student orientations, department graduation celebrations, graduate student awards, recognition at commencement ceremonies, access to the Graduate School conference room, increases in financial support systems.

Other key offices for supporting graduate culture include the Offices of the Deans of the 6 colleges, the Dean of Library Services, the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, the Office of Assessment and Quality Assurance, and the Office of Institutional Research.

**4. What methods do we use to evaluate/assess a graduate-level academic culture?**

In 1997 the Graduate Council began to evaluate graduate education by developing and implementing a graduate assessment plan. This plan complemented the assessment conducted by each of the graduate programs, taking a holistic view of the graduate education and overall quality of graduate education at CSU Stanislaus. This plan was updated in 2002 and again in 2008. Various methods are used to evaluate graduate-level academic culture, such as demographic information, student and alumni surveys, aggregated data for course evaluations, external reviewers, and accreditation. These methods collectively provide information about student academic performance, faculty quality, course quality, student engagement, post-graduation success.

**5. What are additional ideas for enhancing a graduate-level academic culture at the program and/or institutional levels?**

Spring 2008, the provost increased funding support for graduate fee waivers nearly 50%, an important action that contributes to the programs' ability to attract and retain top graduate students. However, the funding tends to provide for partially funded fee waivers; an increase in fully funded fee waivers and increased funding for graduate assistants and teaching associates would allow the time for students to engage more fully in the academic culture of the graduate programs.

The Graduate Council is currently reviewing demographic data related to program admissions and graduation rates and exploring strategies for promoting a more inclusive graduate community (e.g., possibly a grant proposal to the Council of Graduate Schools).

**6. How much of the responsibility is descended to a particular program or the Graduate School as a whole?**

**7. What barriers do we put up that prevent a graduate-level academic culture?**