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REFERRAL REPORT

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According to a letter, dated July 7, 2021, from SACSCOC President Belle S. Wheelan to The University of Alabama President Stuart R. Bell, *The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) Committee on Fifth-Year Interim Reports reviewed the institution's compliance with select standards of the Principles of Accreditation (Principles) outlined in the SACSCOC Fifth-Year Interim Report. Based only on those reviewed standards, the institution should submit a Referral Report due April 1, 2022, addressing the standards of the Principles identified below.*

Standard 8.2.a (Student outcomes: educational programs)

This standard expects an institution to identify expected student learning outcomes, assess the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provide evidence of seeking improvement based on an analysis of the results in the areas for each of its educational programs.

COMMITTEE FINDING

The institution provided evidence that ongoing assessment is occurring, and the institution has a process to evaluate the assessment; however, insufficient evidence was provided to document that programs are using an analysis of assessment results to inform improvements. Many programs provide a summary, explain that they will continue to assess, or describe changes to assessment measures. Although changes to assessments may be an appropriate measure in some cases, few examples of use of results for program improvements are provided. Programs providing use of results for program improvements were mainly graduate programs associated with programmatic accreditation. Furthermore, the Committee could not verify that the institution includes results from its distance programs and programs at off-site locations.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

The University of Alabama (UA) has long-standing mechanisms in place to support and monitor the quality of educational program assessment. In recent years, based on internal meta-assessment data, the institution has augmented and iteratively refined its approach to foster more impactful continuous improvement work among educational programs. For example, Colleges/programs were given the flexibility to select their own annual reporting deadlines (rather than having to use the October 1 deadline historically required across the board) based on optimal opportunities for faculty review of data and development of improvement plans. Colleges were also given the flexibility to choose their own reporting platform—for example, UA's College of Education uses LiveText (rather than Taskstream) for reasons related to data collection. More recent revisions, which were delayed somewhat by UA's pivot to remote instruction and work during COVID, were designed to enhance practices in a number of areas—including the two concerns expressed by the Committee: (1) analysis and use of assessment results to seek improvement in student learning; and (2) disaggregation and analysis of assessment data by instructional delivery mode among those programs delivered in multiple modalities. Henceforth in this letter, the terms **seeking improvement** and **disaggregation by modality** will be used for efficiency.

Continuous Improvement Policy: The enhanced approach to evaluation and support was developed, codified, and implemented as UA's [Continuous Improvement \(CI\) policy](#) in the months following July 2021. The policy was drafted during fall semester with input from key stakeholders, approved in January 2022, and disseminated broadly through several leadership channels. As an example, the attached [announcement](#) was sent to a listserv that includes all Deans, Vice Presidents, and Chairs, as well as all faculty/staff designated to work directly on program assessment in educational programs, academic/student support programs, and administrative departments.

For the most part, UA's CI policy formalized and clarified long-standing UA expectations regarding continuous improvement. The full policy statement follows:

The University of Alabama (UA) strives to continuously improve in achieving its mission, values, and vision. To that end, UA routinely assesses academic programs (including general education), academic support and student support services, administrative support services, research, and community outreach. Academic and non-instructional units, as specified in the "Procedures" section herein, must maintain systematic plans for assessment and submit annual improvement reports. An assessment plan details the unit's expected outcomes and the unit's methods for evaluating the extent to which outcomes are achieved. An annual improvement report includes the assessment plan, assessment results for the preceding cycle, and improvement plans based on review and interpretation of results. Expected outcomes should align with UA and divisional strategic plans as well as national and/or specialized accrediting standards and aspirational goals. Each division determines the level of unit reporting. Each reporting unit submits an annual improvement report to the appropriate divisional leadership as well as the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE). OIE maintains copies of all annual improvement reports for UA per the State of Alabama records retention policy.

With regard to educational programs, the CI policy delineates specific procedures and expectations for academic degree programs (i.e., any plan of study leading to an academic award). The policy excerpt below includes only the two elements about which the Committee expressed concerns with regard to assessment in educational degree programs:

- *Evidence that the program is seeking improvement in student learning through at least one new or ongoing improvement plan each year based on interpretation of assessment results*
- *Interpretation of findings must include a comparison of results based on the method of delivery if the program is approved to deliver instruction in multiple modalities (e.g., main campus and online), and/or at additional instructional sites (e.g., main campus and Gadsden)*

Evaluation and Support of Program Assessment: The Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) implemented a planned revision to its approach to evaluation and support of educational program assessment beginning in Fall 2021. The main changes were as follows: (1) replacement of UA's assessment feedback rubric with a new, simpler [peer review tool](#) that places more emphasis on reporting elements delineated in the CI policy; (2) addition of direct feedback via email to key personnel in academic departments, instead of *only* through UA's primary assessment management platform (Taskstream); and (3) request for revisions when evaluation of assessment reports indicates

the absence of critical elements such as evidence of **seeking improvement** or **disaggregation by modality** (as applicable). OIE continues to offer resources and year-round consultation related to assessment/improvement design.

Impact of Changes: Data from the nine months since July 2021 suggest that for the 160 educational programs that have completed the submission/evaluation/feedback/revision workflow, the enhanced process is working. The table below shows substantial year-over-year increases in the percentage of assessment reports with clear evidence of **seeking improvement** (increase of 48 percentage points) and **disaggregation by modality** (increase of 74 percentage points). An additional 40 programs that recently submitted their 2020-21 assessment reports (in keeping with College of Education’s annual timeline and February reporting deadline) will receive feedback and possible requests for revision later this spring.

Committee Concern	2019-20 Reports	2020-21 Reports*	Change in % Points
Seeking Improvement	31%	79%	+48
Disaggregation by Modality	4%	78%	+74

**Based on the 160 programs that have completed the annual evaluation/revision process thus far.*

The process appears to be working equally well for programs with and without specialized accreditation, and for undergraduate as well as graduate programs. All departments across all colleges are engaged, as reflected in a 2020-21 submission rate of 100%. Among 37 programs that received “revise and resubmit” requests from OIE, 29 (78%) have thus far responded with changes that addressed the shortcomings in their assessment reports.

Among programs whose reports still lack a key element, most are positioned to be fully compliant by the end of the current assessment cycle (2021-22). For example, the Dance MFA program launched in Fall 2020; although faculty developed an assessment plan in advance, as required by UA’s internal process for approving new educational programs, little data was available in [2020-21](#) because students had not reached key assessment points. More data in the second year of the program should allow faculty to document evidence of **seeking improvement** in their 2021-22 assessment report. The Criminology & Criminal Justice BA, historically a main campus (MA) program, was approved for online delivery (distance learning or DL) in 2018; an action plan in their [2020-21 assessment report](#) indicates that they will be able to **disaggregate data by modality** beginning this year (2021-22), as DL students reach 400-level assessment points for the first time.

All available UA educational program assessment reports from 2019-20 and 2020-21 have been included as evidence later in this Referral Report. The paragraphs below highlight enhanced year-over-year compliance in reports from three undergraduate programs without specialized accreditation, since that type of program was of particular concern to the Committee. The first two examples are illustrative of progress in evidence of **seeking improvement**. The third is illustrative of progress in **disaggregation by modality**. The examples are representative of much broader improvement trends.

American Studies BA (Example 1): This main campus program submitted the 2020-21 assessment report ahead of its annual October 1 reporting deadline. While the report was compelling in many ways, it did not include evidence of **seeking improvement** in student learning. In late October, the program received [feedback](#), including a request for revisions, from OIE. By early November, American Studies BA faculty had met, developed a timed

action plan to improve students' critical thinking skills through curricular changes, and documented the plan in their [assessment report](#) (please see page 11).

Creative Media BACIS (Example 2): Following 2019-20, this main campus program submitted an [annual assessment report](#) that, while well written, included no evidence of **seeking improvement** in student learning. Because the institutional review/evaluation process did not include a “revise and resubmit” option at the time, the program received feedback that encouraged—but did not require—development of a learning improvement plan in the subsequent cycle. During summer 2021, the program’s College (Communication & Information Sciences) implemented several workflow changes to foster, among all its programs, more collaborative analysis and use of assessment results, including an internal, preliminary assessment reporting deadline that was followed by a peer review workshop hosted by the College’s assessment liaison. These changes led the Creative Media program to augment its [2020-21 assessment report](#) with a detailed action plan to improve student learning related to diversity (SLO 2; please see page 3). Thus the version of the report submitted to OIE in Fall 2021 was fully compliant, as indicated in subsequent [feedback to the program](#).

Consumer Studies BS (Example 3): This undergraduate program, which is offered via main campus (MA) and distance learning (DL), has submitted very detailed, compelling assessment reports for many years. Historically, as illustrated in their [2019-20 submission](#), they did not formally **disaggregate data by modality** in their reports. Based on Summer/Fall 2021 changes to the institutional approach to oversight and evaluation of assessment (e.g., development of the CI policy; meetings with the University Assessment Council; communication from OIE and College assessment leaders), the Consumer Sciences BS program proactively disaggregated data by MA/DL in its [2020-21 assessment report](#). Thus the program subsequently received [feedback](#) from OIE indicating that the report was fully compliant.

CONCLUSION

In summary, UA received the Committee finding (8.2.a) in July of 2021. The letter from SACSCOC was helpful in providing additional support for ongoing revisions of institutional support and evaluation of educational program assessment. The revisions featured specific plans to address the two concerns articulated by the Committee: **seeking improvement** and **disaggregation by modality**. Actions taken or completed during the past nine months include the creation of a formal policy with unit-specific procedures; the replacement of the existing evaluation (peer review) tool; and College-level as well as institutional adjustments to assessment workflows and dissemination of evaluation feedback—including “revise and resubmit” requests when warranted. The evidence below includes all UA assessment reports from 2019-20 (before the Committee finding) and 2020-21 (afterward) that have completed the annual evaluation/feedback/revision process. Programs are listed by College and Department; asterisks denote those programs that are offered in multiple instructional modes/sites. The list does not include any newly approved programs that are yet to launch. The assessment reports and other supporting documents are also presented alphabetically under “Evidence” at the end of this letter.

Program Assessment Reports from 2019-20 and 2020-21 (asterisks denote programs offered in multiple instructional modes/sites):

Arts & Sciences

American Studies Department

American Studies BA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

American Studies MA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Anthropology Department

Anthropology BA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Anthropology MA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Anthropology PhD [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Art & Art History Department

Art History BA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Art History MA (joint with UAB) [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Studio Art BA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Studio Art BFA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Studio Art MA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Studio Art MFA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Biological Sciences Department

Biology / Marine Science / Microbiology BS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Biological Sciences MA (launched 2019) [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Biology MS / Marine Science MS* [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
(no recent students at OCIS)

Biology PhD [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Chemistry & Biochemistry Department

Chemistry BS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Chemistry MS / PhD (combined report) [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Communicative Disorders Department

Communicative Disorders BA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Speech Language Pathology MS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Criminology & Criminal Justice Department

Criminology & Criminal Justice BA* [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Criminology & Criminal Justice MS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

English Department

Creative Writing MFA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

English BA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

English MA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

English PhD [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

English as a Second Language (TESOL) MA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Gender & Race Studies Department

African American Studies BA (shared with UAB) [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Women's Studies MA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Geography Department

Environmental Science BS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Geography BS / BA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Geography MS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Geography PhD (launched 2017) [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Geological Sciences Department

Geology BS / BS Geo / BA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Geology MS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Geology PhD	2019-20	2020-21
<i><u>History Department</u></i>		
History BA	2019-20	2020-21
History MA	2019-20	2020-21
History PhD	2019-20	2020-21
<i><u>Mathematics Department</u></i>		
Applied Mathematics PhD		
(joint with UAB & UAH; no UA students for many years and thus no assessment data)		
Mathematics BS	2019-20	2020-21
Mathematics MA	2019-20	2020-21
Mathematics PhD	2019-20	2020-21
<i><u>Modern Languages & Classics Department</u></i>		
Foreign Language and Literature BA	2019-20	2020-21
German MA	2019-20	2020-21
Romance Languages MA	2019-20	2020-21
Romance Languages PhD	2019-20	2020-21
Spanish BA	2019-20	2020-21
<i><u>Music Department</u></i>		
Music BA / BM	2019-20	2020-21
Music DMA	2019-20	2020-21
Music MM	2019-20	2020-21
<i><u>New College (Department)</u></i>		
Interdisciplinary Studies BA / BS	2019-20	2020-21
<i><u>Philosophy Department</u></i>		
Philosophy BA	2019-20	2020-21
<i><u>Physics & Astronomy Department</u></i>		
Physics BS	2019-20	2020-21
Physics MS	2019-20	2020-21
Physics PhD	2019-20	2020-21
<i><u>Political Science Department</u></i>		
Economics BA (combined w BS through 19-20)	2019-20	2020-21
International Studies BA	2019-20	2020-21
Political Science BA	2019-20	2020-21
Political Science MA	2019-20	2020-21
Political Science PhD	2019-20	2020-21
Public Administration MPA	2019-20	2020-21
<i><u>Psychology Department</u></i>		
Psychology BS / BA	2019-20	2020-21
Psychology MA / PhD (combined report)	2019-20	2020-21
<i><u>Religious Studies Department</u></i>		
Religious Studies BA	2019-20	2020-21
Religion in Culture MA (launched 2017)	2019-20	2020-21
<i><u>Theatre & Dance Department</u></i>		
Dance BA	2019-20	2020-21
Dance MFA (launched 2020)	n/a	2020-21
Theatre BA	2019-20	2020-21
Theatre BFA (launched 2018)	2019-20	2020-21
Theatre MFA	2019-20	2020-21

Communication & Information Sciences

Advertising & Public Relations Department

Advertising / Public Relations BACom [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Advertising & Public Relations MA* [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Communication Studies Department

Communication Studies BACom* [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Communication Studies MA* [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Communication & Information Sciences PhD* [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Journalism & Creative Media Department

Creative Media BACIS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Journalism & Media Studies MA* [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
News Media BACIS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Library & Information Studies Department

Book Arts MFA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Library & Information Studies MLIS* [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Community Health Sciences

Population Health Sciences MS* [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Rural Community Health MS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Culverhouse College of Business

General Business BS* (core) [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Accountancy Department

Accounting BS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Accounting MAcc [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Accounting MTA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Accounting PhD [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Economics, Finance & Legal Studies Department

Economics BS (combined w BA through 2019-20) [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Finance BS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Finance MS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Finance PhD [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Quantitative Economics MA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Quantitative Economics PhD [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Information Systems, Statistics & Management Science Department

Applied Statistics MS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Applied Statistics PhD [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Business Analytics MS (launched 2020) [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Management Information Systems BS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Management Info. Systems MS (launched 2020) [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Operations Management BS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Operations Management MS* 2019-20 [DL / MA](#) [2020-21](#)
Operations Management PhD [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Management Department

Management BS [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Management MA [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)
Management PhD [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Manderson Graduate School of Business

MBA* [2019-20](#) [2020-21](#)

Marketing Department

Marketing BS	2019-20	2020-21
Marketing MS*	2019-20	2020-21
Marketing PhD	2019-20	2020-21

Education

(Note: 2020-21 assessment reports from the College of Education were submitted as expected in mid-February and will complete the internal evaluation/feedback/revision process this spring. Thus 2020-21 reports are listed as “pending” with no linked evidence.)

Curriculum & Instruction Department

Curriculum & Instruction EdD / PhD	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Elementary Education BSEd	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Elementary Education MA*	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Elementary Education EdS*	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Secondary Education BSEd	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Secondary Education MA*	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Secondary Education EdS*	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)

Educational Leadership, Policy & Technology Studies Department

Educational Leadership MA*	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Educational Leadership EdS*	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Educational Leadership EdD / PhD*	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Higher Education Administration MA*	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Higher Education Administration EdD / PhD	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Instructional Leadership EdD* (Nurse Education)	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Instructional Technology MA (launched 2018)	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Instructional Leadership PhD (Instructional Tech.)	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Instructional Leadership PhD (Social/Cultural)	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)

Educational Studies in Psychology, Research Methodology & Counseling Department

Clinical Mental Health Counseling MA	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Counselor Education MA – Rehab. Counseling	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Counselor Education MA - School Counseling	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Counselor Education EdS	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Counselor Education PhD	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Educational Neuroscience BS (launched 2020)	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Educational Psychology MA*	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Educational Psychology EdS	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Educational Psychology PhD	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Educational Research PhD	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
School Psychology PhD	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)

Kinesiology Department (program name changes from “Human Performance” after 2019)

Kinesiology BSEd	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Kinesiology MA	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Kinesiology PhD	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)

Music Education Department

Music Education BSEd	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
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Special Education & Multiple Abilities Department

Special Education BSEd	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Special Education MA*	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)

Special Education EdS*	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Special Education EdD / PhD*	2019-20	2020-21 (pending)
Engineering		
<u><i>Aerospace Engineering & Mechanics Department</i></u>		
Aerospace Engineering BSAE	2019-20	2020-21
Aerospace Engineering & Mechanics MSAEM*	2019-20	2020-21
Aerospace Engineering & Mechanics PhD*	2019-20	2020-21
<u><i>Chemical & Biological Engineering Department</i></u>		
Chemical Engineering BSChE	2019-20	2020-21
Chemical Engineering MSChE	2019-20	2020-21
Chemical Engineering PhD	2019-20	2020-21
<u><i>Civil, Construction & Environmental Engineering Department</i></u>		
Architectural Engineering BSArchE	2019-20	2020-21
Civil Engineering BSCE	2019-20	2020-21
Civil Engineering MSCE	2019-20	2020-21
Civil Engineering PhD	2019-20	2020-21
Construction Engineering BSConE	2019-20	2020-21
Environmental Engineering BSEnvE	2019-20	2020-21
Environmental Engineering MSEnvE	2019-20	2020-21
<u><i>Computer Science Department</i></u>		
Computer Science BSCS	2019-20	2020-21
Cyber Security BS (launched 2020)	n/a	2020-21
Computer Science MSCS	2019-20	2020-21
Computer Science PhD	2019-20	2020-21
<u><i>Electrical & Computer Engineering Department</i></u>		
Computer Engineering BSCE	2019-20	2020-21
Electrical Engineering BSEE	2019-20	2020-21
Electrical Engineering MSEE	2019-20	2020-21
Electrical Engineering PhD	2019-20	2020-21
Musical Audio Engineering BS (launched 2019)	n/a	2020-21
<u><i>Mechanical Engineering Department</i></u>		
Mechanical Engineering BSME*	2019-20	2020-21
Mechanical Engineering MSME*	2019-20	2020-21
Mechanical Engineering PhD*	2019-20	2020-21
<u><i>Metallurgical & Materials Engineering Department</i></u>		
Metallurgical Engineering BSMet	2019-20	2020-21
Metallurgical Engineering MSMet	2019-20	2020-21
Materials Science PhD (joint with UAB & UAH)	2019-20	2020-21
Metallurgical Engineering PhD (joint with UAB)	2019-20	2020-21
Human Environmental Sciences		
Human Environmental Sciences BSHES*	2019-20	2020-21
Human Environmental Sciences MSHES*	2019-20	2020-21
<u><i>Clothing, Textiles & Design Department</i></u>		
Apparel & Textiles BSHES	2019-20	2020-21
Interior Design BSHES	2019-20	2020-21
<u><i>Consumer Sciences Department</i></u>		
Consumer Sciences BS*	2019-20	2020-21
Consumer Sciences MS*	2019-20	2020-21

Health Sciences Department

Health Education/Promotion MPH*	2019-20	2020-21
Health Education/Promotion PhD	2019-20	2020-21
Health Studies MA	2019-20	2020-21
Public Health BS*	2019-20	2020-21

Human Development & Family Studies Department

Addiction & Recovery BS (launched 2019)	2019-20	2020-21
Early Childhood Education BS*	2019-20	2020-21
Human Development & Family Studies BS*	2019-20	2020-21
Human Development & Family Studies MS	2019-20	2020-21

Human Nutrition & Hospitality Department

Food & Nutrition BSHES*	2019-20	2020-21
Hospitality Management BS*	2019-20	2020-21
Hospitality Management MS* (launched 2020)	n/a	2020-21
Human Nutrition MS*	2019-20	2020-21
Human Nutrition PhD (launched 2018)	2019-20	2020-21

Law

Law JD	2019-20	2020-21
Law LLM	2019-20	2020-21
Law JM - Taxation (launched 2018)	2019-20	2020-21

Nursing

Nursing BSN*	2019-20	2020-21
Nursing MSN	2019-20	2020-21
Nursing DNP	2019-20	2020-21
Nursing Science PhD (joint w UAH; launched 2019)	2019-20	2020-21

Social Work

Social Work BSW*	2019-20	2020-21
Social Work MSW*	2019-20	2020-21
Social Work DSW (launched 2019)	2019-20	2020-21
Social Work PhD	2019-20	2020-21

UA Graduate School

Interdisciplinary Studies PhD	2019-20	2020-21
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