



## GRADUATE COUNCIL MINUTES

May 13th, 2024

The Graduate Council met virtually via Microsoft Teams on Monday, May 13, 2024, at 2:00P.M.

Graduate Council members present: Mr. Hassan Anderson, Chair; Drs. Sourav Banerjee, Kenneth Campbell, Fang Jing, Edie Goldsmith, Dianna Inman, Marketa Kubickova, William Matchin, Terrance McAdoo (Vice Chair), David Reisman, Sheri Silfies, Sriram Venkataraman, Neal Woods, and Gaurav Harshe (GSA).

Graduate Council members absent: Drs. Besim Dragovic, Amy Lehman, Wendy Regoeczi (excused), Nick Watanabe, and Christina Yao (excused).

Graduate School Representatives: Dr. Ann Vail, Dr. Murray Mitchell (Secretary), Dr. Andrea Fleming (excused), Dr. Jean Ellis, Dr. Angelina Sylvain, Dale Moore, Libby Cross, Wright Culpepper, and Wanda Barr

Provost Office Representatives: Trena Houp (excused) and Dr. LaTrice Ratcliff-Small (excused)

Guests: Dr. Mark Yancey (Joseph F. Rice School of Law), Dr. Heather Bonilha (COMD), Dr. Beth Barnes (COMD), Dr. Sherry Warren (Global Carolina), Dr. David Kilpatrick (Environmental Health Science), Dr. Robin Dawson (Nursing), Dr. Jennifer O'Neill (Exercise Science), Dr. Jeanette Andrews (Dean of Nursing), Dr. Danny Jenkins (School of Music), Dr. Andreas Heyden (Chemical Engineering), Dr. Christine Blake (HPEB), Dr. Christine Sacco-Bene (School of Medicine), Dr. Alicia Ribar (Nursing), Joohyung Park (HRSM-Retailing), Dr. Matthew Wilson (Political Science), Dr. Matthias Schindler (Physics and Astronomy), Sandra Rhyne (HSPM), Jenell Peoples (Academic Programs), Brittain Goff (DMSB), Amber Compton (Anthropology), and Hannah Malcom (GSA)

**NOTE: These minutes will become final on August 26, 2024, if not challenged.**

**1. Call to Order and Approval of Agenda** (Hassan Anderson, Chair)

The meeting was called to order at 2:00p.m., and the Agenda was approved.

**2. Approval of the Minutes from April 22, 2024.** Approved actions by Graduate Council become effective 30 days after posting. A copy is available on the Graduate School website at: <https://bit.ly/3SvPO0E>.

**The minutes from April were unanimously approved.**

**3. Report of the Chair** (Hassan Anderson)

Chair Anderson announced that this would be his last meeting chairing the Graduate Council. He didn't think that he would enjoy it so much, but he did. He thanked everyone for all the hard work and

accomplishments that occurred this academic year. He thanked the Graduate Council leadership team comprised of Dean Vail, Dr. Mitchell, Dr. Sylvain, and Dr. Ellis. He challenges everyone to continue to be engaged with graduate course to the best of your abilities and hopes that you will continue to bring your 100% to Graduate Council because the work that we do in Graduate Council really makes graduate studies better for graduate student. It is important that we have full support. He will continue as a regular member for the next academic year. If anyone catches him not keeping the same amount of energy, please bring it to his attention.

#### **4. Report of the Dean of the Graduate School (Ann Vail)**

Dean Vail thanked everyone for their participation in the doctoral hooding. She thought that the event was successful, and she received positive feedback from the participants as well as from upper administration. This year 189 doctoral students were eligible to graduate, and they hooded 127 of them.

Due to the software company having a glitch with the software, she was not able to get a full report on admissions. As of right now, we have 14,089 applications. That number is still staggering to her. Typically, we would have around 5000 at this point of the year; so, we have 9000 more that we did this time last year.

The Dissertation Writing Academy is well underway. This is our first attempt to do the Academy and it is a pilot in many ways. She is impressed with the 15 students that are participating, and they are at various stages of their dissertation. Some are defending in July, and some are just beginning to write up their findings. They are well prepared as a whole, but not well prepared in writing. As she read the recommendations from faculty members as to who should be considered for the Academy, most faculty members spoke about writing being an issue. They have tried to build writing up in the Academy, but it has been a red flag to her to see the issues that we need to address related to writing. We might have some thoughts about that as we prepare for next year. You are invited to stop by to check it out between 8:30am and 4:30pm every day in the Library through May 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Dean Vail relayed that we have hit somewhat of a pothole in the road regarding the international transcript service. She has known since she arrived here that we have serious problems with our admission process, including the application that we use. When we went to the application company to talk about adding this in, we were told that we are using too old of an application to add this type of feature. Her concern is less about the international transcript but the fact that we have been operating under such an old application system is troubling. It is time to make some decisions about that. Some will be hard choices. She thinks that one of the main reasons that we have been using this system is that it is one of the less expensive ones, but we will be exploring other avenues for an application system. The other problem that we have would be that if we find another application system is that the University's infrastructure cannot handle more than what it is already handling. She has been having conversations with the new Chief Information Officer. Our IBM contract ends very soon, and these are all parts of that discussion. She is not giving up on the international transcript service because there are too many issues that we are trying to resolve or meet with that movement, but the bigger issue is that right now the computer capacity to deal with our application period. To give you some insight, the application system that we are currently using is 20 years old. Most campuses have upgraded and are using a newer system, but we can't do that because our hardware system here is operated by IBM. We are trying to figure this out.

David Reisman asked if we could somehow access sample applications from different universities to see how accessible they are, how easy they are to use before we make any decisions on a new application system. Dean Vail stated that most vendors will allow us to set up a dummy account so we can go in and experiment with it. As we start to interview vendors, we would certainly invite you all

go to in and participate in that. She does think there are better systems than ours, but we can't move to one of those until we figure out the capacity issue. She has spoken to her colleagues in the SEC, and there are some of them using the same system that we are using but they have the updated version. Others are using different versions. Some have developed their own; so, there's not a lot of consistency nationally.

Dean Vail acknowledged that this is Dr. Jean Ellis' last meeting as Associate Dean and she thanked her for her service to the Graduate Council as well as to graduate education.

Dean Vail also acknowledged that this was Hassan Anderson's last meeting as Chair. She presented him with a plaque at the meeting in April (our last in person meeting) as a token of remembrance for his leadership as chair of the Graduate Council for this academic year.

**5. Report of the Secretary of the Graduate Council (Murray Mitchell)**

Dr. Mitchell echoed the thanks from Chair Hassan Anderson and Dean Vail to all members of the Graduate Council for the work successfully completed this past academic year. He also acknowledged the departure of several Graduate Council Members who will be rotating off the Council:

Subrahmanyam Bulusu	Earth, Ocean, and Environment
Gaurav Harshe	Graduate Student Association
Dianna Inman	College of Nursing
Marketa Kubickova	Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Management
Amy Lehman	Theatre and Dance
William Matchin	Communication Sciences and Disorders
David Reisman	Biological Sciences
Kim Thompson	School of Information Science
Christina Yao	Leadership, Learning Design, and Inquiry

He welcomed several members who have been nominated by their respective units to join the Council at our August meeting for the 2024-2025 Academic year:

Ashley Gess	Teacher Education, College of Education
Hannah Malcom	Graduate Student Association
Jing "Taylor" Wen	School of Journalism and Mass Communications
Rachel Williams	School of Information Science

As you are aware, based on a change to our operating bylaws, new members will not be voted onto the Council. Instead, new members go through a process within their academic units to be selected as representatives to the Council. What does require a vote is the selection of officers on the Graduate Council. In particular, the Chair and Vice Chair are elected officers. It has been our practice for the Vice Chair to move into the position as Chair in their third year on the Graduate Council, but this is not a required procedure. Indeed, the opportunity to nominate other candidates for both positions is available. Dr. Mitchell asked the current chair to call for nominations for Chair and Vice Chair.

Chair Anderson announced that we have one nomination for Chair of the Graduate Council for Academic Year 2024-2025, our current Vice Chair, Terrance McAdoo, and opened the floor for nominees for both Chair and Vice Chair for Academic Year 2024-2025.

There were no additional nominations for Chair and there were no nominations for Vice Chair.

Chair Anderson called for a vote on the Chair nominee, and Dr. Terrance McAdoo was elected

unanimously.

Dr. Mitchell offered congratulations to Dr. McAdoo and stated that we will continue to solicit nominations for Vice Chair across the summer for action at our Fall meeting.

Dr. David Reisman asked what is the length of term for Graduate Council members and are there other opportunities to serve the interests of the Graduate Council for graduate education?

Dr. Mitchell replied that the typical term of service on Graduate Council has been three years. There are several standing committees that provide additional opportunities for service. The chair of each committee must be a Graduate Council member, but other committee personnel may be graduate faculty and not necessarily on the Council.

**6. Report on Professional Development (Wright Culpepper)**

Wright offered thanks to Chair Hassan Anderson and the Graduate Council for a tremendous job leading this year and always being willing to serve in any capacity during special events, and he appreciates the participation and collaboration as it has been a great year. They are already full speed ahead in terms of planning Fall activities and even Spring activities. If you have any feedback or ideas of what they can be doing differently or if you have any new events that we can plan for students across all 230 programs that we have, he would be happy to hear from you and collaborate with you as we build those. Dean Vail added that we are committed to offering a Graduate School orientation/resource fair early fall closer to the end of August.

**7. Report of the Graduate Student Association (Gaurav Harshe)**

Gaurav thanked the Graduate Council for welcoming him in this past academic year. He was honored to be the Mace bearer for the graduate doctoral hooding ceremony. It was a pleasure of a lifetime. It was very sentimental being a second-year student and being able to see everything from behind the scenes was exciting and thrilling.

Gaurav will be the Graduate Student Association (GSA) President for the next academic year, and he might just drop in to some of meetings with Hannah Malcom, the new GSA representative to Graduate Council.

GSA is wrapping up everything from this past academic year in reconciling budgets with Student Life, and making sure that all receipts are in and reimbursed in a timely and orderly manner. They have submitted a budget request to Student Life for next year's cycle that they are slated to hear back by the end of June or July.

GSA has two exciting new ventures this year. The GSA executives Erin Looney, Vice President, and Iftakhar Ahmad, Treasurer, along with the Graduate Council Representative, Hannah Malcom, will be working collaboratively between Student Life and the Graduate School this summer through the Graduate Student Ambassador program established by Student Life. GSA executives previously would just take the summer off and come back in full force in August. This summer, they are trying to have everyone be committed to the priorities of GSA.

The other exciting venture is the SEC Exchange is happening mid-July. This is a student leadership student government retreat for all student government leaders in the SEC. All student government leaders will be meeting in Oklahoma, the host site for this year. This is the inaugural graduate leader track that they are trying to develop. He has sat in on some meetings this past month where all presidents of GSA in the SEC meet and try to figure out what this track might look like. They are trying to figure out what the attendance from graduate student leaders might be based on budgets,

timing, and availability. If the majority can make it, they will have an in-person graduate track that will go along with the undergraduate or larger student government track and try to foster relationships between the SEC graduate leaders. They are excited and trying to work with Student Life to make that happen for the three executive cabinet members that have expressed interest.

**8. Report of the Academic Policy and Practices Committee** (Murray Mitchell for Terrance McAdoo)  
No report.

**9. Report of the 500/600 Level Courses** (Angelina Sylvain)

This report is presented to Council for informational purposes only; no action is necessary.

**500/600 Courses for May 2024 Grad Council**

(CCP = Course Change Proposal; NCP=New Course Proposal). Total: 0

**10. Associate Graduate Faculty Nominations** Total: 10 (Murray Mitchell)

Name: **Matthew Geary, EdD 2023**  
Program: Exercise Science, ASPH  
Term: Summer 2024 – Spring 2030

Name: **Carolyn Harmon, PhD 2022; DNP 2014**  
Program: Nursing  
Term: Summer 2024 – Summer 2030

Name: **Jim Mensch, PhD 2010**  
Program: Exercise Science, ASPH  
Term: Summer 2024 – Spring 2030

Name: **Michael Moody, PhD 2020**  
Program: Department of Retailing – College of HRSM  
Term: Fall 2024 – Summer 2030

Name: **Teresa Moore, PhD 2000**  
Program: Exercise Science, ASPH  
Term: Summer 2024 – Spring 2030

Name: **David Moscowitz, PhD 2004**  
Program: School of Journalism and Mass Communications  
Term: Fall 2024 – Fall 2030

Name: **Jennifer O’Neill, PhD 2010**  
Program: Exercise Science, ASPH  
Term: Summer 2024 – Spring 2030

Name: **Laura Smith, PhD 2004**  
Program: School of Journalism and Mass Communications  
Term: Fall 2024 – Fall 2030

Name: **Raymond Thompson, PhD 2007**  
Program: Exercise Science, ASPH

Term: Summer 2024 – Spring 2030

Name: **Michael Watson, EdD 2018**

Program: Department of Retailing – College of HRSM

Term: Fall 2024 – Summer 2030

**These nominations were unanimously approved by Graduate Council.**

**11. Fellowships and Scholarships Committee (Edie Goldsmith)**

No report.

**12. Report of Science, Math, and Related Professional Programs Committee (Jing Fang)**

Below is a list of proposals reviewed by the Committee. Total: 32

These 29 proposals are offered for approval:

- **Performance Nutrition and Dietetics, M.S.** (Program Change Request: Fall 2025)
- **Information Technology, M.S.**, (Program Change Request: Fall 2025)
- **Informatics, Ph.D.**, (Program Change Request: Fall 2025)
- **Health Information Technology, M.H.I.T.**, (Program Change Request: Fall 2025)
- **NURS 719** (3) Transition to Advanced Nursing Practice, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **NURS 728** (3) Transition to Nursing Practice in Communities, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **NURS 733** (3) Transition to Evidence-Based Nursing Practice and Evidence Measures, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **NURS 735** (3) Transition to Nursing Leadership, Ethics and Policy, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **PNDI 700** (3) Applied Nutrition Research, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **PNDI 701** (3) Performance Nutrition, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **PNDI 705** (3) Performance Nutrition: Approaches and Advocacy, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **PNDI 710** (3) Medical Nutrition Therapy I, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **PNDI 711** (1) Performance Nutrition and Dietetics Supervised Experience Level I, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **PNDI 712** ((1) Performance Nutrition and Dietetics Supervised Experience Level 2, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **PNDI 713** (1) Performance Nutrition and Dietetics Supervised Experience Level 3, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **PNDI 714** (1) Performance Nutrition and Dietetics Supervised Experience Level 4, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **PNDI 715** (1) Performance Nutrition and Dietetics Supervised Experience Level 5, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **PNDI 730** (3) Nutrition Counseling and Education, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **PNDI 740** (3) Medical Nutrition Therapy II, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **HPEB 752/PNDI 752** (3) Nutrition and Public Health, (CCP: Fall 2025)
- **PNDI 750** (3) Performance Nutrition Therapy, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **PNDI 760** (3) Leadership and Practice in Performance Nutrition and Dietetics, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **PNDI 770** (3) Food Systems Management, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **PNDI 780** (3) Performance Nutrition and Dietetics Capstone, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **COMD 810** (1) Professional Seminar in Communication Sciences and Disorders, (NCP: Fall 2024)

- **COMD 890** (1) Teaching Fundamentals in Communication Sciences and Disorders, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **EXSC 711** (3) Ecological Momentary Assessment in Health Behavior Research, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **ENHS 715** (3) Disasters and Public Health Emergency Management I, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **ENHS 716** (3) Disasters and Public Health Emergency Management II, (NCP: Fall 2024)

The following 3 proposals have been reviewed and approved in concept. Prior to recommending full approval, the committee believes that further discussion is warranted [Please see Attachment #1: Nursing Exception justification]:

- **Nursing Informatics, M.S.N.**, (Program Change Request: Fall 2025)
- **Healthcare Leadership, M.S.N.**, (Program Change Request: Fall 2025)
- **Nursing Education, M.S.N.** (Program Change Request: Fall 2025)

Discussion surrounding the exception represented by these nursing proposals involved a presentation by the Dean of Nursing, Dr. Andrews, and supported by several other Nursing faculty. Following this presentation and discussion, there was a vote on the three Nursing proposals above.

**These proposals were approved by Graduate Council.**

### **13. Report of the Humanities, Social Sciences, Education, and Related Professional Programs Committee** (Angelina Sylvain for Wendy Regoeczi)

Below is a list of proposals reviewed by the Committee. Total: 8

- **Contemporary Music Performance Minor**, (New Program Proposal: Fall 2024)
- **Community Engagement Minor**, (New Program Proposal: Fall 2024)
- **SOWK 784** (1-3) Field Instruction IV: Advanced Social Work Practice, (CCP: Fall 2024)
- **SOWK 783** (1-3) Field Instruction III: Advanced Social Work Practice, (CCP, Fall 2024)
- **SOWK 782** (1-3) Field Instruction II: Generalist Social Work Practice, (CCP, Fall 2024)
- **SOWK 781** (1-3) Field Instruction I: Generalist Social Work Practice, (CCP, Fall 2024)
- **LAWH 711** (3) Organizational Leadership and Professional Development for Healthcare Professionals, (NCP: Fall 2024)
- **LAWG 734** (2-3) Climate Change Seminar, (NCP: Fall 2024)

**These proposals were unanimously approved by Graduate Council.**

### **14. Report of the Grievances, Appeals and Petitions Committee** (David Reisman) No report.

### **15. Other Committee Reports** None.

### **16. Old Business** None.

### **17. New Business** Discussion of concerns regarding implementation of the requirement for international applicants to have their transcripts evaluated by World Education Services (David Reisman on behalf of Graduate

Directors of the College of Arts and Sciences. [Please see Attachment #2: International Transcript Validation].

Dean Vail commented on this process in her comments. There were no further comments at this time.

**18. Good of the Order**

Reminder Dates:

May 6th – 23rd: Dissertation Writing Academy

August 26, 2024: The next scheduled meeting of the Graduate Council will be in person on Monday, August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024, at 2:00 pm. The location and agenda will be made available prior to that meeting.

**19. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:35p.m.

Murray Mitchell, Secretary

CC: Michael Amiridis, President  
Donna Arnett, Provost  
Ann Vail, Dean of the Graduate School  
Deans  
Department Chairs  
Graduate Directors  
Aaron Marterer, University Registrar  
Elaine Belesky, Office of the Registrar  
Malia Kiehl, Office of the Registrar

## **Request for Exception for the Graduate School Admission Policy**

The College of Nursing is requesting an exception for the requirement of a bachelor's degree to enroll in three Master's of Nursing Science Programs in the College (MSN, Nursing Education; MSN, Nursing Informatics; and MSN, Healthcare Leadership). This unique request arises from the current crisis of shortage of registered nurses and nursing faculty, and the state's (SC Commission and Higher Education and SC State Legislature's) urgent request for colleges of nursing to move quickly to address solutions to this crisis. This request allows the college to quickly upfit full-time faculty for our regional and technical colleges, as well as part time clinical faculty for the R1 colleges of nursing in the state which enables the state nursing programs to enroll more nursing students.

This modified entry will allow experienced registered nurses with an Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN; half of all registered nurses in SC) to efficiently matriculate through one of the three MSN programs, after completing four bridge courses that are typically found in the RN-BSN program. This extreme request impacts the safety and well-being of South Carolinians.

### **Additional Detailed Information**

In the state of South Carolina, the nursing shortage looms as a critical challenge, impacting the accessibility and quality of healthcare services. South Carolina has the 4<sup>th</sup> highest projected shortage of nurses in the country and by 2030, it is estimated that 10,400 new nurses will be needed to meet the growing demands. With the demand for registered nurses projected to escalate substantially in the coming years, there is a need to rapidly prepare graduate nurses who can serve as part-time or full-time faculty. The South Carolina state legislature, in attempts to help alleviate the shortage and improve state health outcomes, has provided \$20 million to state funded nursing programs in the past two years - \$10million for faculty salary enhancements and \$10 million for full loan repayments for nurses to return to school to earn a graduate degree (MSN or Doctorate). To increase student enrollment, the state needs to quickly enhance the availability of qualified instructors (typically doctoral prepared for R1 schools of nursing and MSN prepared for full-time faculty in community and technical colleges and part-time faculty) for all 46 approved nursing programs in the state. In a statewide meeting last year with the SC Commission on Higher Education (agency managing the appropriated funds) deans of nursing were encouraged to be “creative” to rapidly address the nursing faculty shortage, as a means to ensure adequate supply of nurses to promote the safety and well being of South Carolinians.

Currently, just under half of all the state’s registered nurse workforce is trained at the associate degree entry to practice level. While the traditional matriculation requirements typically mandate a baccalaureate degree prior to matriculating into a graduate program, which requires multiple applications, delayed processes and timelines, there is a unique time to consider an exception to this policy to allow associate degree registered nurses (ADNs) to pursue a master's degree in nursing for several compelling reasons.

First, ADNs have validated competencies as a registered nurse as they undergo the same rigorous licensure examination (NCLEX-RN) as their counterparts who hold bachelor's degrees in nursing. This standardized examination ensures that all registered nurses, regardless of their educational background, possess the fundamental knowledge and skills required for safe and competent practice as a registered nurse.

Secondly, the proposed modified entry for ADN to MSN program for the three programs (MSN, Nursing Education; MSN, Nursing Informatics; and MSN, Healthcare Leadership), contains four bridge courses that are typically found in an RN – BSN program

along with 8 additional courses for the MSN core/specialty areas. The content for the traditional curriculum offered in bachelor of nursing program that ADN programs are not required to have are included in this proposed curriculum through the four bridge courses.

ADNs bring a wealth of experience and practical knowledge, and many of them have many years of experience as a registered nurse , acquired through their extensive training and hands-on practice in healthcare settings. The modified entry will require at least two years of full-time registered nurse experience to validate experience and advanced competencies. Further, there will be an option for students matriculating through this program to opt out after the 4 bridge courses and instead pursue the BSN if for some reason they are unable to complete the entire MSN curriculum.

Thirdly, there is precedence across the US from accredited programs for RN – MSN program without earning the BSN. The University of Mississippi Medical Center is SACSCOC accredited and offers the RN-MSN option for associate-degree registered nurses to complete the master's program in five areas, two of which are similar to the pathways being proposed (nurse educator and nursing and healthcare administrator). Similarly, Arizona State University offers a RN-MSN pathway for associate degree-prepared nurses to pursue a master's in nursing with a nursing education concentration. The RN-MSN is also offered by several other institutions (Western Governors University, Herzing University, etc.).

In conclusion, the nursing shortage in South Carolina, the mission of our flagship university to address health and safety of our citizens, workforce needs and relevance to our state, along with national precedence from accredited programs across the US triggers a reevaluation of existing admission policies to allow an exception for admission for these selected graduate nursing programs at the University. It is imperative that policymakers and educational institutions collaborate to enact necessary reforms that facilitate creative and necessary solutions to address critical challenges and ensure the delivery of high-quality healthcare services to all residents of South Carolina.



Dear Dean Vail,

We, Directors of Graduate Studies in the College of Arts and Sciences, are writing to express our strong concerns about plans by the Graduate School to require international applicants to have their transcripts evaluated by an external agency such as World Education Services (WES). International students are a core part of our graduate student body. They provide vital contributions to our educational and research missions while also increasing diversity on campus. We understand that combatting fraud is an important task. However, the adoption of this requirement would have immediate and serious negative consequences for graduate programs at USC. It also limits accessibility for prospective students from lower-income countries. There are better ways to combat fraud while keeping USC an attractive destination for prospective international graduate students.

To our understanding, the USC Graduate School has not assessed whether transcript fraud occurs at USC and, if it does occur, how widespread it is. It does not seem prudent to implement such an impactful policy without this information.

During the Graduate Directors meeting on March 19, 2024, the cost of the WES evaluation service was stated to be approximately \$200. This is an exceptionally large amount of money for prospective students from many of the countries from which we receive applications. Imposing this additional requirement will force applicants to avoid applying to USC – not because they find our programs unattractive, but because they do not have the financial means to do so. The result will be a loss of highly qualified applicants, which in turn will have a negative impact on our graduate programs—reducing them in both size and quality. This will be especially severe for programs with a substantial portion of international students, such as in the sciences, engineering, and computing. And it will inhibit programs in the arts and humanities that are looking to expand their international appeal, to capitalize on the international reputations of the faculty.

The negative impact might be mitigated if other institutions had similar requirements. However, to date the Graduate School has not provided a list of institutions that **require** an outside valuation of international transcripts. Absent this information, we have looked at USC's [six official](#) peer institutions (University of Georgia, University of Kentucky, University of Massachusetts – Amherst, University of Missouri – Columbia, University of Tennessee, Clemson

University) and five aspirant institutions (University of Iowa, University of Maryland College Park, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, University of Utah, University of Virginia). Of these 11 institutions, **none** requires that international students have their transcripts validated by an external organization. In fact, several specifically state that they do not accept the evaluation reports in place of a transcript:

- University of Georgia: “...[do not accept evaluation reports from external evaluation agencies](#)”
- University of Tennessee: “Do not upload [...] [an evaluation provided by a credential service, for example, Educational Credentials Evaluators \(ECE\) OR World Education Services \(WES\)](#)”
- University of Utah: “[We do not accept](#) a third-party transcript evaluation as fulfilling the transcript requirement for an application, though it can be accepted in place of a certified English language translation for a transcript.”

If combatting potential fraud is the main motivation for this proposed new requirement, it is not clear why it is limited to international applicants. The transcript requirements for US and international students are identical – they can use unofficial transcripts during the original application process, but they must provide official transcripts once they are enrolled at USC. If international students can cheat during this process, so can domestic students. Why is the new requirement limited to international students, who make up only a small fraction of the overall graduate student population?

We believe that there are better ways to address this issue. The reinstatement of a small application fee would reduce the number of applications to those from students who are truly interested in attending USC. The requirement of transcript validation could be limited to accepted students only, analogous to the requirement for official transcripts. Ideally this would be accompanied by a fee waiver system for admitted students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The collected application fee can be used to offset these costs. Or there could be a simple check to compare unofficial transcripts used for the application with the official transcripts once they are received.

Transcripts are only one aspect that our admissions committees take into account when making decisions. In addition to reviewing provided documents, many departments in the College of Arts and Sciences are performing virtual interviews with applicants. This gives the department an opportunity to gain deeper insights into the qualifications of the candidate beyond what is conveyed in their application material. This enables the department to make an informed decision and select applicants who will be successful graduate students. It quickly becomes obvious during the interview if the student is not qualified, which then prevents unqualified students from gaining admittance.

We urge the Graduate School to not implement the proposed policy. It reinforces inequity by putting up significant barriers for applicants from economically disadvantaged countries. So far,

no other peer institution has been identified that requires transcript validation for all its international graduate applicants. If USC is one of an exceedingly small number of institutions with this type of requirement (or potentially the only one), then we will miss the opportunity to recruit highly qualified applicants and, therefore, graduate education and research at USC will suffer.

Terrence Weik, Anthropology

David Reisman, Biological Sciences

Sheryl Wiskur, Chemistry and Biochemistry

Brandon Applegate, Criminology and Criminal Justice

Michael Bizimis, School of the Earth, Ocean and Environment

Eli Jelly-Schapiro, English

Caroline Nagel, Geography

Joshua Grace, History

Alexandre Bonafos, Languages, Literatures & Cultures

Anne Bezuidenhout, Linguistics

Hong Wang, Mathematics

Brett Sherman, Philosophy

Matthias Schindler, Physics and Astronomy

Matthew Wilson, Political Science

Brett Kloos, Psychology

Andrea Henderson, Sociology

Dewei Wang, Statistics

Andrew Graciano, School of Visual Art and Design

Lauren Sklaroff, Women's and Gender Studies