



Graduate Directors Meeting

October 30, 2025

3:00 – 5:00 p.m.

The Graduate Directors Meeting was held on Thursday, October 30, at 3:00 p.m. on Teams.

Present on Teams: Teams did not record attendance and so our list is incomplete. Dean Ann Vail, Lingyu Yu, Angelina Sylvain, Barbara Foster, Dale Moore, Brandon Applegate, Fabienne Poulain, Christine Sacco-Bene, Steffen Strauch, Hong Wang, Lyda McCartin, Kristen Seay, Sarah Gassman, Toni Torres-McGehee, Shana Harrington, Danny Jenkins, Donna Watson, Sayward Harrison, Marco Valtorta, David Hitchcock, Harlan Smith, Christopher Reid, Robert Moran, Beth Barnes, David Mott, Andreas Heyden, Lana Elkins, Kathleen Robbins, Nabil Natafji,

Welcome and Agenda – Dean Ann Vail

Update on International Graduate Students and Recent Visa Changes – Harlan Smith and Chris Reid



USC_International_Gr
aduate_Students_Upd.

A new member of the International Students and Scholar Support team, **Christopher Reid**, Assistant Director for International Students and Scholars Support, was introduced. He will assist with addressing student issues and support alongside the director.

International Student Regulations and Updates

Attendees were reminded that international students are limited by federal regulations to **20 hours of on-campus work per week** during fall and spring semesters.

Visa Interviews

- Visa interviews are now required for all non-immigrant applicants; waivers are no longer allowed.
- Interviews must be conducted in the applicant's home country unless permanent residence is held elsewhere.
- Visa appointment slots and staffing across the Foreign Service have been reduced.
- Social media vetting now occurs during both the visa interview and U.S. entry process.

Students are being advised on compliance, including appropriate management of online profiles.

Proposed Federal Rule on International Students

A new federal rule has been proposed that may significantly alter university operations related to international students.

- The proposal was open for public comment for 30 days, receiving over **20,000 responses** nationally.
- Institutional comments were not submitted, though individual expert feedback was provided.
- Once finalized, university leadership will review and interpret its impact.

Anticipated outcomes include:

- Greater governmental oversight of university immigration processes.
- Reduced internal authority for institutional approvals.
- Changes expected by **2026** to **F1** and **J1** student visa regulations.
- Adjustments to the **J1 Exchange Visitor Program**, affecting postdoctoral hosting procedures.
- Possible restrictions on program length and extensions, which may require academic justification.

Concerns were expressed regarding:

- Revisions to **curricular practical training (CPT)** and **optional practical training (OPT)** rules.
- Increased difficulty for student travel and mobility.
- Additional governmental reviews through **USCIS**, resulting in longer processing times and added fees.

Formal updates will follow once federal guidance is finalized and reviewed by the Office of the Provost and the Graduate School.

Details of Proposed Rule

The proposal was issued without prior notice. It may limit the **F1 and J1 period of study** to **four years**, regardless of degree level.

Students may need additional approvals for certain aspects of their programs, requiring coordination between the university, academic departments, and immigration authorities. Graduate students could become ineligible to change academic programs or objectives if the proposal remains unchanged.

Comprehensive Assessment Examples – Robert Moran and Beth Barnes

Dean Vail highlighted that each department's approach to comprehensive exams is unique, offering varied strategies and insights for graduate assessment design.

Robert Moran – Comprehensive Exams for Master's and Doctoral Programs



Comprehensive_Exam
_Assessment_Strategy

Overview:

Robert Moran described his department's structure for comprehensive exams across master's and doctoral levels, emphasizing assessment of knowledge, research readiness, and alignment with learning objectives.

Master's Program:

- **Exam Format:** A **four-hour written exam** administered at the beginning of the second semester in the second year.
- **Content:** Five questions, each derived from specific core courses taken during the program.

- **Grading:** Each question is **independently scored by two faculty members**. If they disagree, one to three additional graders are brought in to break the tie.
- **Passing Criteria:** Students must earn at least a **C on each question** and a **B overall average** to pass.
- **Retake Policy:** Students may **retake once in May**; failure on the second attempt results in dismissal from the program.

Doctoral Program:

- **Timing:** Must be completed **60 days before graduation**, after coursework and before significant dissertation work begins.
- **Purpose:** Evaluates both **theoretical understanding and application**.
- **Formats:**
 1. **Traditional:** A four-hour written exam prepared by the dissertation committee, followed by a **30–60 minute oral defense**.
 2. **Proposal-Integrated:** A **take-home written exam** completed at least two weeks before the dissertation proposal, followed by oral questions tied to the proposal defense.
- **Grading:** Pass/fail, with **one retake allowed**. A second failure results in program removal.
- The **master's exam** is more structured and time-bound, while the **doctoral exam** provides greater flexibility, integrating research elements and oral evaluation.
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Beth Barnes – Summative Assessment in Speech-Language Pathology

Overview:

Beth Barnes presented her department's **summative assessment (comprehensive exam)** used for graduating speech-language pathology students, fulfilling **CAA accreditation** requirements.



COMD Summative
Assessment.pptx

Structure of the Exam:

- **Part A:**
 - **100 multiple-choice questions** covering the “Big Nine” areas of speech-language pathology, plus 10 on **research and ethics**.

- Focuses exclusively on **core curriculum**, not electives.
 - Administered on **Blackboard** under supervision to ensure integrity.
 - Questions are **written and revised annually** by faculty based on course content.
- **Part B:**
 - Required only for students who do **not pass Part A** in any section.
 - Involves a **case-history discussion** evaluated by a panel of two faculty members, focusing on areas of weakness.
 - Allows students who struggle with standardized testing to demonstrate knowledge through application and discussion.

Timing and Rationale:

- Held in **January**, after students have completed all core coursework but before their final spring electives and clinical practicum.
- The schedule aligns with **Praxis exam preparation**, supporting dual study efforts.
- The dual-format approach balances **standardized assessment** with **faculty evaluation of applied skills**.

Discussion:

- The challenge of high-GPA students who underperform on standardized tests was noted.
- It was emphasized that the oral component (Part B) helps these students show their true competence.

Follow-Up Topics:

- Two additional issues were raised:
 1. Admissions letters lacking mention of transcript evaluation requirements, which will be addressed.
 2. The idea of **certifying undergraduate courses for graduate credit** through additional exams, especially for accelerated programs — Scheduling a future discussion on this emerging topic was discussed.