

October 13, 2015 Meeting Minutes of the Graduate Council

Members Present: J. Albert, P. Auter, D. Baker, D. Bellar, C. Briggs, A. Brown, K. Evans-Jackson, W. Ferguson, R. Gonzales, D. Harrington, J. Heels, H. Hurst, M. Kightley, J. Lemoine, A. Magidin, A. Maida, S. McNerny, D. Olivier, P. Morton, C. Roche-Wallace, K. Smith, D. Stevens, W. Xu, M. Wright, M. Farmer-Kaiser (ex-officio member)

Members Absent: A. Khattab, R. Hernandez, C. Taylor

Invited Guests: Paul Thomas, Director of Human Resources, Vanessa Richard, Human Resources Specialist

The meeting was called to order by W. Ferguson at 2:03 p.m.

Announcements:

The Council voted to approve the September 8, 2015 meeting minutes.

As requested by the Council at the September meeting, M. Farmer-Kaiser provided the Council with a copy of the approved description of the University Committee on Graduate Student Success and Retention.

The list of degree candidates was presented to and accepted by the Council.

W. Ferguson alerted the Council to scheduling conflicts for the remainder of the semester's meetings. Of note was the December 8, 2015 Council meeting that falls during finals week. M. Farmer-Kaiser proposed that that meeting be moved back one week to December 15, 2015 at 2:00pm. Motion made to move the December 8, 2015 Graduate Council meeting to December 15, 2015 at 2:00pm. Motion seconded and passed.

W. Ferguson requested an amendment of the agenda to move a New Business item forward in the meeting so that guests P. Thomas and V. Richard from Human Resources could participate in initial Council consideration of the proposed definitions of "graduate assistant" and revisions to Catalog policies governing graduate assistantships.

New Business:

M. Farmer-Kaiser introduced the draft document that proposes revisions to the policies governing graduate assistantships presently included in the University Catalog and, within these proposed revisions, definitions of "graduate assistant." She explained that these working definitions and policy revisions had been developed through on-going collaborative efforts with the Office of Human Resources, the Office of Sponsored Programs Finance Administration and Compliance (SPFAC), and the Office of Finance and Administration to more accurately define the meaning of "graduate assistantship" and to provide more complete policies governing the appointment and reappointment of our graduate assistants. She further noted that an earlier version of this document had been introduced to graduate coordinators, department heads, and

school directors, and the academic deans at the outset of the semester, and that this version of the document includes revisions that came as a result of their feedback.

The Council then welcomed P. Thomas, who discussed the need for specific definitions of the various iterations of “graduate assistant” from the vantage point of Human Resources. Compliance with federal laws (e.g., the Fair Labor and Standards Act, the Affordable Healthcare Act, IRS regulations, and visa work regulations set by the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services) necessitates that the University work to establish definitions for graduate teaching, research, and administrative assistants and to improve the process by which we appoint and reappoint GAs. He explained that the University needs a clear understanding of what is being done by graduate assistants so it can properly report to federal agencies. Beyond the need for these definitions, P. Thomas noted other concerns that he has about GA appointments including, in particular, the need to address the practice of allowing graduate assistants to start working before the appointment process is complete. M. Farmer-Kaiser elaborated on this point and explained that the approval process works to ensure graduate students being appointed have the proper credentials (i.e., admitted in regular status and enrolled as a fulltime graduate student), that proposed payments meet University minimum stipend levels, that the funds exist to cover stipend and tuition/fee waivers being offered, and, for international graduate students, that the work hours are in compliance with visa regulations. P. Thomas explained that along with supporting these definitions and policy revisions, Human Resources would be taking a more proactive role in approval of job announcements in order to function efficiently within University, state, and federal guidelines. A period of questions and answers ensued. W. Ferguson and M. Farmer-Kaiser asked that the Council continue to review the proposal, share with their colleagues, and offer feedback prior to the next Council meeting. The Council will return to the proposal as Old Business during the November meeting. P. Thomas and V. Richard thanked the Council for its time and exited.

W. Ferguson requested that the agenda be resumed in its normal order, continuing with Committee Reports.

Committee Reports:

Student Appeals Committee – No report.

Curriculum Committee – Report provided by Natalia Sidorovskaia, not present. Motion made to accept the report of the Curriculum Committee. Motion seconded and carried. The Curriculum Committee also requested, via N. Sidorovskaia, that course change forms be further and better vetted by Academic Affairs and the Graduate School before being sent to the Curriculum Committee for review. M. Farmer-Kaiser noted that Academic Affairs, through the office of Fabrice Leroy, Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs, and the Graduate School were working to address this issue. She also noted that Amanda Payne, Curriculum Management Coordinator, had informed her that Academic Affairs would soon be taking up the task of revising University course guidelines and course change forms.

Fellowship Committee – No report.

Graduate Faculty Membership Review Committee – No report.

Old Business:

The Council had no old business to consider.

New Business:

W. Ferguson provided an open forum for comments, concerns, or suggestions for the University's new strategic plan, and again encouraged those present who had not reviewed the document to do so. All in attendance agreed that the strategic plan was good overall, though concerns over required funding for graduate education initiatives were noted. Discussion also focused on the enrollment goals for graduate education as delineated in the strategic plan. Members agreed that reaching these goals would require more than just aggressive recruiting but also added support for graduate faculty, library development, program creation at the Master's, doctoral, and graduate certificate levels, and continued efforts to address attrition and improve the retention of graduate students.

W. Ferguson requested the creation of an ad hoc committee to develop recommendations to govern the admission, continuation, and completion of graduate students in graduate certificate programs. He noted that Robert Viguerie, the chairman of the Graduate Student Appeals Committee and coordinator for the Business Administration certificate program, had agreed to serve on this committee. He then called for volunteers from the Council to participate. R. Gonzales volunteered, and also agreed to chair the ad hoc committee. J. Lemoine volunteered to participate. K. Smith also noted her willingness to serve should Mark Rees, who serves as the coordinator for the Historic Preservation certificate program, be unable to participate. W. Ferguson thanked these members of the Council for their willingness to serve and noted that he and M. Farmer-Kaiser would assist the ad hoc committee in its work as well as to develop a timetable for coming back to the Council with recommendations.

The Council then turned its attention to the topic of outside observers. Outside observers are members of the graduate faculty assigned by the Dean of the Graduate School to attend thesis and dissertation defenses. W. Ferguson noted that while the outside observer policy has existed for some time, it is not without problems. M. Farmer-Kaiser confirmed that the response rate for outside observers is staggeringly low and that, from her perspective, it is long past time for the Graduate School to reexamine the administrative process for assigning outside observers. She noted also that the Graduate School has received feedback from committee chairs, faculty members being assigned as outside observers, and academic deans that calls into question not only the process for appointing these members but also the practice of doing so. Thus, before undertaking efforts to improve both the administrative process of assigning outside observers and the attendance/response rate of outside observers, she seeks guidance from the Council. H. Hurst and A. Brown both agreed that this low response rate may stem from uncertainty on the role of the outside observer. D. Bellar argued that if the assignment appears optional and without any real repercussions for non-attendance, little progress will be made in improving attendance and response rates. M. Farmer-Kaiser clarified that her intent in bringing this issue to the Council was less about seeking administrative guidance but rather to reconfirm that the Council continues

to see this practice as an important function of the graduate faculty. She asked the Council to define the role and purpose of outside observers. Council members present from Education, Business, the Sciences, and Liberal Arts expressed their general support for the practice as an assurance of academic integrity and interdepartmental activity. Other members, however, expressed concern over the practice as a flawed, outdated practice that the Council would be wise to discontinue. In order to make a more informed, representative decision regarding the practice of assigning outside observers, D. Baker motioned that the discussion be tabled until the November meeting so that members of the Council could consult with their respective colleges to gain additional feedback from other graduate faculty members. Motion seconded and passed with three votes against.

Motion made to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded and passed. Meeting adjourned at 4:21pm.