

December 15, 2015 Meeting Minutes of the Graduate Council

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

Members Absent: P. Auter, D. Bellar, K. Evans-Jackson

The meeting was called to order by W. Ferguson at 2:06 p.m.

Announcements:

The Council voted to approve the November 10, 2015 meeting minutes, with corrections to the spelling of M. Kightley's name throughout and also a grammatical error.

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

A motion was made by the Council to move the February 9, 2016 Graduate Council meeting to February 2, 2016 in observance of the Mardi Gras holiday. Motion seconded and carried.

Committee Reports:

Student Appeals Committee – No report.

Curriculum Committee – Committee report submitted by Natalia Sidorovskaia, not present. Motion made to accept the report of the Curriculum Committee. Motion seconded and carried.

Fellowship Committee – No report.

Graduate Faculty Membership Review Committee – W. Ferguson explained that there was one application for Graduate Faculty status left out from the previous review cycle by error of the Graduate School. Michelle Feist, Graduate Faculty Membership Review Committee Chair, prepared a report on the missed application, recommending denial for Level II membership and appointment at Level I. M. Farmer-Kaiser explained that this application was reviewed in the same manner as all other Graduate Faculty applications (i.e., by all three College review entities and, since the College reviews resulted in recommendations for appointment at a level different than that which was applied for, the Graduate Faculty Membership Committee) and thus, was properly vetted. Motion made to accept the recommendations of the Graduate Faculty Membership Review Committee. Motion seconded and carried.

Old Business:

W. Ferguson presented the Council with a document containing the proposed revisions to University policies related to graduate assistantships, incorporating feedback and comments from the previous Council meeting as well as feedback from Human Resources. M. Farmer-Kaiser

explained that revisions were made to the document taking into account research assistant duties, graduate certificate students, and recommendations from the task force on University payroll. D. Stephens noted an error in the “L” section where “one” should read “on.” A. Magidin also spotted an error in the “Course Load” section, where “in section” should be deleted. Discussion turned to the dates graduate assistants are required to report to the University for fulfillment of duties, with the new policies requiring students to be present for the start of classes rather than the begin of the semester. A. Magidin and P. Viguerie expressed concern that difficulties may arise from syncing the beginning of the semester and the start of classes on the same date. M. Farmer-Kaiser echoed those concerns and noted that offer letters to students will need to indicate clearly when GA duties begin/end as well as any expectations for participation in orientation(s). Further discussion centered on the definition of University holidays and breaks and when international student were allowed to work during those periods. Motion made to accept the proposed revisions to University policies related to graduate assistantships document with the following changes implemented:

- In both “Graduate Research Assistant” and “Graduate Assistants” under section C, the line, “The duties do not involve classroom instruction” should be amended to read, “The primary duties do not involve classroom instruction....”
- Under section F, the line, “Assistantship appointments are to be made using the appropriate Office of Human Resources form” should be amended to read, “Assistantship appointments are to be made at the outset of each academic year, or semester if not an academic year appointment, using the appropriate Office of Human Resources form.”
- Under section G, the phrase, “in section V.C.4.” should be removed.
- Following section I, a section J should be added with the information present broken into three bullet points.
- Under section L, the word “on” should be changed to “one.”

Motion seconded and carried.

W. Ferguson reopened the discussion on University outside observers and the continuation of that process. He then broke down the three different directions that the Council could take on outside observers:

1. The Council can support the continuation of the appointment of an “outside observer” (or, as identified by other universities, a “Graduate Faculty/School Representative”) with a statement defining its purpose and the role of an outside observer. In doing so, it would also charge the Graduate School with revising the process for appointing and ensuring participation of/feedback from outside observers so that that process runs efficiently and serves a defined purpose.
2. The Council can recommend the discontinuation of the practice of appointment of an “outside observer” to thesis, dissertation, and synthesis projects, citing a general movement away from outside observers by Graduate Schools and the belief that the practice is outdated and serves no purpose. In doing so, it would recommend revision of the Catalog by removing the below-noted references to outside observers.
3. The Council can recognize that some form of Graduate School/University representation

should exist but that its current iteration is flawed, thus recommending discontinuation of the current practice of appointment of an “outside observer” as noted in #2 above and replacing it with the requirement of open defenses that are advertised at least XXX weeks in advance by the Graduate School. This approach would allow, in theory, any attendee to serve as an outside observer. In recommending this new approach, it would also charge the Graduate School with defining and administering the process of publicizing all defenses.

Discussion then began around these three options and the plausibility or desire to accept any one of them. D. Baker initially suggested that outsider observer be required to attend defenses or risk losing graduate faculty status. C. Taylor argued that this approach would be unfair as there were a number of times that he was not contacted about a scheduled defense. A. Maida advocated for abolishing the practice altogether as it’s just another practice that takes faculty away from other important tasks. S. McInerny agreed, while J. Lemoine disagreed as the entire process only takes a few hours. R. Hernandez objected, stating that some doctoral defenses have taken 3-4 hours, while outside observers generally do not possess the expertise to provide meaningful feedback for the student. C. Taylor advocated for option three as a cultural shift for how defenses are held University wide, but D. Olivier stated that such open defenses would have to be in locations that could accommodate larger crowds, necessitating their faculty to move between both campus locations frequently. C. Briggs asked for any evidence of malpractice at defenses that would require outside observers but M. Farmer-Kaiser explained that the general lack of participation in the practice over the past several years makes data-driven conclusions difficult. M. Kightley stated that his greatest concern was ensuring a mechanism to protect students during a defense, to which many Council members agreed. An initial motion was made to create an open defense that is advertised weekly to all grad faculty along with the ability to invite anyone from the graduate faculty to attend, by the student or the faculty. H. Hurst noted though that this change would leave little time for the Graduate School to make the changes necessary to implement a new system in the Spring semester. Thus, the initial motion was not seconded. A new motion was made to continue assigning outside observers for only doctoral students in the Spring semester, and not to assign outside observers to thesis defenses unless requested by the student, committee chair, or graduate coordinator; during this time the Council will act to develop a committee to recommend lasting revisions to the practice. Motion seconded and a vote was taken. Motion carried with 14 votes to approve, 3 voted to oppose, and 2 abstentions.

New Business:

R. Gonzales presented the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Graduate Certificate rules and regulations, explaining that the recommendations functions as two documents where the first seeks to include new information on existing programs in the Graduate Catalog while the second offers guidance to programs creating new certificate programs. M. Farmer-Kaiser asked for clarification on the question of grade requirements for certificate students, with R. Gonzales stating that certificate student would be required to maintain the GPA of all graduate students. D. Harrington asked that the committee’s recommendation in the program-specific guidelines regarding admission be revised to include language that prospective students could hold either a Bachelor’s degree or a Master’s degree. R. Gonzales agreed. Suggestion also accepted to change the program-specific admission requirement recommendation to read: “Require at least a minimum undergraduate grade point average of 2.75 (4.0 scale) on all work

required.” Motion made to accept the Ad Hoc Committee recommendations with the proposed revisions. Motion seconded and carried. The Council then thanked the ad hoc committee members for their hard work.

Through the Ad Hoc Committee on International Student Admissions Policies, M. Farmer-Kaiser submitted a proposal to admit international students who meet all University standards for regular admission as REG (Regular Admission) rather than CONI (Conditional International). She explained that the CONI admission status is not considered as “regular admission” and/or admission in “good standing” and, as a result imposes an unnecessary challenge for these potential graduate students who are otherwise qualified for “regular admission” and/or admission in “good standing.” Perhaps most notably, these potential graduate students find that they do not qualify for many funding opportunities. Indeed, even our own current Graduate Assistantship policy states: “To qualify for an assistantship, a student must be in regular admission status.” With these considerations in mind, and on behalf of the graduate coordinators and the Graduate School, she asked that the below-noted qualification for admission be removed from policy outlined in the University Catalog’s Graduate Rules & Regulations, Admission to Graduate School, Qualifications for Admission:

D. Qualifications for Admission

.... All international students who hold degrees only from institutions outside the United States are admitted in conditional status....

With the removal of this qualification for admission, the admission status of international applicants who only hold degrees from institutions outside the United States would henceforth be dictated by the admission criteria in place for all applicants. Motion made to approve M. Farmer-Kaiser’s proposal. Motion seconded and carried.

Finally, motion made to discuss enrollment expectations/limits for graduate courses at the February Graduate Council meeting. Motion seconded and carried.

Motion made to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded and carried. Meeting adjourned at 4:25pm.