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Graduate Associate Deans' Group Minutes - June 11, 2020

Graduate Council

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Graduate Associate Deans

Minutes – June 11, 2020

Via Zoom

Attending: Bruce Behn; Katherine Ambroziak; Virginia Kupritz; Jeff Fairbrother; John Stier; Charles Noble; Sherry Cummings; Todd Moore; Sadie Hutson; Claudia Kirk; Ozlem Kilic; Paula Schaefer; Regina Mays; Teri Durbin

Ex Officio: Dixie Thompson; Sean Hendricks; Dixie Thompson; Yvonne Kilpatrick; AnnaMaria Murphy; Sean Hendricks; Millie Cheatham

Welcome – Dixie Thompson; Approval of the minutes from the last meeting deferred to June.

Graduate School Updates – Dixie Thompson

Dixie has been working one of the AOGs to help implement COVID 19 changes that needed to take place. They finished their work in May, and Dixie transitioned to an implementation team about how to prepare for Fall. Screen Share from Dixie of priority items they are working on.

Top 3 Priorities:

- **Student Success**
- **Adequate-Training for the New Environment – One module is out now for employees, there will be another coming for instructors and graduate assistants, and another for students as we welcome them back to campus.**
- **Communication to/from grad/prof students – making sure we are staying connected to our students and that they are getting what they need.**

Some of the student success items have been completed, others will be ongoing. The longer this pandemic lasts, the more we will have students impacted.

Orientation

The Graduate School is preparing for orientations; it will be virtual on August 10 and 11. We are working with a vendor to make this a good experience for our students. We can retain the content for 6 months after the event, so it will be beneficial to students arriving in Spring.

Delays in Graduation Report

Thank you for helping pull together information for that report. Dixie will share that report once it has been cleared from the Provost for sharing.

International Students

Students are faced with issues related to embassies not open yet or delayed opening, as well as issues related to executive orders that will create difficulties in getting them here. A primary question that comes up is “if we can enroll them, and they can do their work remotely, can we hire them?”

Payroll is a system function. There are countries that US law prohibits payments of employees (Syria, Iran, Cuba, North Korea and the Crimea Region). There will be no hiring of people who reside in these countries.

There is a company that UT has secured to handle payments of employees who reside outside the US. For these employees, there is an option, but it is expensive:

- The cost per employee is 20% of salary with a minimum of 1250.00 per month (minimum 15,000.00 per year per employee). Cost will be charged to the responsible unit.
- Tax rates vary – some as high as 50% - need to negotiate if student would pay this or the dept.
- Set-up fee of at least \$500 per employee (rate could be considerably higher). This would be charged to the responsible unit.
- The company needs a lead time of 3-4 weeks once given the employee’s data.
- There are still some issues to be explored related to status of benefits for these employees. This is being investigated by UT System payroll office and they will report back.
- We are not sure about the fee waiver. Where does their status as employee reside?

Closing the door to all other back channels to make sure we are not breaking the laws of other countries, as well as our own. However, this essentially doubles the cost of a GTA/GRA.

A deferred entry process is probably the best option for these students.

Questions:

- Can tuition be the stipend? No. Students must be employed to access the fee waiver pool. A department can pay a student’s tuition, though
- Can the stipend be held? She will need to ask, but not likely. Fee waivers are tied to being an employee, which means they need to be paid.

Students may have left to go home and will now be returning. Remember they may need to self-isolate upon their return.

Prep for Today’s Meeting

Thanks for sending in this information on what is happening with your international students. If you have not had a chance to do this yet, please go ahead and submit it to us.

Graduate Admissions – Yvonne Kilpatrick & AnnaMaria Murphy

Yvonne shared that the issue for many students is getting an appointment and obtaining the visa from their consulate. Even students with a valid visa may have travel issues. Visa is a permission to go to the border and request entrance. It is the officer’s decision as to whether or not you are allowed entry. Transferring from another US institution is viable, however, since those students are already in the US.

Also, a reminder that if students are taking classes online, there is a difference between online instruction vs distance programs.

Research & Field Placements – Dixie Thompson

Discussed how these are being handled. There has been some ability to come up with creative solutions, but difficulties for others. Some agencies won't be open for placements. There are some related financial struggles; temporary housing issues for those who may have to travel for placements.

Discussed validity of signed waivers of liability for students in these placements. It really isn't enforceable. MOU with agency can include social distancing and mitigating risks. Sadie shared that the system level is talking about having discussion about signing waivers of liability. Sadie will link Dixie into the conversation.

What about Research? Dixie shared that in the report from the colleges, maybe 95% or higher reported that the department or college had a solution, but the longer this goes on, the bigger the problem will be. Dixie will reach out to Matthew Mench to see where we are on research. He does have weekly updates; if you are not getting those, check with them to see about being on their distribution list.

Return to Teaching Open Discussion

Question about GTAs who are not comfortable teaching an in-person class. RJ Hinde has been working closely on those issues and creating a training series on hybrid, online, face to face, and how to teach in those ways. RJ is probably the best person to talk to for related questions. When people see the training video for instructors, we believe it will ease anxiety. A lot of thought has gone into this, about how to create a safe environment.

Some of our faculty are not comfortable in coming back, and are there percentages about how many should be face to face or hybrid. We will leave that to colleges to find solutions that work best for your students and faculty. Room capacities are reduced to about 30 %.

Some of the students may have a hard time transitioning to become online learners. We are thinking about doing something along these lines for professional development.

Communication - Dixie

This fall will have challenges and one issue that will be important is how to communicate with our students. What are your plans, and do you have suggestions for the grad school?

Our social media presence has increased (Twitter, FB – they can get quick updates). Students are very responsive right now because we don't send them emails that often. We will continue to do so when needed. We do routinely send info to Directors of Graduate Studies. Please help us continue to encourage them to push info both up and down (to department heads, leaders, and to students).

The UT App is a very helpful communication tool. Thinking that could be very useful for us; there is a student section on the app.

Discussed students who may feel pressured to be in a lab or teaching space where they feel something is unsafe. Instructor training will include info, ombudsperson can be an option, as well as the department

head. Perhaps the hotline where you can report waste, fraud, and abuse could be used as a place to report these things, as well. The return to work guides will be helpful;

Todd, a return to work guide. Supervisors and their work. We talk about committees and one is a committee to listen to situations and give advice; one also around personnel, as an avenue if the need to arises.

Dixie encouraged everyone to feel free to reach out if you need to. We are working on professional development and looking to move some of that content online. John suggested a best practices for online teaching would be helpful to include.

No further items. Meeting adjourned.