



University of Colorado **Denver**

Graduate Education Working Group

Report and Recommendations to Chancellor and Provost

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Introduction

Until 2022, many (but not all) CU Denver graduate programs were administered through a Graduate School shared with CU Anschutz graduate programs. In 2022, CU Denver exited that dual-campus graduate school and transitioned to a new model to serve CU Denver students exclusively. Since 2022, many graduate education functions (including admissions, recruitment, and academic planning) have been managed locally, whereas other functions have been managed by a central Office of Graduate Education, with a faculty Graduate Council advising the provost on matters of significance.

Gaps in policy and process clarity and coordination, along with insufficient funding, have impeded the overall competitiveness of CU Denver graduate education programs and operations. To gain further insight and context on the state of play for CU Denver graduate education, in spring 2025 the university engaged the [Council of Graduate Schools \(CGS\)](#), a national organization providing resources and support, to review operations and make recommendations for CU Denver graduate education going forward. Their April 2025 report can be viewed [here](#).

In summer 2025, the Office of the Provost designated a special assistant to the provost and three faculty fellows to assess and prioritize how to follow through on the report's findings. This summertime groundwork set the stage for a fall 2025 working group that would address three key questions and produce deliverables with recommendations on each by Dec. 15, 2025:

1) What policies and procedures should guide graduate education delivery at CU Denver and how should these policies and procedures be managed and communicated to the CU Denver community?

Related deliverable: A proposed set of policies, procedures, and/or processes that define a baseline from which all graduate programs will operate, and that clearly delineates elements to be managed centrally from those that are decentralized.

2) What administrative structure should oversee and coordinate CU Denver graduate education operations?

Related deliverable: A recommendation concerning the structure of graduate education administration, including the mission and goals of a central office, staffing, and graduate faculty council scope recommended to implement it.

3) What policies and procedures should guide graduate student employment and tuition remission?

Related deliverable: A recommendation for enacting policies and procedures to guide graduate student employment and offering tuition remission in categories to be defined by this working group.

This working group first met on Sept. 4 and continued to meet through the fall both collectively and in three subgroups focusing on each of the questions. The working group charge in full is available on [this working group webpage](#).

The report to follow is structured in three sections—each with their own brief introduction to the topic at hand—to respond individually to the three questions above. Though these questions are addressed separately, these recommendations reflect the consensus of the working group as a whole.

While the working group will conclude with the delivery of this report, the special assistant and faculty fellows are poised to continue their work into the spring 2026 semester for further operational planning and implementation activities as advised by the chancellor and provost. We would like to acknowledge the diligent efforts of working group members exploring these complex and multifaceted issues this semester, as well as key contributors to the operations team supporting this working group.

Question 1: What policies and procedures should guide graduate education delivery at CU Denver and how should these policies and procedures be managed and communicated to the CU Denver community?

Introduction

This introduction summarizes background and rationale for developing unified institutional standards for graduate education. While the full report introduction provides a broader institutional context, this introduction offers a concise background specific to Charge Question 1 for readers consulting this section independently.

Historically, PhD programs and some but not all graduate programs followed a set of policies and procedures created by the formerly dual-campus Graduate School. Yet some programs were permitted to opt out of Graduate School policies and to establish their own policies and procedures, creating inconsistencies across the seven schools and colleges. When CU Denver exited the Graduate School in January 2022, two colleges (CLAS and Engineering) chose to continue to abide by Graduate School policies and procedures. The other schools and colleges largely opted out (with the exception of their doctoral programs). Although CU Denver's newly formed Office of Graduate Education and Graduate Council attempted to revise and ensure campuswide application of policies to reflect our evolved graduate education operating environment, no official set of overall standards was approved. As a result, policies and procedures governing graduate education became fragmented, inconsistent across units, and difficult for students and programs to navigate.

In response to this, the [April 2025 CGS Report](#) included the following recommendation:

The Consultation Team recommends that a working group of faculty members create a set of institutional standards that encompass the needs and variations of all academic programs. This recommendation should follow the semester or a year of information gathering and the creation of a central repository. It is critically important that those central CU-Denver graduate standards provide guidance and guardrails but also include explicit and flexible policies for exceptions and student appeals.

In responding to this CGS recommendation, our working group was charged with developing graduate-level policies that could be implemented across all schools and colleges at CU Denver. We developed this proposed set of governing policies based on: 1) the [2022 Graduate School Policies and Procedures Manual](#); 2) policies proposed by the CU Denver Office of Graduate Education in conjunction with the Graduate Council; and 3) input from representatives across CU

Denver's seven schools and colleges. These sources were synthesized to create consistent, campuswide standards. Our review created shared expectations across programs and resolved discrepancies that arose from differing or outdated policy sources.

The proposed policies in this section set minimum standards to provide guidance to graduate programs while allowing flexibility to enable units to apply their own supplemental policies tailored to their own distinct circumstances. We recommend that all graduate programs (including graduate certificates and other microcredentials) follow these standards and that these replace any Graduate School or Office of Graduate Education Policies and Procedures documents that have to date been followed by individual programs.

Individual graduate programs may institute more stringent policies than those specified in this document. Because Question 1 of our charge focuses specifically on academic policies and standards, this section addresses the rules and expectations governing graduate program operations rather than the administrative structures responsible for implementing them. To avoid establishing standards that may quickly become outdated once administrative structures are formalized, we intentionally omitted policies for the structure, composition, and responsibilities of a proposed Graduate Studies Office (GSO) and Graduate Council (see Section 2), and policies for approval of new graduate programs. Once the administrative structure for graduate education is finalized based on recommendations on Question 2, these outstanding policies can be created to align with the new governance model.

Because these standards will apply to all CU Denver graduate programs regardless of disciplinary context, input from program directors will be critical to ensuring feasibility, clarity, and consistent application. We recommend that all graduate program directors review these policies during an early 2026 feedback period before implementation.

The following sections outline proposed policies recommended by this working group.

I. Foundational / General Governance

1. Avenues for Addressing Non-Academic Concerns

In many cases, concerns related to a student's continuation in a graduate program are not academic in nature and should be handled through appropriate avenues according to existing policies. A non-exhaustive list of potential issues and avenues is provided to assist with the resolution of such matters.

Students are expected to abide by the CU Denver Student Code of Conduct, as well as any school/college or program codes of conduct. Any violation of the codes of conduct may result in review by the program, school/college, or university.

Students who have concerns with a faculty member's conduct should follow the policies outlined by their school or college. In the absence of explicit policies, students should bring their concerns

to the director of their program. Students also have the option of contacting the campus Ombuds Office.

Alleged misconduct in research (as defined in federal and institutional policies) should be reported to CU Denver's Office of Research Services.

Any allegation of protected-class discrimination or harassment, sexual assault or other forms of sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence (including dating or domestic violence), stalking, etc., or related retaliation must be reported to the Office of Equity.

2. Grievances and grade appeals

A graduate student who disputes a course grade or other evaluation for an academic program requirement (e.g., comprehensive examination, thesis defense, etc.) may file a grievance following the policies outlined by their school or college. In the absence of explicit policies, students should follow the steps outlined below:

- 1) The student should first discuss the issue with the faculty member(s) and attempt to find a resolution.
- 2) If a resolution is not reached, the student may then appeal to the chair or director (or designee thereof) of the academic unit in which the course is taught.
- 3) If a resolution is not reached, the student may then appeal to the school/college in which the course was taught, following the grade appeal procedures of that school/college.
- 4) Beyond this, students may appeal to the GSO.

Appeals must be initiated within a year of the disputed grade. Note that faculty members must employ their professional judgment when evaluating student work and assigning grades, and this decision will not be overturned unless there is clear evidence that the faculty member has made a mistake, has failed to adhere to stated standards, or has otherwise engaged in arbitrary or capricious behavior.

II. Enrollment, Leave, and Standing

1. Leave of Absence

Students who need to leave a graduate program for a period of time (up to one [1] year) should consult with their program director for approval on a Leave of Absence (LOA). Personal LOAs are reviewed and approved by graduate programs, in consultation with the college or school; medical LOAs are managed through the Office of Case Management in collaboration with the program and the college or school. An approved LOA pauses the student's academic record and automatically extends the time limit for completing a degree by the equivalent amount of time that the student spends on leave. Requests for LOA that exceed one (1) year may be approved with sufficient justification to the college or school dean. Note that the limit on LOA for the purposes of financial aid is a maximum of 18 months. Students who do not return from their approved LOA will be

considered to have withdrawn from their program and will be eligible for reconsideration for admission.

2. Grades and Quality of Graduate Work

I. Academic Quality

Grades in graduate-level courses must be a “C” or higher (or receive a grade of “satisfactory” or its equivalent) to count toward degree requirements, **unless a graduate program specifies a more stringent minimum grade for courses. In such cases, students must meet the higher-grade requirement set by their program.** Independent of individual course grades, graduate students must maintain an overall GPA of at least 3.00 for courses counted toward their program (or if their program requires a higher minimum GPA, that program’s minimum GPA) to remain in good academic standing and to meet the minimum GPA required for degree conferral. If a program does not explicitly define overall GPA criteria, then cumulative GPA will be used.

In all cases, students must also meet the minimum credit requirements established by their program to earn the degree.

Students pursuing a graduate certificate or micro-credential must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.00 for courses counted toward their program (or, if higher, their program’s minimum GPA) to be eligible for award of the certificate/credential. This requirement also applies to undergraduate (i.e., 4000 level) courses that may be applied towards the graduate degree.

II. Academic Standing

To maintain satisfactory academic progress, advance to candidacy, and remain in good academic standing within a graduate degree program, students must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.00 for courses counted toward their program (or, if higher, their program’s minimum GPA).

III. Academic Probation

If a graduate student’s GPA as defined by their program falls below 3.00 for courses counted toward their program (or their program’s minimum GPA), they are placed on Academic Probation. This status serves as a warning that academic performance does not meet their program GPA requirements. If the student on academic probation achieves the required minimum GPA, they are cleared from probation. Failure to meet the required minimum GPA may result in academic suspension for a year.

Please note: If a graduate student on academic probation is not enrolled in any classes for three consecutive semesters, the student will no longer be an active student in their program and will be placed on academic suspension.

IV. Academic Suspension

Failure to remedy being placed on academic probation within the time limit established by the program may result in academic suspension for one year. During the suspension period, a

“suspension hold” will be placed on the student’s account, preventing enrollment in courses at any University of Colorado campus, including continuing education and extended studies.

Students placed on academic suspension may petition for readmission after a minimum of one year following the term in which they were suspended. Readmission is not guaranteed.

If a student cannot mathematically achieve the program’s required minimum GPA with the remaining required courses, the petition for readmission will not be approved—unless the school or college permits additional coursework to fulfill program requirements and raise the GPA to the required minimum.

Readmitted students must meet any updated admission requirements in effect at the time of readmission. Additionally, degree requirements for readmitted students will reflect requirements in effect at the time of readmission. Note that prior coursework might not meet updated degree requirements.

V. Course Repeat Policy

Students who receive a grade below a C in a required course in their graduate program must retake and repay the course to fulfill degree requirements. Successfully repeating the course does **not** remove the original grade from the transcript. Both the original and repeated grades will remain on the student’s academic record and will be calculated into the cumulative GPA.

Students are allowed no more than three attempts to pass a course (including withdrawals) without program approval.

VI. Incomplete Grades:

An Incomplete grade (“I”) may be assigned only when:

- 1) The coursework is 75% complete and the student can finish the remaining work without attending further lectures, and
- 2) The reason for not completing the remaining work is beyond the student’s control (e.g., illness, family emergency)
- 3) After 1 and 2 are satisfied, the student and faculty member must sign a contract outlining the plan and timeline for completing the outstanding work. Note: incompletes will only be resolved once the student meets the requirements of this plan

It is the student’s responsibility to contact the instructor to arrange completion of the coursework.

All “I” grades must be resolved within the contract period, which may not exceed one year. If the work is not completed within this timeframe, the “I” will automatically convert to an “F” grade, as processed by the Registrar’s Office.

If a student enters military service before completing a course and an “I” is reported, this grade may be carried on for the duration of the student's service, provided this service requirement has been communicated to the graduate program and the Registrar’s Office. If the military service happens early in the course (before 75%) the student will be allowed to drop with a “W” and be refunded their tuition and fees.

VII. In-Progress Grades

An In-Progress (IP) grade is assigned for thesis/project/dissertation or internship hours until the final approved thesis/project or dissertation grade is submitted to the Registrar’s Office.

III. Academic Progress and Continuation

1. Dismissal Based on Lack of Adequate Academic Progress

Note that this policy only applies to dismissal for academic progress reasons. Dismissal for professional misconduct or violations of academic integrity are covered in the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Graduate students are expected to maintain satisfactory academic progress toward completion of their degree or other credential. A student may be subject to dismissal if any of the following conditions occur:

- 1) The student’s GPA as defined by the program falls below 3.00 and its not mathematically possible for them to raise it based on remaining program requirements
- 2) The student fails the preliminary, comprehensive or final (thesis or dissertation) examination twice
- 3) The student does not complete degree requirements within the established time limit

I. Program Dismissal

Graduate students who fail to demonstrate satisfactory academic progress may be placed on academic probation. Programs must provide the student with a written notice that specifies the reason for probation (e.g., GPA below 3.00, failure of a required exam, or inadequate research progress) and the expectations for remediation. This notice should clearly outline the benchmarks the student must achieve, the timeframe in which they must be met, and the consequences of failing to do so, including potential dismissal. A copy of the probation notice and remediation plan must be shared with the student, the program director, the school or college, and the GSO. Students have the right to appeal probationary findings or outcomes through program-level review, and the decision must be documented and communicated to the student in writing within the established timeframe.

If a program determines that dismissal is warranted, the graduate program director will prepare a written recommendation for dismissal. This recommendation should summarize the basis for dismissal and prior evaluations of the student’s performance. A copy of the recommendation must

be provided to the student and forwarded to the school or college for approval, after which the school or college forwards the decision to the GSO.

II. Appeals Process

A student may appeal a dismissal recommendation. Appeals must be submitted in writing to the graduate program director within ten (10) working days of the student receiving the dismissal notice. The program will review the appeal and render a decision within a reasonable timeframe.

If the program upholds the dismissal after the appeal, the recommendation will proceed to the school or college for review. They will issue their decision in writing, with copies provided to the student, program director, and the GSO. Students have the option to appeal this decision to the GSO.

2. Graduate Degree Requirements

I. Transfer Credits

A transfer credit is any credit that a student earned at another accredited institution *outside* of the CU System. The maximum amount of transfer credits that may be applied toward a graduate degree at CU Denver is twelve (12) (or 40% if the program requires more than thirty (30) credits) for master's programs; nine (9) hours of coursework for the EdD Program; fifty (50) hours of coursework for the PsyD Program; and thirty (30) hours of coursework for PhD degree programs (individual programs may have more restrictive limits).

Coursework that has been applied towards an undergraduate degree or another graduate degree on the same level (e.g., MA to MS) **cannot** be accepted for transfer credit. Specifically, master's courses applied to one completed master's degree program may not be applied to another master's degree; however, graduate level coursework (5000 level or above) completed for a master's degree may be applied toward a doctoral degree with program approval. Also, credits earned in a graduate certificate program that have *not* also been applied to a graduate degree program may be applied to a graduate degree program with program consent.

To be eligible for transfer, courses must:

- be at the graduate level (5000 or above)
- have a letter grade (courses in which the grading is either satisfactory/unsatisfactory or pass/fail are not accepted, except for Spring/Summer terms 2020, for which a waiver was granted to this requirement)
- have a grade of C or higher (individual programs may impose a more stringent requirement);
- be validated by the program director if the credits were not earned within the last seven (7) years before applying to the degree program

- be transferred prior to the semester in which the student takes the doctoral comprehensive exam or master's final examination.

Graduate program directors, independently or in conjunction with other academic advisors, determine what courses will be accepted for transfer. Transfer credit requests must be accompanied by an official transcript with transcript key and credits that have been earned at a university that uses quarter credits will be converted to semester credits. International transfer credits require official translated transcripts *and* transcript evaluation from the Office of International Admissions. Credits can be transferred only after a student has established a satisfactory record of at least one term of enrollment at CU Denver or CU Anschutz with a minimum GPA of 3.00 for courses counted toward their program.

Resident Credits:

Credit hours earned within the CU System will *not* be subject to the policies of transfer credits. They are referred to as *resident credits* similar to those a student might have earned at CU as a non-degree seeking student. The maximum number of resident credits that can be adopted by a graduate degree program is decided by the program. Adopted resident credits count towards the student's program GPA.

II. Master's Degree (minimum requirements)

The minimum number of credit hours required for earning a master's degree is thirty (30). Many programs require more than 30 credits. If the program includes a thesis, research paper, capstone project or internship as the culminating requirement, the thesis/research paper must count for three to six (3-6) credits, unless specified otherwise by individual programs. These credits of thesis/research count toward the 30 total credits. Independent study coursework cannot exceed 20% of coursework required for the master's degree.

While it is expected that most of this coursework will be at the graduate level (5000 and above), some graduate programs may allow up to two 4000-level undergraduate courses (maximum of six [6] credits). Note that some approved dual degree programs allow for credits to be counted toward an undergraduate and graduate program, and those requirements will be defined by each program. Graduate level coursework from an earned doctoral degree may be applied toward a master's degree with program approval.

III. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Degree (minimum requirements)

The doctoral degree requires a minimum of sixty (60) credit hours. At least thirty (30) credits must be coursework; the rest must be dissertation/research credits as specified by the program.

While it is expected that most of this coursework will be at the graduate level (5000 and above), some graduate programs may allow up to two 4000-level undergraduate courses (maximum of six [6] credits). Note that some approved dual degree programs allow for credits to be counted toward an undergraduate and graduate program, and those requirements will be defined by each program.

Graduate-level coursework from an earned master's degree may be applied toward a doctoral degree with program approval.

IV. Professional/Doctorate Degrees (minimum requirements)

Note: We recommend that the graduate council provide a campus-level working definition for “professional” that must be inclusive of programs with CIP codes that are [recognized by the federal government as professional](#) for FAFSA-related policies.

A professional doctorate requires a minimum of fifty-four (54) credit hours, at least thirty (30) of which should be didactic/course-based credits. Individual programs may require more than this.

While it is expected that most of this coursework will be at the graduate level (5000 and above), some graduate programs may allow up to two 4000-level undergraduate courses (maximum of six [6] credits). Note that some approved dual degree programs allow for credits to be counted toward an undergraduate and graduate program, and those requirements will be defined by each program.

V. Requirements for Dual Master's Degrees

Students can pursue approved dual degrees as specified by their programs. Additionally, students can, with written permission of both degree programs, earn two graduate degrees concurrently outside of an approved dual-degree program. Policies and requirements for such combinations must be approved by the two programs through an official application to each school/college. The application must specify:

- 1) the conditions/courses that must be fulfilled to earn both degrees
- 2) that at least 50% of each program must be unique coursework that applies to only one degree
- 3) which of the credits will count towards both degrees

The minimum required credits for earning two master's degrees concurrently are 42 credits for programs requiring 30 credit hours, or more, if one or both of the individual master's programs require more than 30 credits for graduation.

VI. Time Limits for Completion of Degrees

Master's students, whether enrolled full-time or part-time, must complete all degree requirements within seven (7) calendar years of matriculation. This timeframe is also in effect for students pursuing dual degrees. Doctoral students, whether enrolled full-time or part-time, must complete all degree requirements within eight (8) calendar years of matriculation. Professional doctoral students, whether enrolled full-time or part-time, must complete all degree requirements within eight (8) calendar years of matriculation.

Time on any approved leave of absence does not count toward the time limit if the student is readmitted at a later date. Students who fail to complete the degree in the time specified are subject to termination from their program. For a student to continue beyond the prescribed time limit, they must apply for an extension with their program and their school and college. Rules about extensions may vary from program to program.

VII. Graduate Certificates and Microcredentials

Graduate Certificates require nine (9) or more course credits and do not require a cumulative examination, capstone project or thesis unless specified by the graduate program. Grades in all courses must be a “C” or better to count toward the certificate unless the program specifies a more stringent requirement. Students who want to earn concurrently two graduate certificates with overlapping course requirements may count only one course (maximally three credits) for both Graduate Certificates. There are no limitations for double-counting graduate certificates or microcredentials with degree programs. Students pursuing microcredentials must follow the policies outlined by the program.

IV. Examinations, Candidacy, and Graduation

1. Graduate Examinations and Committees

I. Master’s Degree Requirements

Master’s degree programs may require a final examination, a capstone project, or thesis defense as the culminating component of their program. (Some master’s programs may consist of only coursework.) The examination may take the form of a written, oral, or combined format as determined by the program.

If the program requires a committee for the assessment of the exam, capstone, or thesis, the committee must adhere to the following guidelines:

1. The examining committee shall consist of at least three (3) members of the graduate faculty of either CU Denver or CU Anschutz.
2. The committee chair shall be a regular graduate faculty member within the student’s home department or program.
3. To ensure independent evaluation of students’ examinations, no voting member of the committee should have undue influence over another member of the committee. Undue influence could include but is not limited to direct employment (e.g. a postdoc employed by a faculty member), familial relationships, or financial relationships. Any potential conflicts should be disclosed by committee members on the exam request form and considered in the approval process.
4. The composition of each committee shall be approved by the director of that graduate program prior to the examination.

5. In the event of an emergency that prevents one (1) faculty committee member from attending the exam, the exam may proceed with the faculty members who can attend, and the student will schedule a separate meeting with the absent faculty member at an alternate time.

A majority of the examination committee members must vote for one of the following examination outcomes: a) Pass; b) Conditional Pass; or c) Fail. In cases where the examination is a part of a course, the minimum required grade for passing a course is C. Programs may set a higher bar for passing. If a student receives a Conditional Pass, the examining committee will clearly define the requirements for the student to receive an unconditional passing grade and these requirements must be completed to the satisfaction of the examination committee within the time specified by the committee but no longer than four (4) months. Failure to satisfy these conditions will result in failure of the examination. At the program's discretion, failure of the exam can be cause for dismissal or a student may retake the examination up to one time. The results of each examination shall be submitted to the program director within ten (10) working days of completion. Programs shall maintain written documentation of examination outcomes and any required remedial actions. These should be forwarded to the school/college as well as the OGS.

II. Doctoral Degree Requirements (Excluding Professional Doctorate Degrees)

Each examination shall be administered under the supervision of an approved committee. Failure of any examination may result in one additional attempt, with approval of the program director. Doctoral students shall complete a minimum of the following two (2) formal examinations as part of degree progression (programs may require additional exams):

- 1) **Comprehensive Examination (or equivalent):** Assesses the student's conceptual understanding and preparation for advancement to candidacy. After completing or registering for all program-required, non-dissertation coursework, and concurrent with admission to candidacy, doctoral students must take a comprehensive examination in their respective discipline. This examination will test a student's mastery of a broad field of knowledge, not merely the formal coursework that has been completed. . Students may not participate in the comprehensive examination if on probation, i.e., if they have a GPA less than that required by the program.

If the program requires an oral component of the examination, at the program's discretion, the oral portion of the comprehensive examination may be open to all members of the program, after which the student shall meet with the examination committee in a closed session.

The examination committee shall consist of a minimum of three (3) Graduate Faculty members. A majority of the committee members, including the chair, must be members of the degree-granting program. Programs may impose more stringent requirements.

- 2) **Final Dissertation Defense:** A public defense of the completed dissertation. Each doctoral final dissertation defense shall be conducted by a committee of at least four (4) members of the Graduate Faculty. The chair of the committee shall be a regular Graduate Faculty member within the student's program. At least one (1) voting member should be outside of the student's department or program. A majority of the committee members shall hold regular Graduate Faculty appointments. Additional non-voting members may be added to provide specific expertise, with approval of the program director. Committee membership shall be reviewed and approved by the graduate program director prior to the examination.

A majority of the examination committee members must vote for one of the following examination outcomes: a) Pass; b) Conditional Pass; or c) Fail. If a student receives a Conditional Pass, the examining committee will clearly define the requirements for the student to receive an unconditional passing grade and these requirements must be completed to the satisfaction of the examination committee within the time specified by the committee but no longer than four (4) months. Failure to satisfy these conditions will result in failure of the examination. At the program's discretion, failure of the exam can be cause for dismissal or a student may retake the examination up to one time. The results of each examination shall be submitted to the program director within ten (10) working days of completion. Programs shall maintain written documentation of examination outcomes and any required remedial actions.

2. Professional Degree Requirements

I. Master's Degree

After completing or registering for all program-required coursework, students must file an Intent to Graduate with the Registrar's Office no later than the posted deadline for the term in which they intend to graduate. Programs must confirm that students intending to graduate a) meet the GPA requirements of the program, and b) are compliant with the program curriculum.

II. Doctoral Degree

Professional doctoral degree programs do not require a preliminary or comprehensive examination. After completing or registering for all program-required coursework and the capstone/dissertation defense, students must file an Intent to Graduate form with the Registrar's Office no later than the posted deadline for the term in which they intend to graduate. Programs must confirm that students intending to graduate a) meet the requirements of the program GPA, and b) are compliant with the program curriculum.

If professional doctorate students must complete either a dissertation, project or internship, or both, the capstone event can be composed of a written document as well as an oral presentation and following defense. The examining committee should be composed of at least three members

with graduate faculty appointments, including the chair who should have a regular graduate faculty appointment. If the primary mentor for research or scholarship is not a CU Denver or CU Anschutz faculty member or otherwise cannot hold a regular graduate faculty appointment, that person can co-chair the examining committee with a regular graduate faculty appointee. To ensure independent evaluation of students' examinations, no voting member of the committee should have undue influence over another member of the committee. Undue influence could include, but is not limited to, direct employment (e.g. a postdoc employed by a faculty member), familial relationships, and financial relationships. Any potential conflicts should be disclosed by committee members.

The student's final examination/defense committee and the examination schedule must be approved by the program director before being submitted to the GSO on the Exam Request Form. The GSO must receive the Exam Request form by published deadlines. Graduate programs may have additional requirements for registering/scheduling the exam. The Exam Report/signature form will be sent to the committee chair and other program staff for completion at the examination.

The student must submit finalized draft copies of the dissertation or project report to the defense committee at least two (2) weeks before the examination date. Programs/committees may require an earlier deadline.

The student and all members of the committee must be present for the examination, either in person or by interactive video. The primary faculty advisor's participation is determined by the program, if that person is not already part of the committee. In the event of an emergency that prevents one (1) faculty committee member from attending the exam, the exam can proceed with the faculty members who can attend, and the student will schedule a separate meeting with the absent faculty member and the exam committee chair at an alternate time. If the original committee chair must be absent, a replacement must be designated by the program. A majority of the examination committee must vote for one of the following outcomes: a) Pass; b) Conditional Pass; or c) Fail. All members of the committee must sign the exam report form to document their individual vote, and the form, with original signatures, must be returned to the Graduate Education Office in hard copy or high-quality scan.

If a student receives a Conditional Pass, the examining committee must clearly define the requirements for the student to receive an unconditional passing grade, and these requirements must be completed to the satisfaction of the examination committee within sixty (60) days of the defense. Under extenuating circumstances, the graduate program directors may petition the Graduate Education Office for additional time. If a student fails the examination, they may not continue in the program unless a time extension is supported by the program in writing.

Question 2: What administrative structure should oversee and coordinate CU Denver graduate education operations?

Prior to exiting the Graduate School in 2022, Denver campus graduate programs could elect to participate with the Graduate School playing an active role in their operations. Programs with outside accreditation or license from state or other governmental agencies were given the option to waive participation with the Graduate School and administer their programs directly supported by faculty and staff in their school/college.

After 2022, it became evident that this history had resulted in different levels of available support for graduate programs, with some schools/colleges maintaining larger and more comprehensive administrative supports and others relying on centralized support. Furthermore, in the absence of a well-defined central office, how various administrative functions were conducted became unclear and units often devised their own administrative workarounds to continue to conduct business. Some personnel were moved to areas like Admissions, and some central offices (e.g., the Registrar) took on additional administrative and record-keeping responsibilities.

Ambiguities remain regarding what central body (if any) coordinates graduate programs, ensures accountability for the work being done within policy and in consideration of various rules and regulations, and provides feedback and assistance to students and other decision-makers. For this reason, we were asked to consider what structure should be created to oversee graduate education, what should the mission/goals of this office be, and what areas of operation should the office have responsibility over?

Our recommendations are organized to cover three areas:

- 1) The structure, mission and responsibilities of the Graduate Studies Office (GSO)
- 2) The configuration and responsibilities of Graduate Council
- 3) The rules and procedures governing appointment to Graduate Faculty

To accomplish this work, we 1) consulted archival information related to CU Denver's previous structures and processes for governing graduate education; 2) researched and assembled information available publicly from 18 colleges/universities that included those CU Denver defines as comparable urban research universities as well as in-state institutions; 3) consulted [the CGS report](#); and 4) reflected on information provided related to how various schools/colleges used central graduate education services, where available.

In consideration of this evidence, we conducted an exercise that involved spelling out tasks, processes, and policies involved in delivering graduate programs, and for each of these, defined:

- Who is responsible and accountable for each activity
- If different, who implements each activity
- Who monitors and assesses each activity

- Who maintains records related to each activity

We also noted, where possible, central administrative offices that support each activity, though this portion of the table is likely incomplete. A table that was produced from this activity is included as an appendix to this section of the report.

It is important to stress that we tried to be careful in describing as specifically as possible what a central Graduate Studies Office, its leader, and Graduate Council would be *responsible* for versus activities or areas in which they may offer *assistance or support* for academic or administrative units that rely on this support or seek to augment their own capacities. The first sentence of our recommendations reads: *The primary responsibility for creation, delivery, evaluation and improvement of graduate programs rests with the schools and colleges offering graduate education*, reflecting our understanding that, when plausible, decisions about academic oversight are best made as close as possible to the delivery of instruction.

In this regard, there are activities we enumerate for a central office that amount to *coordinating, monitoring or recording* activities as needed for accountability and efficiency purposes, rather than being responsible and accountable for decisions related to those activities. These coordination and oversight functions are critical in a largely decentralized enterprise to ensure that business is conducted legally, effectively, and equitably, while not placing an overly bureaucratic burden on academic units.

It also deserves to be said that what follows, if supported, will need to be operationalized in processes and procedures that we neither envisioned nor defined, save for our belief that everything we include can and ought to be enacted.

I. Graduate Studies Office (GSO)¹

1.1 GSO Overview

The primary responsibility for creation, delivery, evaluation and improvement of graduate programs should rest with the schools and colleges offering graduate education.

The GSO exists to facilitate and support the delivery and continuous improvement of graduate education, and advocates for graduate programs throughout the university: including, but not limited to, by procuring resources needed to support excellence in graduate education and to promote the interests of graduate faculty and students.

The GSO with the Graduate Council provides leadership in strategic planning for graduate education, establishes and maintains policy and standards related to graduate education, works to

¹ We are recommending the name Graduate Studies Office to differentiate from the prior name. We considered and are open to a variety of alternatives.

enhancing the visibility of graduate education at the university, and supports the marketing and growth of graduate programs.

1.2 GSO Office Leader²

The GSO will be administered by an individual in a CU Denver faculty position serving in an administrative capacity, appointed by and reporting to the provost. Further dialogue will occur before the provost determines prior to GSO implementation whether this individual will hold a dean, director, or AVC title.

The office leader shall promote and maintain high standards of scholarship in graduate education; promote and encourage continuous improvement and interdisciplinary efforts in graduate education; encourage differing perspectives, abilities, cultures, and experiences among all students and faculty; and inform the university community of local and national issues of import to graduate education. As the chief administrative officer of the GSO, this individual shall:

- Enforce university policies regarding graduate education
- Following consultation with the Graduate Council, make recommendations to the provost concerning new graduate programs, substantive changes in existing graduate programs, implementation of changes in graduate programs recommended through program reviews, and deletion of graduate programs
- Participate in or conduct reviews of graduate programs in collaboration with other appropriate college and university offices
- Recommend budgets to provide funding for operation of the GSO
- With the Graduate Council, facilitate interdisciplinary graduate programs that do not otherwise have an administrative unit base and assist graduate faculty who wish to explore establishment of interdisciplinary graduate programs
- Serve as an *ex officio* member of the Graduate Council
- Support programs and schools/colleges and oversee GSO efforts to promote and facilitate all facets of graduate education
- Serve other roles normally expected of a chief administrative officer for graduate education
- Assume other duties as assigned by the provost
- Assume duties appropriate to fostering and promoting high-quality graduate education at the university, including appointing and charging committees of graduate faculty to examine issues germane to graduate education

1.3 Graduate Studies Office Responsibilities

Administered by the GSO leader, the GSO is the administrative office that assists in promoting and maintaining high standards of scholarship and encourages continuous improvement in graduate

education. The GSO leader and office advocate for graduate programs and students across administrative functions. The GSO functions are enumerated below:

Admissions

- GSO will support as needed programs' recruitment, marketing, and admissions.
- GSO will advocate for and support the award of scholarships offered as part of admissions from campuswide sources.

Programs and Curriculum

- GSO will advocate for and support programs and schools/colleges that are creating or amending degree programs, certificates, or micro-credentials.
- GSO will advocate for and support cross-program collaboration to promote the development and implementation of interdisciplinary curricula.
- GSO will identify skills and support programs for graduate faculty as well as student professional and lifelong learning.
- GSO will establish and maintain a document repository (following CGS guidance) in which programs, schools, and colleges specify any additional requirements. (Note: The CU Denver graduate course catalog is the appropriate venue for this repository).

Courses

- GSO assists schools/colleges as needed with collecting and recording updates to the graduate course catalog and ensuring that websites and pages are amended in a timely fashion.

Student Affairs

- GSO monitors and records decisions made at the program/unit level related to probation, reinstatement or dismissal, withdrawals from programs, registration holds, leaves of absence, unresolved appeals, and time extensions.
- As needed by programs/schools/colleges, GSO will assist and advise prospective students on appropriate programs of study.
- As needed by programs/schools/colleges, GSO will assist and advise students related to career opportunities and internships.
- GSO will advocate for graduate students and work with relevant offices to provide high-quality services to graduate students related to counseling and wellness, career planning and services, academic supports (e.g., writing), student organizations, housing, experiential learning/study abroad, teaching preparation (for PhD students), and English-language proficiency.

Academic Affairs

- GSO maintains a record of graduate faculty eligibility and is responsible for maintaining a central roster of graduate faculty appointments and for ensuring that appointments are made with fidelity.

- GSO records and maintains a record of examinations scheduled (comps, defenses).
- GSO provides exam committee chairs an exam report form prior to comprehensive exams, thesis/dissertation/capstone defenses; receives, reviews, and records results of exams; and processes same with the registrar for inclusion in student records.
- GSO serves as a central repository for course substitution/waiver information when approved by programs.
- GSO maintains a record of successful degree audits or reviews affirming students' eligibility to graduate from degree programs or certificates and facilitates provision of this information for commencement.
- GSO ensures students receive support related to thesis/dissertation formatting and review for ProQuest submission.

Program Management

- GSO facilitates efforts and supports programs' efforts to bolster retention and completion.
- GSO monitors and keeps a record of third-party contracts and agreements related to graduate education and may, when appropriate, serve as signatory for MOUs and partnership agreements.³
- GSO serves as a central repository for partnerships and community engagement efforts related to graduate education.
- GSO facilitates the collection of student exit survey data, facilitates alumni relations, and promotes alumni affinity to the university.

II. Graduate Council

2.1 Graduate Council Overview

The Graduate Council advises the GSO leader and provost as needed on matters associated with graduate education, including but not limited to strategic planning, policy and standards, and resolution of disputes and appeals.

Graduate Council has responsibility (enumerated below) in the areas of graduate curricula and degree programs, policy revision and oversight, promoting student retention and completion, and promoting continuous improvement of graduate programs.

2.2 Graduate Council Meetings

The Graduate Council shall meet at least monthly during the academic year. An agenda for each meeting will be created and distributed by the Graduate Council chairperson at least one calendar week prior to each meeting and shall include time for each Graduate Council standing and ad hoc committee to report its activities.

³ It is unclear to us whether serving as a signatory is either permitted or necessary.

2.3 Graduate Council Membership

Graduate Council shall be composed of program representatives from across the schools and colleges. The GSO leader and registrar shall serve as an *ex-officio* (non-voting) members of the Graduate Council.

Academic units will determine eligibility for their own members' service on the Graduate Council. Members are elected or appointed to three-year terms⁴ by their school/college in alignment with that unit's bylaws. [Terms will be staggered initially.] Graduate Council members may serve two consecutive terms, and past members may not be reelected or reappointed before one year has passed since their last appointment. If a vacancy occurs during a member's term, the academic unit shall elect/appoint a replacement within one month of the vacancy to serve out the term.

2.4 Graduate Council Committees

The Graduate Council will elect a chair and vice-chair initially to a one-year term, and a vice-chair annually thereafter who will serve as chair the year following their service as vice-chair. The chair is responsible for creating and distributing agendas prior to meetings, facilitating Graduate Council meetings, and generally supporting the work of Graduate Council and its committees.

The Graduate Council will have several standing committees described below and may authorize the appointment of ad hoc committees to deal with various matters that are relevant to graduate education. At least one member of the Graduate Council will be on each ad hoc committee. The GSO leader appoints members to serve on these committees.

Each member of Graduate Council will serve on one standing committee. Graduate Council will have the following standing committees that will meet at least monthly during the academic year:

- Membership and Student Financial Awards Committee
 - Review, at least every five (5) years, the criteria and procedures for graduate faculty membership
 - Review, at least every five (5) years, GSO/Graduate Council charge and responsibilities
 - Review and recommend GSO financial awards/scholarships to students
 - Review and recommend GSO travel awards to students
- Graduate Curriculum Committee
 - Provide consultation on any budget matter that may affect delivery of graduate curriculum
 - Participate in review of graduate programs

⁴ Three-year terms are intended to allow for acclimation to Graduate Council and to provide continuity. Whether members can serve consecutive terms is intended to balance expertise with (varied) voice.

- Review and make recommendations related to the approval of new or revised courses or programs recommended by school/college curriculum committees⁵
- Promote the creation and implementation of interdisciplinary programs
- Student Affairs Committee
 - Resolve appeals not settled at the school/college level including, but not limited to, grade appeals, appeals on holds, appeals on conduct issues, etc.
 - Sponsor and promote workshops for graduate faculty and students
 - Sponsor graduate student and faculty events including but not limited to Three-Minute Thesis competitions, student & faculty awards ceremony, etc.

2.5 Graduate Council Responsibilities

Programs and Curriculum

- As needed, Graduate Council will assist programs, schools/colleges that are creating or amending degree programs, certificates, or microcredentials
- As needed, Graduate Council is responsible for reviewing proposals for new or revised certificates, microcredentials and degree programs to ensure nonredundancy with existing offerings⁶

Student Affairs

- Graduate Council is responsible for reviewing appeals that are unresolved at the primary academic unit level after review at the program or school/college levels
- Graduate Council is responsible for adjudicating and helping to settle unresolved complaints and appeals related to student and faculty conduct, ethical conduct of research, conflict of interest, and risk management.

Academic Affairs

- Graduate Council determines criteria for graduate faculty appointments

III. Graduate Faculty

3.1 Graduate Faculty Overview

Members of the CU Denver Graduate Faculty are those faculty members who are engaged in graduate education and who serve in a faculty role where qualifications and job duties defined by CU System [Administrative Policy Statement 5060](#) and include tenured, tenure-track, or IRC faculty who are active in scholarship or professional or creative activities in the disciplines in which they teach and supervise graduate students. Graduate faculty members are responsible for the development, execution, and review of graduate programs and, through representation on the Graduate Council, the recommendation of policy on all graduate education matters at CU Denver. Appointment as a graduate faculty member is required in order to serve as the mentor or primary academic advisor of a graduate student; to serve on a thesis, dissertation, or examination

⁵ See earlier comment related to UCC.

⁶ See earlier comment related to UCC responsibilities.

committee; to be instructor of record for graduate-level (including cross-listed) courses; or to serve as a program or course director.

This [linked matrix](#) denotes qualifications for all faculty titles described in APS 5060. Faculty hired into these positions are automatically appointed as graduate faculty by the dean of their home academic unit. The Graduate Council coordinates with schools and colleges annually to maintain a list of all graduate faculty appointments.

Graduate faculty members maintain their appointments for the duration of their contracts, provided they meet the terms and conditions of their contract or, in the case of tenure-track or tenured faculty, meet their home department standards for reappointment or for successful post-tenure review, respectively. Those who do not meet department standards or the terms of their contract may have their graduate faculty status revoked by the dean of their home academic unit as recommended by the department chair or graduate program director during the time of remediation, and in such instances must satisfy the terms and conditions set forth by the department before they may be reinstated as graduate faculty.

3.2 Emeritus, Retired, or Former Graduate Faculty as Thesis, Dissertation, or Capstone Project Committee Chairs

Emeritus, retired, or former faculty from CU Denver are permitted, with the approval of the program faculty, to chair graduate thesis, dissertation, or project committees, based on the emeritus, retired, or former faculty's expertise and knowledge in the discipline that aligns with the student's area of research. Thesis or dissertation chairs who leave CU Denver but who have been serving as a chair on a student's committee may remain in the chair role, with program approval, to provide the graduate student with consistent academic supervision of their research.

Appendix to Section 2: Graduate Program Responsibilities/Activities

- Graduate Studies Organization (GSO)
 - Admin (GSO)
 - Grad council (GC)
- School/College (S/C)
 - Dean or designee (S/CD)
 - Faculty (S/CF)
 - Staff (S/CS)
 - Program (PG)
- UnivOffice (UO)

| | Responsible | Implements | Monitors | Records | Assists |
|--|---------------|-------------|----------|---------|----------|
| Recruitment and marketing | UO / PG | UO | S/CD | S/CS | UO, S/CS |
| Admissions | | | | | |
| Support enrollment marketing and digital campaigns | GSO; S/C | UO | S/C | | |
| Admit/deny | PG | PG | S/C | UO | |
| Provisional/conditional admit | PG S/C | S/C | S/C | UO | |
| Deferrals | S/C | S/C | S/C | UO | |
| Transfer evaluation | PG; S/C; UO | PG; S/C; UO | S/C | UO | |
| Intl students | PG; S/C; UO | PG; UO | UO | UO | UO |
| Orientation | S/C | S/C | GSO | -- | UO |
| Financial aid | UO | UO | S/CS | | UO |
| Financial awards | S/C | S/C | UO | UO | |
| Scholarships | GSO & S/C | GSO & S/C | GSO | | UO |
| Programs/Curriculum | | | | | |
| Creation of programs | S/CF; GC; GSO | S/CF | S/C | S/C; UO | GSO/GC |
| Amendments | S/CF; GC; GSO | S/CF | S/C | UO | GSO/GC |
| Non-redundancy of programs/courses | GC | GC; S/C | GC/GSO | UO | |
| Coordination/collaboration | GC; GSO | GSO/PG | GSO | | |
| Viability, continuation | S/CD; GSO | PG | UO | UO | UO |
| | | | | | |

| | Responsible | Implements | Monitors | Records | Assists |
|---|--------------|--------------|----------|---------|---------|
| Courses | | | | | |
| Efficiency decisions (build/cancel) | S/C | PG | S/C | UO | |
| Assigning instructors | S/C | PG | S/C | UO | |
| Rooming/campus scheduling | UO | UO | S/C | UO | |
| Course creation, amendments | S/CF | PG | S/C | UO | |
| Program redundancy review | GC | GC | GSO | GSO | UO |
| Catalog updates comms/web | S/C | PG | GSO; UO | UO; GSO | UO; GSO |
| Student affairs | | | | | |
| Programs of study | PG | PG | S/C | | |
| Probation | S/C | PG | GSO | UO; GSO | UO |
| Withdraw/retroactive withdraw | PG; S/C | S/C | GSO | UO | UO |
| Dismissal | PG; S/C | S/C | GSO | UO | |
| Reinstatements | PG | S/C | GSO | UO | UO |
| Advising (program selection) | S/C; GSO | S/C; GSO | S/C | UO | UO |
| Career services and internships | GSO; S/C | | | | |
| Holds | UO | UO; S/C | GSO | UO; S/C | S/C; PG |
| Leaves of absence | PG | S/C | GSO | UO | |
| Appeals | S/C; GC | S/C; GSO | S/C; GSO | GSO | UO |
| Time extensions | PG | S/C | GSO | UO | UO |
| Counseling and wellness services | UO | UO | GSO | UO | |
| Complaints and appeals (student conduct, faculty conduct & ethical conduct of research/COI/risk management) | GC; GSO; S/C | S/C, GSO, UO | UO | GSO | UO; S/C |
| Student orgs/student life/housing & dining | UO | UO; GSO; S/C | GSO | ? | |
| Experiential learning & study abroad | UO; PG | UO; GSO | GSO | UO | |

| | Responsible | Implements | Monitors | Records | Assists |
|---|-------------|--------------|----------|---------------|---------------|
| Disability resources and supports | UO | UO; GSO; S/C | GSO | UO | |
| Tutoring, English language proficiency, learning and peer supports, writing | UO | UO; GSO | GSO | GSO | GSO advocates |
| Teaching/pedagogy training (PhD only) | UO; S/C; GC | UO; S/C | GSO | ? | CETL; CFDA |
| Academic affairs | | | | | |
| Grad faculty eligibility | GC | S/C | S/C | GSO | |
| Grad faculty appointment | GSO | S/C | GSO | GSO | |
| Scheduling exams | PG | PG | S/C | PG -> GSO | |
| Exam outcomes reporting | PG | GSO | GSO | GSO -> UO | |
| Defense committees | PG | PG | S/C | PG -> GSO | |
| Exam criteria/processes | PG | PG | S/C | PG -> GSO | |
| HLC/program outcomes reporting | GSO; UO | GSO; UO | S/C; UO | PG -> GSO; UO | |
| Learning outcome assessment | PG | PG | S/C | PG -> GSO | |
| Degree audit (grad) | UO | UO | PG | PG -> GSO | |
| Commencement | UO | UO | UO; GSO | -- | S/C |
| Transfer of credit | GSO; UO | GSO; UO | S/C; PG | UO | |
| Course subst/waiver | PG | PG | S/C | GSO; UO | |
| Program switch / transfer | PG | PG | PG | GSO; PG | S/C |
| Thesis/diss format approval and Proquest mgmt | GSO; UO | GSO; UO | GSO | PG; GSO | |
| Program Management | | | | | |
| Appoint program director | S/C | S/C | S/C | | |
| Comms and marketing/ website/Current student newsletter | S/C | S/CS; PG | S/C | S/CS | |
| Academic Advising | S/C; PG | PG | S/C | S/C | |

| | Responsible | Implements | Monitors | Records | Assists |
|---|--------------|------------|------------------|----------|---------|
| Career coaching/ placements | S/C; PG | S/C; GSO | S/C | S/CS | GSO |
| Retention programs and efforts | ALL | S/C; GSO | GSO | S/C; GSO | |
| Program committee meetings | PG | PG | S/C | PG | |
| 3 rd party agreements for services or instruction | S/C or PG | S/CD | UO; GSO | S/C | |
| Negotiate and sign MOUs / partnership agreements | S/C or PG | S/CD | S/CD; UO; GSO | S/CS | |
| Community and alumni engagement | GSO; S/C; PG | S/C | GSO | S/C | |

Question 3: What policies and procedures should guide graduate student employment and tuition remission?

The following recommendations propose guidelines and policies to facilitate tax-free tuition remission payments for graduate students who perform teaching or research activities for the university. The recommendations are informed by 1) data that reflect current practices; 2) financial capacities and hiring needs at CU Denver; and 3) practices at other public PhD-granting campuses in Colorado, which remit tuition and fees as financial aid for graduate students hired into teaching or research assistantship contracts between 0.25 and 0.5 FTE. We compared our practices with public PhD-granting campuses in Colorado, rather than peer institutions in other states, because public universities in Colorado receive similar comparatively low levels of state funding as compared with peers in other states, and so are all subject to a similar narrow range of fiscal flexibility. Based on current practices, the estimated annual cost would be ~\$900,000, or about 1.6% of the total graduate tuition revenue in AY 2024-25. (Note: a portion of this sum is already being paid by academic units through internal sources.)

CU Denver is the only public, PhD-granting campus in Colorado without a tuition remission policy. All others (Northern Colorado, Colorado State, Colorado School of Mines, CU Anschutz, CU Boulder, and UCCS) have campuswide policies that allow tuition remission to be paid as part of teaching and research assistantships. The Internal Revenue Code ([CFR § 200.466\(b\)\(2\)](#)) permits payment of graduate tuition remission from federal awards only if provided according to a written policy that establishes consistent practices for such payments from any source.

The decentralized funding approach to graduate student appointments prevents optimal decisions for the use of centrally available funds. We therefore recommend transitioning to a process that improves central understanding and oversight over the next two to three years. This will improve consistency and equity in appointing graduate student assistants across academic units in three ways:

- It will provide central oversight of aggregate FTE loads
- It will standardize campuswide pay ranges for similar teaching and research activities
- It will create a campuswide tuition remission policy that can be integrated into the annual budgeting process

We recommend using the \$1.5 million committed by the Provost's Office (over three years from FY26 to FY28) as one-time money allocated toward graduate education activities to help offset costs for this transition.

As part of the deliberation in response to CGS recommendation 2.1.4 (to “immediately develop a university-wide policy on tuition remission”), our working group considered three models:

- 1) The first was the status quo; namely, no remission policy.

- 2) The second has been discussed off and on in recent years; namely, to provide full tuition remission for all PhD students through means that effectively create a permanent budget cut to offer free PhD programs.
- 3) The third is modeled after policies at research institutions in Colorado and across the country; namely, to expect some level of tuition remission as part of graduate student assistantships, especially for teaching and research appointments.

The first two models represent the extreme ends of a possible tuition remission policy: either making remission entirely at the discretion of programs that must be self-funded or providing full remission for all PhD students from shared university funds. Neither of these models were considered feasible. The former case was ruled out because of the provost's preference, federal regulations that would preclude paying tuition from federal grants, and the competitive disadvantage it creates. The latter case was ruled out because of financial limitations. We describe these two options in the interest of transparency and indicate that they were briefly considered before dismissing them.

The third model is a tuition remission policy that applies only to graduate student assistantships held by students who are enrolled full time in academic (research thesis-based) graduate programs. Qualifying positions include graduate teaching assistantships (GTA, job code 1506), graduate part-time instructorships (GPTI, job code 1503), and graduate research assistantships (GRA, job code 1505). This model 1) brings the university into compliance with all federal laws and regulations; 2) moves us toward consistency across academic graduate programs; 3) aligns with the university's current financial capabilities; and 4) enables programs to offer competitive assistantship packages to recruit and retain high-quality students therefore fulfilling the university's research mission and raising its national profile.

Model three represents a reasonable first step toward developing a more comprehensive student funding plan, as described in CGS recommendation 2.1.1, to "begin development of a comprehensive plan to increase competitiveness of graduate student funding that is aligned with [strategic] goals and enrollment plans." Realizing a more comprehensive plan to create competitive graduate funding packages that align with strategic goals is still some time away. The policies herein represent an important and essential starting point, however. Any subsequent phase of planning initiatives should aim to extend beyond assistantships to identify opportunities for scholarships, fellowships, training grants, and loan programs.

As a result of reviewing current practices for hiring graduate students into teaching and research positions across campus, the working group came to appreciate and strongly agree with CGS recommendation 2.1.3: "immediately develop a central mechanism for reviewing and approving (central administrator level, not HR) graduate student appointment forms." Because CU Denver lacks a tuition remission policy, schools, colleges, and programs have varied widely in their solutions to financially support graduate students in academic programs. For example, wages for CU Denver teaching and research assistantships (prorated to 0.50 FTE equivalencies) vary across

and within schools and colleges, ranging from an apparent maximum \$6,853/month, through an apparent median \$2,209/month, down to an apparent minimum \$1,341.82/month, which prorates to \$15.27/hr. By comparison, campus-wide minimum wages (at 0.5 FTE equivalencies) for other public PhD-granting campuses in Colorado are publicly discoverable as \$1,922/month for Colorado State University; \$2,904.67/month for University of Colorado Boulder; and \$3,166.67/month for Colorado School of Mines. Further, of the 482 graduate students employed by CU Denver in fall 2024, 57% received some level of tuition remission in addition to wages from a range of sources. The proportion of students receiving remission within a specific job code varied from 40% to 78%, with 63% of CU Denver degree-seeking graduate students with teaching or research assistantships in Fall 2024 having received some level of tuition remission in addition to wages. Approximately 10% of students with teaching or research assistantships held more than one assistantship, and in some cases appeared to have been hired at up to 1.15 FTE in aggregate (2.3 times the maximum amount recommended).

Whereas this report section summarizes relevant data to establish the need for centralized coordination on graduate student appointments, it does not provide specific recommendations on the structure for such, as we have not had time to consult with staff and other stakeholders to identify institutional capacity and potential costs.

Proposal: Graduate Student Employment and Tuition Remission

Students enrolled full-time during the academic year and in good standing within a qualifying academic graduate degree-granting program are eligible for graduate assistantships that include tuition remission (GTA, job code 1506; GPTI, job code 1503; GRA, job code 1505). The set of qualifying programs in which students must be enrolled, and the availability of eligible teaching and research assistantships, are determined and maintained as written policy within each school or college and reported to the GSO.

Graduate student assistantships are expected to meet minimum wage requirements (for City of Denver) and maximum workload requirements (0.5 FTE in aggregate). Workloads should be based on hours per week for all the work required of the position rather than on the number of credits taught. Hourly-equivalent compensation for the same position may vary upwards according to written policies specific to each school or college, but not within individual programs. A centralized review and approval process for graduate appointments within and across schools and colleges should be established to verify compliance with the workload and wage limits described above and with the tuition remission benefits described below; approval is expected for all necessary and compliant appointments.

Assistantships for teaching (GTA, GPTI) and for research (GRA) contracted at the 0.25 FTE or 0.5 FTE level are eligible for tuition remission; assistantships contracted at other levels are ineligible. Graduate administrative assistantships (GA) and other appointments (e.g. hourly appointments, adjunct lecturer) are likewise ineligible for tuition remission.

Tuition remission, when granted as part of a graduate appointment, is considered financial aid. It is awarded specifically to aid the student in their pursuit of studies and is paid independent of wages. Because tuition remission is therefore not conditioned on the student providing any services to the university, it is not expected to be classified as taxable compensation as per federal regulations.

Because 0.5 FTE is the maximum employment level for contracted assistantships, 100% tuition remission is expected for qualifying GRA/GTA/GPTI appointments at 0.5 FTE. For qualifying appointments at 0.25 FTE, a minimum of 50% remission is expected. For any combination of two qualifying 0.25 FTE contracts, 100% remission is expected. Tuition for regular course credits and mandatory fees are eligible for remission. Extended study credits and fees (D2, D3) are ineligible.

Budget Process: Teaching Assistantships and Part-Time Instructorships

As part of the annual budgeting process, each school and college estimates the proportion of graduate student-assisted instructional needs that will be met by remission-eligible contracted graduate teaching assistantships (GTA, job code 1506) and graduate part time teaching instructors (GPTI, job code 1503) as described in their written policies for hiring graduate students to teach (e.g. enrollment limits that justify hiring a TA). The aggregate FTE is partitioned into units of 0.25, which comprise the total number of remission-qualifying positions. The estimated cost for GTA/GPTI wages for any upcoming academic year derives from that instructional need. The estimated cost for remission is based on 50% of the cost for the average per-semester credit load carried by all GTA/GPTI in that school or college from the previous year. The sum of estimated wages and tuition remission is allocated to each school or college's instructional budget to cover the total costs for using GTA/GPTI to help meet graduate student-assisted instructional needs according to the written policy for that school or college for the upcoming AY. Any academic unit that wants to cover >50% remission for stand-alone 0.25 FTE GTA/GPTI contracts should do so from independent funding sources.

Budget Process: Research Assistantships

For remission-qualifying research assistantships (GRA, job code 1505), principal investigators are expected to provide tuition remission at the resident rate as part of the employment contract according to the specifics listed above ($\geq 50\%$ remission for 0.25 FTE; 100% remission for 0.5 FTE appointments). Any required nonresident tuition differential is expected to be paid from funds held centrally [by the GSO] in two cases: first, domestic nonresident graduate students contracted as GRA at 0.5 FTE with resident tuition remission can expect the nonresident differential to be paid during the first year only; if the student does not establish Colorado residency by the start of their second year working as GRA, the PI and/or student are responsible for the differential. Second, international graduate students contracted as GRA at 0.5 FTE with resident tuition remission can expect the nonresident differential to be paid by centrally held funds for all academic year semesters when they are hired as GRA at 0.5 FTE with resident tuition remission.

Data and Estimated Costs for Tuition Remission Budget

The data in this section derive from CU-SIS, HR, and Bursar records for all graduate students enrolled in degree-seeking programs during fall 2024, the most recent term for which we had complete information. The headcounts and FTE in this section focus on students hired into job codes 1503 (GPTI), 1505 (GRA) and 1506 (GTA) only. They do not focus on students who were performing teaching or research activities for the university, but who were hired using other job codes. As schools and colleges transition to using job codes GTA and GPTI for graduate student-assisted instruction and GRA for graduate student research, we expect the number of assistantships to increase.

In fall 2024, the university hired 186 students as GTAs, including 96 (52%) that received tuition remission; of the 31 students hired as GPTIs, 24 (77%) received tuition remission; of the 143 students hired as GRAs, 105 (74%) received tuition remission; and of 122 students hired using job codes other than above, 49 (40%) received tuition remission. Tables 1 and 2 provide summaries for fall 2024 employment and AY 2025-26 costs for tuition and fees, respectively. These data can be used to illustrate the budgeting process for the proposed tuition remission policy.

Teaching – The budgeting process for estimating centralized tuition remission costs for GTA/GPTI would be to first calculate the number of 0.25 FTE positions required based on hiring patterns in the previous year. For example, if we assume the total FTE hired in spring 2025 was the same as fall 2024, that gives 116 FTE, or 464 positions at 0.25 FTE each for the academic year. Next, calculate 50% of the tuition and fees for the average enrollment level for students in GTA (6.7) and GPTI (4.0) roles and the average cost per credit for tuition and fees, and assuming the ratio of resident to non-resident GTAs/GPTIs as the basis for estimating average cost mixtures. Using the data in tables 1 and 2, the estimated annual cost for remission would be ~\$623,500 for GTAs and ~\$45,000 for GPTIs, for a total of ~\$668,500 for all teaching positions. (Note: as mentioned above, a portion of this sum is already being paid by academic units through internal sources.)

Research – The budgeting process for estimating centralized tuition remission costs for GRA non-resident premiums would be to first calculate the number of 0.5 FTE nonresident positions required based on hiring patterns in the previous year. For example, assume the total FTE hired in spring 2025 was the same as fall 2024 to get 92 FTE, or 184 positions at 0.5 FTE each. Next, calculate the nonresident tuition differential for the average enrollment level for students in GRA roles (7.1) and assume the ratio of resident to non-resident GRAs as the basis for estimating the proportion requiring non-resident buydown. Using the data summaries in tables 1 and 2, the estimated annual cost for nonresident tuition buydown for GRAs would be ~\$228,000. (Note: as mentioned above, a portion of this sum is already being paid by academic units through internal sources.)

Table 1. Summary HR and enrollment data for graduate student teaching and research assistantships contracted for the Fall 2024 semester.

| Assistantships for Fall 2024 | GTA (job code 1506) | GPTI (job code 1503) | GTA/GPTI Combined | GRA (job code 1505) |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Appointment Count | 186 | 31 | 217 | 143 |
| Resident | 131 | 24 | 155 | 116 |
| Nonresident | 55 | 7 | 62 | 27 |
| Total FTE | 50 | 8 | 58 | 46 |
| Average FTE/appointment | 0.27 | 0.25 | 0.26 | 0.32 |
| Average Enrolled Credits | 6.7 | 4 | 4.8 | 7.1 |

Table 2. Tuition (D1) and fees for schools and colleges in AY 2025-26. Per-credit resident and nonresident tuition rates include all per-credit fees (university level and school/college level). Fees/term include university level and school/college level fees.

| Tuition and Fees | resident/cr | nonresident/cr | nonresident differential | fees/term |
|-------------------------------|-------------|----------------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| College of Arch & Planning | \$612.63 | \$1,544.63 | \$932.00 | \$382.43 |
| College of Arts & Media | \$597.44 | \$1,529.44 | \$932.00 | \$526.09 |
| Business School | \$805.05 | \$1,673.05 | \$868.00 | \$453.85 |
| College of Liberal Arts & Sci | \$508.59 | \$1,517.59 | \$1,009.00 | \$484.82 |
| School of Educ & Human Dev | \$496.85 | \$1,505.85 | \$1,009.00 | \$510.68 |
| College of Engr Design & Comp | \$791.56 | \$1,672.56 | \$881.00 | \$472.43 |
| School of Public Affairs | \$653.71 | \$1,508.71 | \$855.00 | \$526.47 |
| Average | \$637.98 | \$1,564.55 | \$926.57 | \$479.54 |