CAL POLY HUMBOLDT
University Senate

Resolution on the Policy on the Culminating Experience for Graduate Degrees

05-26/27-APC —November 10, 2026 — First Reading

RESOLVED: That the University Senate of Cal Poly Humboldt recommends to the President the approval of the Cal Poly Humboldt Policy on the Culminating Experience for Graduate Degrees; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the University Senate requests, upon approval, that the President or designee direct relevant offices to update related websites including but not limited to the University Catalog.

RATIONALE:
This policy reinforces Cal Poly Humboldt's alignment with Title V and California State University (CSU) system-level policy while detailing nuances of Humboldt graduate culminating experiences.

Cal Poly Humboldt.

Policy on the Culminating Experience for Graduate Degrees
Policy #
Office of the Provost

Applies to: Graduate students and faculty

This policy outlines Cal Poly Humboldt's requirements for the graduate culminating experience.

Note: Individual programs may have more specific requirements for their graduate culminating experience, e.g., a required thesis, and this policy does not supplant those requirements. Candidates are responsible for understanding the requirements within their programs.

Purpose of the Policy: This policy reinforces Cal Poly Humboldt's alignment with Title V and California State University (CSU) system-level policy while detailing nuances of Humboldt graduate culminating experiences.

With guidance from their graduate committee and in alignment with the expectations of individual graduate degree programs, students will need to complete one of the following culminating experiences: ***Comprehensive Exam, Project, or Thesis***. Not all programs offer all three options and students must check with their graduate program to determine which options are available.

Definitions:

- **Advancement to Candidacy Application**: The advancement to candidacy application includes a list of courses required for degree completion, as well as a declaration of culminating experience and related documentation.

- **Anonymization of Publication**. The process of altering a name on a document to remove author identity. Anonymization can only be implemented on the object and object metadata held in the institutional repository: this internal process does not affect copies, citations, or other displays or mentions of the document with prior release into the scholarly public sphere. Note: Other research ethics protocols, such as use of pseudonyms, should be considered to protect participant confidentiality during the pre-publication research protocol planning.

- **Comprehensive Exam**: “A comprehensive examination is an assessment of the student's ability to integrate the knowledge of the area, show critical and independent thinking, and demonstrate mastery of the subject matter. The results of the examination evidence independent thinking, appropriate organization, critical analysis and accuracy of documentation. A record of the examination questions and responses shall be maintained in accordance with the records retention policy of The California State University” (Title V).

- **Embargo**: The process of delaying publication, typically for the purpose of allowing another publisher to have first publication rights.

- **Graduate Candidate**. Candidacy is an acknowledgement of a student’s potential to complete the requirements for the master’s degree. Students should apply for advancement to candidacy and graduation at least one semester prior to completion of course requirements. Some programs require earlier application. A student must be enrolled in the semester during which advancement to candidacy takes place.

  Candidacy Requirements:
  - Graduate classified standing (fulfilled all program admission requirements);
  - A GPA of 3.00 or better;
  - Completion of 12 to 15 units of approved coursework for the master’s program;
  - Approval of the advisor, committee, and graduate coordinator; and
  - Approval of any plan to use humans or animals as subjects in research if applicable.

- **Graduate Faculty Member**: Graduate faculty members are those who hold the appropriate credentials to teach graduate seminars and evaluate graduate-level work in the field.

- **Project**: “A project is a significant undertaking appropriate to the fine and applied arts or to professional fields. It evidences originality and independent thinking, appropriate form and organization, and a rationale. It is described and summarized in a written abstract that includes the project's significance, objectives, methodology, and a conclusion or recommendation. An oral defense of the project may be required” (Title 5).

- **Thesis**: “A thesis is the written product of a systematic study of a significant problem. It identifies the problem, states the major assumptions, explains the significance of the undertaking, sets forth the sources for and methods of gathering information, analyzes the data, and offers a conclusion or recommendation. The finished product evidences originality, critical and independent thinking, appropriate organization and format, and thorough documentation. Normally, an oral defense of the thesis is required” (Title 5).

Policy Details

1. **State of California and CSU Policy on Graduate Culminating Experiences.** The requirements of Cal Poly Humboldt graduate degrees, including culminating experiences, are foundationally defined by state law and related academic policy of the CSU and Cal Poly Humboldt:

    a. California Administrative Code of Regulations, Title V Education, Division 5 Board of Trustees of the California State Universities, Chapter 1 California State University, Subchapter 2 Educational Program, Article 7 Graduate Degrees, Section 40510 The Master's Degree

    b. California State University **Definitions of Graduate Level Instruction** (policy #18450674) Section G. the Culminating Experience

    c. California State University policy on Records Retention and Disposition Schedules (EO 1031 2026).

    d. California State University Ethical and Responsible Use Guidance for AI https://genai.calstate.edu/systemwide/ethical-and-responsible-use

    e. Cal Poly Humboldt Library Scholarly Communications Publishing Standards on AI Use: https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/faq.html.

2. **Graduate Culminating Experience.** Graduate degrees require the completion of a culminating experience as defined by state and CSU policy (1a and 1b). Cal Poly Humboldt graduate culminating experience requirements are further detailed as follows:

    a. **Types:** *Comprehensive Exam, Project or Thesis*. Not all programs offer all three options and students must check with their graduate program to determine which options are available.

    b. **Committee/Reviewers.** The culminating experience shall be evaluated by *at least* two Cal Poly Humboldt faculty members with appropriate expertise relevant to the culminating experience. The committee chair must be a graduate faculty member affiliated with the graduate program. Individual programs may specify further details about committee membership, including policies on members from outside the program and/or the university, as well as policies on committee decision-making rules. Committee members drawn from outside the department or program, must (a) have a graduate degree in a related field, or (b) have extensive experience in the topic, and (c) demonstrate professional recognition through publications, creative activities, reports, papers or membership in a

national professional organization and/or working committees in their institution. Individuals from outside the university must submit a Volunteer for Graduate Committee Service form which must be signed by the committee chair.

c. **Designation on Final Transcript**. The final transcript will indicate the type of culminating experience as approved by the graduate committee, as well as the document title in the case of project or thesis designation.

d. **Enrollment and Final Product Alignment/Change.** The graduate committee shall determine the classification (e.g., Comprehensive Exam, Project or Thesis) of the final product based on program standards. The culminating experience course number(s) on a transcript should reflect the intent of the work at the time of enrollment: course enrollment reflected on the transcript is not strictly required to align with the graduate committee final decision on classification of the final product (e.g., a student may have enrolled in thesis units early on and then, in collaboration with their committee, determined that the final work project is better understood as a portfolio of work and classified ultimately as a “project”). If there is a change in type between advancement and final product submission, the graduate will indicate that on an accompanying change form.

3. **Publication Requirements.**

a. **Thesis.** Graduate students completing a thesis shall publish their graduate thesis on the Library’s open-access institutional repository. This requirement aligns with scholarly expectations around research dissemination and thesis contribution to related bodies of knowledge. Students researching and writing in areas that present heightened concern for ethical or safety protections of research communities should build those protections into their research protocols. If ethical or safety concerns regarding publication remain, students, working with their committee, may explore additional protections for their research. See 3c.

b. **Project**. Graduate students completing a project are strongly encouraged to publish their work on the Library open-access institutional repository; however, they may request to withhold their work from publication. Students concerned with publishing their project because of the particular knowledge contained therein, or because of participant confidentiality concerns not easily mitigated by typical research protocol practices, shall be advised on project options acceptable to their committee that might support publication of some elements of their work (e.g., a student completing a project that includes client or community partner content that is confidential, and/or knowledge protected within Indigenous communities, could briefly describe in a given section of the project document the type of work in which they engaged and the related decision to withhold details of

that particular information from publication).

c. **Publication Standards, Processes, and Adaptations**. The standards, process, and related specifications for culminating experience publication, including accessibility formatting standards, shall be maintained and communicated by the Library Scholarly Communications Office and Graduate Studies in consultation with the Graduate Council and the Vice Provost and Graduate Dean. While Library Scholarly Communications shall maintain a digital copy of all theses, dissemination is a public commons process outside the direct control of Scholarly Communications. However, a graduate student may request one or more of the following publication adaptations:

i. **Redaction:** Graduate students, with approval of their committee, may request that portions of the published version of their project or thesis be permanently blacked out such that sensitive data is protected.

ii. **Anonymization**. Graduate students, with approval of their committee, may request anonymity of their authorship prior to the publication of a project or thesis document. A committee member may also request anonymization of their name. (See 1e. Humboldt Digital Commons FAQ on the limits of these efforts.) However, the project/thesis author (student name) and all committee member names must appear on internal routing and approval forms. These internal records are protected by FERPA.

iii. **Embargo.** Graduate students, with approval of their committee, may request a thesis or project embargo of 1-5 years. If ethical or safety concerns persist longer than 5 years, longer periods may be requested.

4. **Records Retention.** Graduate Studies shall maintain in perpetuity an archive of all final thesis documents. Academic departments shall maintain an archive of final graduate projects and a record of Comprehensive Exam questions for two years, in accordance with records retention policy 9.3.3 of The California State University - Student portfolios (culminating experience project)--held by departments. All such records are protected by FERPA.

5. **Generative AI Use and the Culminating Experience.** See guidelines of the CSU (1.d), the Cal Poly Humboldt Library Scholarly Communications guidelines (1.e), and program-specific policies and guidelines.

Related Policies:

- California State University Blended Bachelor's and Master's degree (AA 2012-01) and the related Cal Poly Humboldt campus policy (VPAA 23-05) .

- California Administrative Code of Regulations, Title V Education, Division 5 Board of Trustees of the California State Universities, Chapter 1 California State University, Subchapter 2 Educational Program, Article 7 Graduate Degrees, Section 40510 The Master's Degree

- California State University **Definitions of Graduate Instruction** (policy #18450674) Section G. the Culminating Experience

- 2025-26 Cal Poly Humboldt Catalog, Section on Master's Degree Requirements

Expiration Date: none

History:
This policy was drafted by a subgroup of faculty, graduate students, staff, and administrators, including the Cal Poly Humboldt Scholarly Publications Librarian, Graduate Council representatives, Graduate Studies Budget Analyst, Graduate Student Representatives, and the Vice Provost and Graduate Dean. The work on culminating experience was catalyzed by a graduate student request for the Graduate Council to provide an option for candidates for graduate degrees to choose not to publish their culminating work.

Approved by University Senate Committee on Academic Affairs: 03/##/2026
Approved by University Senate: MM/DD/YYYY
Approved by Provost/President: MM/DD/YYYY