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Graduate Council Minutes - March 26, 2020

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

March 26, 2020 Minutes

Members present: Patterson, D., (Chair), Broemmel, A., (Chair-Elect), Alshibli, K., Baxter, T., Boder, E., Bonom, J., Choi, S. (Graduate Student Senate Vice-President), Dittmann, P., Dodds, G., Dzikus, L., Edwards, L., Ekici, K., Finotti, L., Fleming-May, R., Griffin, M., Guo, H., Herron, F., Hewett, K., Hines, M., Lang, M., Mason, L., Meschke, L., Misawa, M., Mohsin, M., Moyer, D., Ohnesorg, S., Okafor, C., Preuss, N., Stehle, M., Wang, H., Ward, M., Willis, D. (Graduate Student Senate President), Zhang, F.

Ex-Officio members present: Ambroziak, K., Aydeniz, M., Behn, B., Bradberry, S., Brothers, E., Cantrell, S., Cheatham, M., Fairbrother, J., Foy, S., Hartman, H., Hendricks, S., Kilbey, M., Kilic, O., Kilpatrick, Y., Kirk, C., Kupritz, V., Mercer, H., Moore, T., Murphy, A., Noble, C., Thompson, D., Cox, C.

1. **Call to Order and Welcome** (David Patterson)

The first Graduate Council Zoom meeting was called to order by Chair, David Patterson on Thursday, March 26, 2020, at 3:00 p.m.

This is an unfortunate and unprecedented event that we have to meet by Zoom. Before we adjourn, we would like to hear from the colleges in terms of how you are adapting to this remarkable turn of events. We appreciate everyone making time to attend this first Zoom Graduate Council meeting.

2. **Minutes of the Preceding Meeting**

The February 20, 2020, Graduate Council Minutes were approved electronically on March 12, 2020.

3. **Committees and Reports:**

➤ **Academic Policy Committee** (Maria Stehle)

No meeting / no report.

➤ **Appeals Committee** (Amy Broemmel)

No appeals to report.

➤ **Curriculum Committee** (Laurie Meschke) (Attachment 3)

No meeting / no report.

4. **New Business**

Earlier this week you were asked to vote for policy changes on two issues:

- i) proposal to change the deadline for late drops for Spring 2020 classes only, and
- ii) proposal to extend the deadline to choose S/NC grading for spring 2020 classes only.

Dr. Patterson asked Dean Dixie Thompson, how will these be implemented?

D. Thompson: The Academic Operations Group along with the Registrar's Office will help us work through how this will happen. I am in the process of writing an appeal that will go to the Deans and Department

Heads to ask them to consider opening their courses for this option. Many of our graduate students may have started this semester in a very positive space. However, because of this coronavirus pandemic and the situation that we now find ourselves in, many students now may be seriously struggling and find it difficult to excel in the same way. We will be working out the details but we had to get the policies in place so that we could move forward.

5. Administrative Reports and Announcements:

Deans Update: (Dixie Thompson)

So many things have transpired since we met last. In the Graduate School, when we began seeing the writing on the wall in terms what might come our way with this pandemic, we looked at our technology options and asked our staff about ways they could telecommute. Therefore, as of this week, we have moved to 100 percent telecommuting. You can still reach us through our phone numbers and email.

Under the Emergency Operations Center, an Academic Operations Group was created, with multiple subgroups focused on specific areas. One of these groups is focused entirely on graduate and professional student education matters. The members of this team is composed of David Patterson, Claudia Kirk, Todd Moore, Beauvais Lyons, Kathy Abbott, Paula Schaefer, and myself.

For immediate issues: we noticed right away that the graduation deadlines would have to be adjusted. For those defending their thesis or dissertation, we revised those dates and pushed out those deadlines. We also sent information about how to defend remotely and about how these changes may be affecting their research. I would like to thank Sean Hendricks who did a heroic job in creating websites and linking information together and communicating with our Directors of Graduate Studies.

We are now looking at issues that have a longer-term impact. Such as, how will all this affect the mental health of our graduate and professional students? How are we going to help support graduate students who have their graduation ceremony delayed because of this pandemic? These issues are more complex and we will continue to review these issues to find solutions. We will communicate to you as we progress.

I appreciate everyone's willingness to participate in the emergency voting earlier this week. Those matters needed to get to the Faculty Senate for approval. The Chancellor wanted to let students know right away that we were going to be flexible and creative in how we approach policy matters that would give students opportunities to salvage this semester. We did not want students to just start dropping classes. We hope this gives them some options to find a way to be successful this semester. This has been a whirlwind and crazy couple of weeks for all of us and I thank you for all you have done during this very trying and challenging time.

Next week was our Graduate and Professional Student Appreciation Week. I am happy to report that next week will still be our Graduate and Professional Student Appreciation Week. However, it will look very different. We will have a number of online professional development opportunities. We will do a lot of social media and do shout-outs to graduate and professional students to celebrate some of the wonderful things they are doing.

Next week we have a meeting with the Directors of Graduate Studies to see what issues are coming up in the departments so that I can communicate those issues to the Academic Operations Group in order to find solutions.

We are dedicated to make sure that we do everything we can to support student success. We have learned that we can do things differently. In good times and bad, we will continue to work hard.

I see a question in chat. Someone asked what does an S grade mean? An S grade is B or better. So, if the grade is below a B, then the grade would be NC. This is very important in educating our students. We tried in the messaging to make sure we indicated to students that they need to communicate to their major professors before they make a decision on the grading option and before they choose to withdraw. Because this can have implications for financial aid and/or veteran's benefits. This is why we have pushed these deadline dates out to April 22. We want students to review and determine how they are doing with these online classes and not make a rash decision.

Patterson: We do not want students to make a flight response. The instructors and students need to talk.

A one-question Pulse survey will be sent to our students. The general question asked, how they are doing and do they need support. They will have three responses.

- 1) I am doing ok. I've got this.
- 2) This is difficult. But, I will make it work.
- 3) No, I am really struggling. I need some help.

Depending on the response selected, the student will be directed to a resource on the Graduate School webpage. If they fall into the category, "No, I am really struggling", they will be able to provide their name and contact information so that we can reach out and contact those students.

Our graduation specialist will also be contacting those students that have applied to graduate spring to ask if they need any help.

E. Brothers: Returning Student Fellowships – We will accept those applications through April 9. Awardees will be notified by April 14. Students will have until May 4 to accept or decline the offer.

Graduate Student Senate (David Willis)

First, I want to thank everyone for being flexible during this time.

The GSS elections for president and vice-president are happening now and will end on April 3. We have two running for president and one running for vice-president.

We will have our April 14 GSS meeting by Zoom.

At our last meeting we voted and will vote again at the April meeting to make the Mental Health Committee a permanent committee and will name it the Graduate Wellness Committee.

As Dr. Thompson mentioned, GPSAW is happening. The winners of the Professional Development Awards will be announced on April 3. We will announce this on our webpage and on social media.

Brew On It - because we are concerned about graduate and professional students being in isolation. We formed Brew On It. It is a Zoom session where graduate and professional students just bring a cup of coffee to Zoom and discuss whatever is on your mind. It does not have to be about academics. We just want to connect and talk. Hopefully, the first session will be during GPSAW and then we will try and do one a week.

Graduate Council Chair (David Patterson)

From our Nominating Committee, we have two nominees for Vice-Chair. Those names are Dr. Laurie Meschke and Dr. Stefanie Ohnesorg. Thank you for your willingness to serve. You received their bios. We will send out a Question Pro for your vote.

I want to address our faculty. Does anyone have any questions? How are your students doing?

F. Herron (College of Social Work) reported: I want to touch on something that David Willis said concerning the isolation of graduate students. I teach in the Doctor of Social Work Program and we are accustomed to Zoom and online courses. This is not new to us. But, we had a remarkable discussion in class last night as everyone now is working from home. Someone asked, "do we really have to do a group project? Could this now just be an individual paper?" But, there was a cry from the students, especially those who are single, who said, "you guys are all that I have right now. This is my human contact." The discussion that came about was really one about a connectivity even online that was extraordinarily important to our students.

C. Kirk (College of Veterinary Medicine). I want to echo on that and say that I have been doing fireside chats with our students. For many of them too, it is a way to connect. If we can do this for our students' once or twice a week to make sure our administration is still connected with them. This seems to make the students feel better and that they know what is going on.

Amy Broemmel (College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences). I would like to piggyback on that. I opened a Zoom meeting last night for all my doctoral students. It was just an hour of conversation and connection. They asked if they could share it with other doctoral students and join in for next week and make it a weekly meeting. I also want to say that the ethic of care and concern that seems to be coming from the top down during this time is evident that maybe has not been so clearly evident consistently in the past. Many have noticed and the administration should be commended for that.

M. Ward (College of Social Work). In the conversations I had with students this past week, they are very appreciative and grateful for the flexibility and adaptability and our quick reactions to all of this.

O. Kilic (Tickle College of Engineering). I have a question for Dr. Thompson. What about our international students that are currently in the US and are admitted for fall 2020?

D. Thompson: We will have to look into the Visa implications of if they can update their admission to summer.

S. Cantrell (Center for Global Engagement). We should be able to move the students up for summer. We can discuss this more after the meeting.

K. Alshibli (Tickle College of Engineering). Should we be admitting international students for the fall?

D. Thompson: If you have strong candidates that you want to admit – admit them. Even if they have to delay their arrival, admit them.

S. Cantrell (Center for Global Engagement). To give everyone an update. No Embassy in the world is issuing any Visa's right now. Whether immigrant or non-immigrant and particularly for students. For those folks outside the US, it will depend on when the Visa offices open back up for processing. From our perspective, if a student is admitted, we will work to get them the immigration enabling documents (I-20's and the DS2019's) that they need to get that appointment. We do not want to slow the process down. So, we will process our documents as normal.

If they are already within the United States, there should not be a problem for them for fall.

6. Items from the Floor:

Dr. Claudia Kirk

The College of Veterinary Medicine is requesting a grading option change for our VMC (clinical) courses. This applies only to those students who are completing rotations during this last 6 weeks of the spring 2020 semester (about 100 students). The current grading option is A-F. For those students who have already completed their rotations, they will receive the A-F grading option.

In our last curriculum submission, we submitted a proposal to change the grading option on these VMC clinical courses from the A-F grading to the S/NC grading option beginning summer.

I have met and discussed this option with Kathy Abbott in the Registrar's Office.

With no questions and with no opposition of the vote coming forward, the request from the College of Veterinary Medicine was sent via Zoom to the Graduate Council voting members. The poll question for the Graduate Council voting members was:

Do you approve for the College of Veterinary Medicine to change the grading option (from A-F grading to S/NC grading) on their VMC (clinical) courses during the last 6 weeks of the spring 2020 semester? The results were:

Voting Results

Yes = 31 votes

No = 1 vote

Abstain = 1 vote

Proposal passed. This will now move forward to the Senate Executive Committee and then on to the Faculty Senate for approval.

The College of Law is in a similar discussion concerning grading options on some of their law courses. They have another faculty meeting on Monday. If the College of Law notifies us with a similar proposal, we will send this out to Graduate Council for an immediate vote and then it will move forward to Faculty Senate.

Dr. Thompson: given these extraordinary times, we are making decisions in unprecedented ways. Thank you for your willingness to do these emergency-type votes because we do want the faculty voice to be a part of these decisions. Thank you for your engagement and thank you for what you are doing every day to help our students.

This was a historic meeting. With no further business, Dr. Patterson ask for a motion to adjourn.

The meeting adjourned at 3:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Cox
Graduate Council Liaison