

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

March 21, 2024

Members present: Thompson, P. (Graduate Council Chair), Akerman, J., Ayo, A., Bettaieb, A., Bishop, W., Bowland, L., Castillo-Rodriguez, M., Cathey, A., Cho, M., Dickerson, A., Fathy, A., Finotti, L., Han, L., Hembree, D., Higgins, P., Hines, M., Kaplan, G., Lang, M., Laursen, S. (Graduate Council Chair Elect), Love, A., Lucio, R., Marshall, S., Maslar, D., McCord, R., Misawa, M., Newkirk, K., Ownley, B., Patrick, J., Skinner, C., Su, S., Roy, Anirban, proxy for Graduate Student Senate President, Vogiatzis, K., Wang, T., Zhao, P.

Ex-Officio members present: Bruner, M., Cathey, A., Collins, C., Danquah, M., Dzikus, L., Haramule, J. (Undergraduate Curriculum Operations Coordinator), Lane, I., McConville, B., Mercer, H., Meschke, L. (Past Graduate Council Chair), Nowicki, M., Odoi, A., Scheb, J., Steele, J., Sullivan, M. (Undergraduate Curriculum Coordinator), Thompson, D., Tran, L., Cox, C., Favier, G.

1. **Call to Order and Welcome** (Phyllis Thompson)

The Graduate Council Zoom meeting was called to order by Graduate Council Chair, Phyllis Thompson on Thursday, March 21, 2024, at 3:00 p.m.

2. **Minutes of the Preceding Meeting**

P. Thompson reported the February 22, 2024, Graduate Council Minutes were approved electronically on February 29, 2024.

3. **Committee Reports:**

➤ **Academic Policy Committee** (Melissa Hines, chair) – (**Attachment 1**)

Hines reported on the discussion item from the APC meeting – Continuous Enrollment.

Hines gave a summary of the discussion and asked for further discussion from the Graduate Council.

- Tran thanked the committee for bringing this forward. And communicated that his college sent a survey about this topic earlier today and will have the results next week, which he will share with Graduate Council.
- One member reported that sometimes it is difficult to get the whole committee together to work over the summer.
- One member reported that their college has a range of solutions for this issue. One department tells their students they cannot expect the faculty to work with them over the summer (no comp exams and no defenses). Two departments pay a small stipend, but that department is struggling to find those funds. One department expects their faculty to be available for their students during the summer.
- Maybe what should come forward with this is some best practices on mentoring and the obligation we have to our graduate students who are conducting research.
- In fairness to our graduate students, if faculty are not going to be available over the summer, or whatever period of time it is, they should make arrangements ahead of time and provide the students with some guidance to plan for their defense in the spring or fall.

We ask all members to go back to your college and engage with your colleagues about this topic and we will share data and continue the discussion at the next APC meeting.

➤ **Appeals Committee** (Siris Laursen, chair) No appeals. No report.

➤ **Curriculum Committee** (Sibyl Marshall, chair) – No meeting. No report.

➤ **Graduate Student Research Awards** (Dixie Thompson)

- The Graduate Student Research Awards committee meets tomorrow, March 22, to make our award recommendations. I will give a full report at our next Council meeting.

4. **Administrative Reports and Announcements:**

Dean's Update (Dixie Thompson)

- We held our spring 2024 workshop for Directors of Graduate Studies on March 6. Presentations were made on Student Services, Graduate Admissions, and Graduate Recruitment.
- Associate Deans Brothers and Collins concluded the spring cohort for Holistic Graduate Admissions. Look for calls to participate in this training in coming semesters.
- March 22 is the deadline to nominate students for Returning Students Endowed Fellowships
- Graduate and Professional Student Appreciation Week is April 1 – 5.
- Graduate Hooding is Saturday, May 18 at 9AM in Thompson-Boling Arena.
- Applications for our graduate programs are up compared to last year.
 - Completed applications for fall 2024 are 5638; up 19.3% over this time last year.
 - Admitted students for fall 2024 are at 2226; up 13.3% over this time last year.
 - However – there is still work to do because many of these students have not yet completed the Intent to Enroll. Students with assistantship offers may be weighing their options until April 15. Continue to interact with these students and let them know that we want them to join us on Rocky Top!
 - Over 2000 applications have no decision. Please work within your departments to finalize all decisions.

Graduate Student Senate Update: (Anirban Roy, Proxy for GSS President, Katherine Trubee)

- Our Senate 8 meeting is tonight. Our speakers tonight are Jaclyn Slack, Senior Account Manager with the Hildreth Agency and Dr. Jill Zambito, Associate Vice Chancellor for Health and Wellness. GSS meetings are open to the public and we encourage all graduate and professional students to come and engage with our speakers and the senate body.
- Office Hours. An opportunity for graduate and professional students to speak with different units.
 - April 1, 4-5: UT Creamery – College of Education Health and Human Sciences.
 - April 8, 11-12; Student Union Room 370 – Social Sciences.
 - April 22, 1-2; Ayres, Room 308H
- Travel Awards
 - Travel period 4. Travel occurring between March 1 and April 30. The deadline was February 14.
 - \$68,000.00 was awarded to 115 students, averaging \$590 per student.
 - Next deadline is April 12. This is travel between May thru August. Students will know the results by May 15th. Visit gss.utk.edu/gss-travel-awards or email gsstravel@utk.edu for more information.
- Newsletter – *The Gist*
 - The 5th *The Gist* newsletter went out on March 18. GPSAW was highlighted and there was a housing survey.
- Upcoming Events:
 - April 1 – April 3: SGA/GSS elections.
 - April 1 – April 5: GPSAW
 - Monday, April 1, GSS Awards Brunch, 11:00 – 1:00, in the Student Union Ball Room.
 - Tuesday, April 2, GSO Summit, 12:00 – 3:00, Student Union, Room 362.
 - Friday, April 5, MGSO/GSS Social Event, 6:00 – 10:00.
 - Saturday, April 6, CSE Grad Night at Painting with a Twist, 6:00-8:00 p.m.
 - Sunday, April 21, MGSO/GSS, Tyson Park Cleanup, 11:00 – 2:00.
 - Thursday, May 2, Grad Night Out at Tern Club, 8:00 – 10:00 p.m.
 - Wednesday, May 15, MGSO End of Year Celebration at UT Gardens, 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.
- Senate meeting #9 will be held on April 18.
- Senate meeting #10 will be held on May 2.
Upcoming featured speakers: Chancellor Plowman; Tanara Teal-Tate, Executive Director of Parking and Transportation; and Dr. Janelle Coleman, Access and Engagement Executive Director for Assessment and Evaluation, to discuss campus climate assessment.
- As we move into GPSAW, we are keeping our vision in mind: to build a graduate student community at UTK.

Graduate Council Chair (Phyllis Thompson)

I want to share information from the last Faculty Senate meeting. The discussion was about winter mini term.

Winter mini term. The concern was brought to the Undergraduate Council because we have gone from a 3-week mini term to a 2-week mini term. If you teach in that mini term and you have concerns or questions, please share those and I will take them to the next Faculty Senate meeting on behalf of Graduate Council. If you would rather send those questions or concerns to me in an email, that is fine also.

From the data that was shared, concerns were expressed about taking an already limited course, after reducing it from 15 weeks down to 3, and now reducing it to 2.

I assume with more online options that we may see growth in our mini terms. My understanding for the mini term is that it allows students who are not doing so well the chance to improve. Creating mini term was targeting our undergraduate students who may, because they are struggling, need to withdraw from a class fall semester. Then, to stay on track, they register for mini term. This has been successful for the undergraduate students.

- A concern about the academic calendar was raised. The 2-week course requires a new process for teaching. We want to maintain quality for the course. But this brings a new burden on faculty. Also, this burdens graduate students to only one weekend to catch up on class material.
 - Yes, the calendar is set now. But it is my understanding that they will continue to look at the calendar and therefore we should raise concerns so they can make informed decisions regarding faculty concerns. I bring this to your attention, changing it from 3 weeks to 2 weeks, in case you were thinking about teaching a mini-term course. How much learning and quality will the students gain from a 2-week course?
- The aspect of this is that colleges/departments can make decisions and have control of those decisions in terms of what courses to teach for those mini terms and for how many credit hours. Can the curriculum be developed and created for a 2-week mini-term where students can actually complete the work?

D. Thompson: One of the concerns keeping the current mini term length was pushing the spring term to end at almost Memorial Day. Also, looking at peer institutions, with having a shorter mini term, brings us in alignment with them. There are faculty members that are on these various committees. I believe the discussion will be what works best for UTK.

5. Items from the Floor:**Nominating Committee – Phyllis Thompson**

We have not received any nominations for chair elect. I would like to communicate this is a great opportunity for campus-wide leadership, service, and making a difference. There are meetings you need to attend, being available for Faculty Senate, and presenting our Council Report at their meetings. I ask at this time, are there any nominations for next year's chair elect or would anyone like to self-nominate?

- Greg Kaplan self-nominated.

Thank you, Greg, for self-nominating. If you would please send me, Siris, and Catherine a copy of your CV. If there are any other faculty members that would like to self-nominate, please send us a copy of your CV. We will vote on next year's chair-elect at our April 25 Council meeting.

P. Thompson: Are there any questions? With no questions, the meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Cox
Graduate Council Liaison

Attachment 1**REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING****Thursday, February 29, 2024****3:30 – 5:00 p.m., Zoom Meeting**

Committee members present: Melissa Hines (Chair), Ahmed Bettaieb, Lizzie Bowland, Victor Chavez (Proxy for Maria Castillo Rodrigues), Aly Fathy, Adam Love, David Maslar, Jennifer Patrick, Chris Pickart,

Other attendees: Brendan McConville (School of Music), Phyllis Thompson (Graduate Council Chair), Marla Bruner, Carl Collins, Dixie Thompson, Catherine Cox, Grace Favier (Graduate School).

Melissa Hines called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.

Agenda Item: Continuous Enrollment**D. Thompson:**

I bring the Continuous Enrollment policy to you today as a discussion item.

The Graduate Catalog policy:***Continuous Enrollment***

All degree-seeking students are expected to make a full commitment to their graduate and/or professional study in order to ensure that they can complete all degree requirements without unnecessary delay. Graduate students are therefore required to maintain an active status through continuous enrollment from the time of first enrollment until graduation. (Doctoral students registered for course 600 Dissertation have option of exemption under special circumstances of full-time internships not related to the dissertation. See section below Exemption from Continuous Enrollment of Course 600.

Continuous enrollment is maintained by registering for a minimum of one graduate credit hour per semester (excluding the summer, unless stipulated otherwise by the program or department). However, students who have started taking dissertation hours (course 600 Dissertation) must maintain a minimum of 3 credit hours per semester during all semesters, including the summer, in order to comply with the Continuous Enrollment requirement.

There are conflicting issues putting graduate students, faculty and departmental leaders into difficult situations.

Here are the conflicting issues:

- PhD students who begin taking course 600 must enroll in course 600 every semester until graduation – including summers.
- The majority of tenured and tenure-track faculty members are on 9-month appointments.

Thus, we run into an issue when faculty are not available in the summer to assist/oversee students, but students are required to enroll in course 600. The intention of the policy was to ensure that doctoral students maintain progress in research and graduate in a timely manner, but are the unintended consequences creating problems that need to be addressed?

Suggestions:

- I ask our committee members to begin to gather input from your colleges on whether faculty and students find this an issue of concern.
- Dean Thompson will gather input from the provost and college leadership on whether they perceive this to be an issue of concern.
- Graduate School staff will begin to gather data from other schools about their policies.

Goal:

Come to the April 4 APC meeting with input as listed above. This will allow the committee to begin an informed conversation about the issue. Ultimately, it may be next year's committee that makes a policy change recommendation, but at least some work toward consideration of this issue can begin this semester with good data.

This proposal is open to questions and discussion.

Is the solution to say that students do not have to register for the summer semester?

Thompson: That may be one answer. But, let me share that we have many graduate students that choose the summer semester to graduate. These students are dependent on having their chair and committee members willing to work with them to graduate summer term. If faculty are not going to be available in the summer, then they need to communicate that information early to their students, so the students know early to plan on a spring or fall graduation. These questions are complicated. And the implications and repercussions are not simple.

For students that are on project funding, doesn't that funding include summer salary?

Thompson: Yes, for the GRA's, which only accounts for some of our doctoral students. We have many students that are on GTA's and students that have no funding at all and are paying their own way.

I believe we need and should think about how unfair it is for students to pay for something they are not getting assistance with to finish.

Thompson: I agree. There is an obligation. When a student registers for dissertation hours under a faculty member, I believe there is an obligation for the major professor to provide feedback, guidance, and input.

Comments from Committee Members:

- In our department it is the norm that in the summer our doctoral students will do their comprehensive exams. It is something the faculty member is willing to do without pay. We are providing unofficial labor when not on contract over the summer. This is providing help and guidance for our students but not being directly compensated.
- Our model is similar in our unit. I think specifically it shows up not as teaching but as service. As the chair of the committee, it is expected and thought of as part of the service that is associated with those duties. This is the first time I have heard this question.
- In our unit working with and advising your doctoral student over the summer is standard. I have never heard of a faculty member complaining about that in our department.
- In the College of Veterinary Medicine, it is quite different. To the best of my knowledge, we do not have very many, if any, 9-month faculty appointments. We commonly have students work on their projects over the summer and graduate in the summer.
- For the College of Social Work, we have many that work over the summer. To include tenure and non-tenure track. I think the expectation of mentoring is that you are mentoring and not letting a large gap emerge within the relationship. I would be very distressed as a student if I found that my chair wanted to take a break for 3 months. I believe there is an obligation there to mentor our students. I believe service to the academy, service to those students that are setting themselves up in their careers, that we have an obligation and an incredible privilege from where we sit. There should be service beyond what we do in the classroom. Part of what we are called to do is to serve and mentor the next generation of academics and these students are trying to go to the next level. I believe the mentoring part is one of the most important things I do.
- With respect to the time to finish their degree, if we don't require students to enroll and make progress during the summer, does that mean they will have longer to finish their degree?

Thompson: I hope not. I don't want us to change the time limit for the doctoral degree. I believe we would be outside the norm and moving in a negative direction. As mentioned, I will be gathering data from SEC institutions.

- Are there any obvious negatives for not making students enroll in course 600 over the summer?

Thompson: We have to consider this action may make it even more difficult for those students that want to graduate summer. This also suggests to the doctoral students that there is an option in stopping their research. Research is usually a long slog of continuous work that gets you to the finish line. It is not starting and stopping. I would hate it if our doctoral students thought of this as a timeout. In alignment to what was previously mentioned, I would hope even if a student was not going to sign up for course 600 in the summer, that before the spring semester ended, the mentor and the student have discussed what they will accomplish over the summer. Students need to continue to work on their projects and that kind of careful mentoring is what helps our students get to successful outcomes.

There are a lot of variations in how faculty see this issue. I encourage you to talk with faculty in your college and get some input because I want us to come to a good decision for the university. One that will be fair to both our faculty and our students.

- What about faculty that go on a sabbatical? Is there a mechanism in place for that situation?

Thompson: There is not a policy in place. What I have generally seen is that the faculty member will continue to work with their doctoral students. In cases where they are unable to, they have provided a contingency plan.

- What would be the financial ramifications of this policy change?

Thompson: For students that are GRA's, if they are not taking course 600 in the summer, then the college is not getting those tuition dollars. In the case of GTA's, those tuition dollars are coming from the college and going back to the college. For those doctoral students that are self-funded, they would not pay for tuition for the summer term.

M. Hines: I believe our discussions today have been very good. I encourage everyone to go back to their units and talk about this and then bring to the April APC meeting those discussions.

D. Thompson: This has been a great discussion. I appreciate everyone's input today. At the next APC meeting we will continue this discussion and share the data. Note, this agenda item may continue and move forward to next year's Academic Policy Committee. This change is important for us to not rush it forward.

The meeting adjourned at 4:25.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Cox
Graduate Council Liaison