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Graduate Associate Deans' Group Minutes

Graduate Council

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MINUTES

Graduate Associate Deans

February 9, 2017

SSB 405

2:00 – 3:30PM

Members Attending: **Dixie Thompson** (Vice-Provost & Dean), **Jeffrey Fairbrother** (Education, Health, & Human Sciences), **Mary Gunther** (Nursing), **Kate Atchley** (Haslam Business), **Katherine Ambroziak** (Architecture and Design), **Todd Moore** (Arts & Sciences), **Masood Parang** (Tickle Engineering), **Alex Long** (Law), **Stephen Kania** (Vet Med), **Joan Rentsch** (Communication & Information), **Holly Mercer** (Library), **Claudia Kirk** (Vet Med), **Sherry Cummings** (Social Work)

Ex Officio: **Ernest Brothers** (Graduate School), **Yvonne Kilpatrick** (Graduate School), **Stephanie Galloway** (Graduate School), **Sarah Stone** (Graduate School)

1. **Welcome & meeting called to order** at 2 p.m. by Dixie Thompson. Attendees introduced themselves.
2. **Minutes of the January 12, 2017 meeting were approved.**
3. **Announcements – Dr. Thompson**
 - Notification letters for the Spring 2017 Faculty Student Research Award (FSRA) recipients will be going out by early next week.
 - Nominations for Jimmy and Ilene Cheek Graduate Medal of Excellence are in, and we have asked the members of the SFRA committee to evaluate those, as well.
 - We are in the process of sorting out the nominations for fellowships. Dr. Brothers will be sharing additional information shortly.
 - We are a little more behind than where we had hoped to be with the encoding for the graduate degree auditing system, but we are moving forward. It will happen...just not as quickly as we had anticipated. It will be a slow, methodical process to get it done. All of our changes to the graduate catalog are essential to that, so we will continue to work together to make sure the descriptions of our programs are such that we can actually deconstruct them and then reconstruct them in coding language so the auditing system can work.

- Overall, we are very pleased with the progress we are making. Dr. Thompson asked Ernest Brothers and Sarah Stone to give an update on the 3MT competitions.

3MT Update – Ernest Brothers and Sarah Stone

- Two workshops have been scheduled for February 22 and 23 (one in the morning, one in the afternoon). This will help students know how to prepare for the competition. Some students can't come in for those sessions, so Sean Hendricks will record them and stream the content. As you submit names, Sean will send information to them about these sessions and the preparation opportunities available for them. Dr. Ambroziak asked that the details be sent to the associate deans, as well.
- In regards to training the judges, we don't think they will necessarily want to come in; so we are putting together a packet for them that we can send electronically along with links to previous competitions. Sean and Ernest are working on the score card for the judges, so you will have that prior to your semi-finals. There will be a rubric with the criteria carefully spelled out for the judges, which they will have an opportunity to review before they come to the venue.
- Two semi-finals have been scheduled:
 - March 7 from 4 – 7 p.m. in 113 BIOTECH
 - March 9 from 9 – Noon in the Scripps Lab
- Remaining dates are pending. Reminder that we want to have the semi-finals during March before Spring Break. The final competition is April 7 in Hollingsworth Auditorium from 1 – 4 pm.

Discussed the time frame for the semi-finals. Dr. Fairbrother shared they are tentatively scheduling 3 hours, allowing informal time on the front and back for refreshments and the process itself. Dr. Thompson agreed: a time for breaks and a time to have a social aspect to these events is not uncommon. Notes regarding the final competition:

- The sound set up for the final will likely be a lapel mic.
- Dr. Thompson and Dr. Brothers are working on getting the judges for the final.
- There will be awards for everyone who makes it to the finals. We are trying to keep the costs so that we don't have to ask for sharing.

Semi-final nominees are due to us by February 20. The most you will have in each semi-final rounds is 12. When we get the additional dates and the names of the students, we send those brackets to you.

Fellowships Update – Ernest Brothers

We had 76 nominations for the Graduate School Fellowships (we had 84; some were without transcripts so they were disqualified). This process is working well; much better than last year. We are running it through the Admit system, and that seems to be going well. February 15 – March 1 will be the review process, and we need you to volunteer to be reviewers. Reviewers will have no more than 18 files to review. We only have 7 so far; and we will need 3 reviewers per fellowship. (Bruce Behn, Stephen Kania, and Kathryn Ambroziak all offered help.) Dr. Thompson added that she will likely call on everyone in the room to review. Note the window is still open for returning student nominations.

Dr. Brothers shared that they have made a lot of effort to make the process better from last year. Our hope is that this has been a good recruitment tool. Dr. Thompson extended thanks to Ernest, Sean & Greg, who have worked very hard to make this happen.

Fellowships for Graduate Excellence

Deans were given the number of awards they can distribute, so colleges can use those to attract your best students. There will be more detailed information about how they have been set up coming in March/April.

It is correct that you cannot nominate people for more than one Grad School Fellowship; however, students receiving one of the Fellowships for Graduate Excellence can also be in the running for one of the others, too.

Dr. Fairbrother asked if there are things they need to track related to the students receiving the Fellowships for Graduate Excellence. Dr. Thompson said that all of those details are forthcoming. We will want feedback. Reporting will include research, academic performance, creative involvement, etc. All of that is down the road (late spring/early summer). We may ask for suggestions about creating PR around this process, but that will also be late spring/early summer before we start working on that piece of it. However, when August comes, we want to start the fall semester talking about these students. We want to promote these students, have gatherings for them, and spend time really profiling the good work that they are doing.

Graduate School Policies

Dr. Thompson shared that there has been some misunderstanding of our policies or attempts at getting around them, especially with the Leave of Absence and 600 Exemption requests. We have a leave of absence policy for students who for good reason need to stop their academic progress to take care of issues and then re-start that program without great difficulty. We also have a policy to allow doctoral students who are on full-time internships and not working on their dissertations to get an exemption from 600. In both instances we have cases of abuse and problems, and we need your help with this. She asked Dr. Stephanie Galloway to share information related to this issue, and to discuss ways we can help lessen the problems we are experiencing.

Leave of Absence Policy – Stephanie Galloway

One of the issues that we have with LOA is that students are requesting it who do not meet the criteria. A lot of students are looking at it to relieve financial burdens. While we are sensitive to the costs involved with graduate education, the policy was not designed for financial hardship. We are seeing several requests that are for financial hardship alone; once they learn that won't be approved, they then come back and indicate that they were sick and go get the medical documentation. At the college level we need you to really evaluate if the student does have a legitimate reason before requesting a leave of absence. The purpose of the Leave of Absence is for students in serious medical need. The LOA was put in place for extreme circumstances that necessitates students to step away from their studies.

Dr. Fairbrother raised the discussion that financial hardship is a legitimate concern with a lot of talk now that universities are not taking the responsibility seriously to prevent their students from going into a lifetime of debt. It seems to raise the question that perhaps financial hardship should be a legitimate reason.

Dr. Galloway agreed that it is a concern and she is not sure why financial hardship was not included as a reason when the policy was drafted, but that is what it is today. Dr. Thompson noted that what we are charged to do in the Graduate School is enforce Graduate Council policy. We want to set up policies that recognize real world situations, but that also hold people accountable. There is great difficulty in managing a graduate program if the membrane is porous and the people are continually in and out of school. It seems this was put in place for those times when there are extraordinary situations that require a student to step away; otherwise the student has been admitted to a program and commits to that program to finish. It isn't intended to be punitive or harsh. It is important to note that a student can always step away; however, they have to go through the readmission process to return. It doesn't mean that for financial reasons they can't stop if they need to.

Question raised: how many LOAs do we process, and how many have been approved or denied? Dr. Galloway shared that in the time that she has been here, the number is approximately 50-75, and most are typically approved as long as they meet the criteria. Usually the reason for forms to be denied is because they are lacking documentation or it is clearly not an appropriate reason. Another issue are the forms that come in retroactively. Some of these students are gone a long time and then come back and try to claim it as a medical leave of absence. We are getting so many, and it leads us to think that they may be abusing the system.

Dr. Thompson noted that a change to the policy would be problematic, and as such would need to include conversations to involve the provost and the chancellor.

600 Exemption – Stephanie Galloway

Dr. Thompson shared that this policy is clearly misunderstood across campus which sets the stage for abuse to occur. Dr. Galloway explained that the original purpose was to allow students to leave for a semester for internships abroad, and since they would not be working on their dissertation or using university resources, they would be released from fees. Now students are trying to use it, even when it is clear they will be continuing to work on their dissertation.

At the department level, we need help so that students understand the policy and use it correctly.

Dr. Fairbrother suggesting adding a policy box to the form that states, “During the period of my exemption I will not be working on my dissertation. I understand it is a violation of policy to use university resources (including access to advisors, equipment, data collection, etc.) during this period.” Also, why are students not registering in an internship course during this period?

Dr. Thompson shared that not all programs require students to be signed up for internship hours. The form, however, does require the major professor and director of graduate studies to sign. Dr. Galloway explained that if they both signed, then it puts her in a difficult position to have to come back and say that they don’t meet the criteria. We need the help of the department screening and letting them know they don’t qualify before they complete the form, which shouldn’t be signed off on if they don’t meet the policy.

Dr. Fairbrother brought up that there may be IRB concerns, too, if the student is not enrolled but working with research subjects.

Dr. Cummings shared that sometimes advisors are not fully aware of the policy and not taking time to look it up. They would be in favor of having the policy on the form with a check box, as Dr. Fairbrother mentioned.

It was pointed out that there are some instances where “not enrolled” may extend to students who are withdrawn or dismissed, but who are still required to meet with departmental counselors or staff. That would need to be differentiated so it doesn’t appear they are in violation of policy.

Dr. Thompson and Dr. Galloway agreed we can improve the form. We will work on it with our staff, and also discuss it at the DGS meeting in March. We just wanted you to know this difficulty that we are facing, and your thoughts and comments will be helpful as we work to reconstruct this form to make it more clear what the policy and expectations are.

Plagiarism in Thesis and Dissertation – Dixie Thompson

This is a follow up to the council meeting discussion last week about iThenticate. On February 20 Dr. Thompson will be going to the Faculty Senate executive meeting to talk with them, as well as the Council of Deans. We have a very serious problem with plagiarism that we have to find a solution for.

When there is an allegation of an event, we have to investigate. The process usually begins with Dr. Nobels to determine if any federal funding was tied to the project. If so, then he would take the lead on it. Either way, a group of faculty is called to review the charges. Usually, it is a collaborative effort from the unit where the student earned the degree, and the college. They make a recommendation, and ultimately it could end up with the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards. If they find it to be a violation of policies, the degree is revoked.

We want to put in place mechanisms to decrease the number of plagiarisms. By doing so we diminish the person hours involved in the investigative process, and we decrease the number of degrees revoked. Regarding iThenticate – Engineering is requiring it, and others are using it. We do want to make it policy.

Dr. Fairbrother: The feedback he is getting is that Department Heads are not in favor of having their staff scanning the documents; but they are in favor, at least in the spirit of it; some concern with the language “certify that it is plagiarism free.”

Dr. Thompson shared that they have fixed that language; and also revised it so that it each department can create an “in-house plan” so it doesn’t have to be a staff person scanning documents.

Dr. Mercer talked about the license we hold: we have 200 accounts that can be used, and we spread those across colleges. That is approximately 6000 reports that are available to run each year by those accounts. Currently, we have about 600 dissertations reviewed each year, so there is still plenty of room for faculty and students to have their other papers and manuscripts scanned.

Dr. Mercer explained that it really is a developmental tool; more and more journals are using it, so it is like training future faculty. The process is only a few minutes. You give it a title, upload the document, and run the report. The most challenging part is reading and interpreting the report. If the manuscript has exact language and is cited, that can be ignored.

Dr. Thompson shared that her idea is when the report is generated, everyone on the committee would get a copy, but that is up to the department.

Dr. Rentsch indicated that it would be nice to have some way to relieve advisors of culpability. There was a case recently where the degree was revoked and the student sued the professor. That could be avoided with something like this in place.

Dr. Thompson thanked everyone for the discussion, and this will be something we continue to look at and discuss.

Graduate Council Handout:

Dr. Thompson shared the final language regarding certificates that was discussed at last week's council meeting. There was a lot of back and forth and editing, so she is presenting this final language for you to see:

From:

No more than nine (9) semester credit hours earned toward completion of a single certificate may be applied toward a graduate degree

To:

At least 3 credit hours for the certificate must be earned outside of the requirements of the degree(s) and other certificates.

Credentials Committee

The final item on the agenda warrants discussion but we only have a few minutes remaining. Dr. Thompson shared about their purpose: it is to ensure that people who are serving on committees have the credentials to do so:

- Have the Terminal Degree: PhD or equivalent
- Academic Standing
- Affiliated with University

When we certify the degrees, we look to make sure the people serving on committees are on this list and approved to sign off on the dissertation. The problem is that through the years there has been difficulty creating a database that was maintained well. We are correcting that, and have made great strides in doing so. There has also been a lack of transparency in how the committee operates, and we are working on that, too, and trying to communicate more clearly.

Todd Moore and others in Arts and Sciences have done some work in polling department heads and in reviewing this process. There has been some thought that perhaps credentialing should be shifted to departments. If we do that, we have to continue to think about:

- 1) How to maintain a database
- 2) How we certify within accreditation standards that everyone serving on committees has the credentials to do so.

If we move away from the credentials committee, we have got to come up with a different solution. There are many things that hinge upon the idea that a person is credentialed, so the decision is not a simple one. We don't have time to get into a full discussion of it today, but we want to introduce it and maybe we can add it to the agenda for next time, but she asked Dr. Todd Moore to talk a little about the survey.

Dr. Moore shared that the survey was conducted among 60 department heads on campus and about 80% responded. They were asked what their satisfaction was with the credentialing process and what their thoughts were about being able to handle this in the departments.

Results:

- Low satisfaction for the process as it currently stands.
- In a scale of 1 to 5, the average rating was a “4” wanting the process to reside in the department
- Why would a change be valuable: the response was that very rarely is someone not approved – so what is the point if it is an extremely rare event to have them denied?

He shared this with the credentials committee and they were very open to the discussion. The question though is if the committee is going away, what happens then? Will the quality still be there?

Dr. Thompson shared that her hope was that with the changes we have made and continue to make, that this will be such a seamless process that people won't even think twice about it. However, it is going to take longer and we will have to smooth over some bad feelings about how difficult it has been in the past.

Todd shared that one department head said the new system is worse. The CV had to be manipulated into the requirements of the committee; and for him it was very frustrating in the time and effort it took to rearrange the CV. Perhaps it will be useful to get more feedback, since that is only a one person perspective.

Dr. Thompson thanked everyone for their time. With no additional items, the meeting adjourned at 3:30. **Our next meeting is March 9 at 2 p.m.**