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Graduate Council Minutes

Graduate Council

9-2-2021

Graduate Council Minutes - September 2, 2021

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

September 2, 2021

Members present: Ohnesorg, S (Chair), Baxter, T., Dittmann, P., Dzikus, L., Edwards, L., Ekici, K., Fathy, A., Finotti, L., Fleming-May, R., Griffin, M., Hammock, H. (Graduate Student Senate President), Kaplan, G., King, L., Kotowski, M., Lang, M., Lim, J., Mannik, J., Meschke, L. (Chair-Elect), Mohsin, M., Neal, A., Newkirk, K., Palies, P. (UTSI), Sachs, A., Schmidt, H., Scott, J.,

Ex-Officio members present: Bradberry, S., Broemmel, A. (Past Chair), Cantrell, S., Cheatham, M., Cox, C., Gordon, K., Gross, L. (Faculty Senate President), Kilpatrick, Y., Kupritz, V., Mercer, H., Moore, T., Thompson, D.

1. **Call to Order and Welcome** (Stefanie Ohnesorg)

The Graduate Council Zoom meeting was called to order by Chair, Stefanie Ohnesorg on Thursday, September 2, 2021, at 3:00 p.m. Ohnesorg welcomed new members and returning members.

2. **Minutes of the Preceding Meeting**

The April 29, 2021, Graduate Council Minutes were approved electronically on May 18, 2021.

3. **Welcome from Lou Gross, Faculty Senate President**

Gross thanked everyone for their service on Graduate Council. As Faculty Senate president, I want to bring to your attention today points of interest relating to graduate programs and to Graduate Council.

1. The new UT Budget Allocation Model, also known as BAM. Instead of allocating funds through the Provost Office, this new model will allocate funds to the colleges. This gives the college deans more authority to decide on expenditures and allocation of resources. Both the Undergraduate Council and the Graduate Council will serve as guide points to ensure there is equity in the offering of graduate courses. This means the Curriculum Committee and Graduate Council will have a greater responsibility and will look more closely at the budget implications of courses coming forward.
2. Strengthening graduate programs. This is tied-in to the new budget model with fee waivers for our GTA's. The positive side of this is there is more decision-making at the unit level. The downside is there is no longer a central resource for fee waivers.
3. At present, the major growth for graduate programs is with the new Oak Ridge Innovation Institute, formerly ORI. There are currently about 130 graduate students associated with this program.

Question:

For the new budget, how will the money flow concerning interdisciplinary programs - to inhibit or discourage interdisciplinary programs?

Gross: I also asked this question to both the Provost Office and the Office of Research. It is my understanding that initially all the indirect returns associated with external funding grants would go back to the generating colleges. The latest discussion is that a part of that money will be retained specifically for the Office of Research, to support interdisciplinary programs.

4. **Message from Graduate Council Chair: Stefanie Ohnesorg**

I want to take a few minutes and explain, especially to our new members, what is Graduate Council.

- The mission of Graduate Council is to promote excellence in graduate education.
- The Graduate Council establishes standards for admission, retention, and graduation.
- Graduate Council assesses curricular revisions and new proposals for graduate programs.
- Graduate Council is a special committee of the Faculty Senate that works closely with the Graduate School and a variety of other campus bodies to fulfill its mission.

Some topics that might come forward and be discussed this academic year include:

- Bylaws
- Changes regarding the approval of curriculum items under the new budget model BAM.
- Items from the various committees.

I want to thank Amy Broemmel, last year's Graduate Council chair and Laurie Meschke, our chair elect. I also want to say thank you to all the Graduate Council members and to all the staff in the Graduate School.

5. Committees

We have no committee reports as the committees have not met for this academic year.

6. Administrative Reports and Announcements:

Deans Update: (Dixie Thompson)

Dean Thompson provided a welcome to the members and thanked them in advance for the work that will be accomplished in the year ahead. Thompson emphasized the essential nature of the work done by Graduate Council and the importance of the close working relationship between the Council and the Graduate School. Staff members in the Graduate School provide the human resources support (preparing agendas, minutes, scheduling, etc.) that unburden the faculty members who serve on Council. Many accomplishments were achieved in previous years because of the hard work of members and the close working relationship between the Council and the Graduate School. One example of this good work was the outcome from APC and the Appeals Committee on reshaping our policies on academic misconduct and the appeals processes related to grade and academic penalties associated with such misconduct. The agenda contains an attachment of the new process.

Updates since our spring meeting:

- We had very successful online orientation sessions. One for grad/prof students and another for new GTAs. Additionally, there were several welcoming sessions held for new and returning students.
- A \$1M investment allowed the university to elevate the minimum graduate student stipends by 20%. This recurring investment is being distributed to departments across the university. UT has now invested \$2.5M in recurring dollars to increase graduate student stipends in the past 5 years.
- As the university moves to a new budget allocation model (BAM), the dollars associated with central fee waivers will be distributed to colleges. This will allow them to retain their current pool of assistantships.
- Another outcome of BAM is that the Graduate Council's role in overseeing curriculum will need an overhaul. A taskforce of Undergraduate Council leaders, Graduate Council leaders, associate deans, staff from the Registrar's Office and staff from the Graduate School was formed in late spring 2021. This taskforce, under the leadership of Dean Thompson and Vice Provost Hinde, made recommendations about potential changes to the review cycle and process, and recommended investment in software to efficiently manage curricular revisions. More to come on this in the months ahead.
- In summer 2021, we awarded 490 graduate degrees and 24 graduate certificates.
- Our fall enrollment is not yet official, but projections have us up by a few hundred compared to fall 2020.
- The Graduate School continues to incorporate more forms to an electronic submission process. These workflow solutions create ease and efficiency for all involved.
- Additional resources are being directed from graduate student fees to graduate students. This money will be used to increase the GSS Travel and Academic support budget from \$220,000 to \$350,000 per year. The SFRA budget will increase from \$106,000 to \$206,000 per year. Additionally, a staff person will be hired to directly support the Graduate Student Senate and other graduate student organizations.
- The SEC Emerging Scholars program has launched. 46 applications were submitted, and 10 Scholars were chosen. These PhD students will participate in an online 2-day conference at the end of September. Professional development opportunities will be available to all who applied.
- Federal COVID-relief money is available to support students. Some of the money will be distributed based on financial need (thus FAFSA required). Some resources will be available to DACA, undocumented and international students. Additionally, \$1M is available to help support students who can document that their graduation was delayed because of the COVID pandemic.

Graduate Student Senate (Hunter Hammock, GSS President)

I am honored and look forward to serving as the GSS president this year. I look forward to representing the graduate and professional students. I want to share some information about Graduate Student Senate (GSS).

- The Graduate Student Senate is the official voice for our graduate and professional students. GSS represents over 6,000 students across many disciplines.
- The purpose of GSS is to bring representatives from each department or academic unit to represent their fellow peers and give feedback about what is going on in their departments (concerns, issues, and needs). We also want to communicate the big wins that happen within the departments. We convey all this information to the UTK administration to help them make informed policy decisions.
- GSS advocates for the graduate and professional students to help improve their graduate experience, to pass the torch, and continue to make the experience better for each successive class after us.
- After Mohamed Al Sager, the GSS Vice-President, and I were elected this year, we conducted a survey with the GSS senators to determine the needs and issues of our graduate and professional students. From that survey we determined the following initiatives for this year.
 1. Primary initiative is for social reconnection of the graduate student body, both socially and professionally. Going virtual took a toll on the graduate and professional students. Across the board students communicated they wanted that social connection and to get back to their in-person research. To connect with those within their departments and across campus to build their network. To do this we want to create different events. Such as trivia night for social events and poster competition and 3MT for networking.
 2. Our second goal for graduate and professional students is overall well-being – to include physical, mental, emotional, and financial well-being. COVID put a lot of strain and stress on our graduate and professional students. We want to advocate to our students that your research is important, not only for society for improving the next generation but also, for your professional career. You must focus on creating a healthy environment for yourself to balance your work and professional life.
 3. Another important goal this year is to have 100 percent participation in GSS. We want to make sure that all our departments across campus are represented equally. Currently, we have about 70 senators out of the 95 senator seats. We are making good strides at that 100 percent goal.
 4. Finally, we want to keep our finger on the pulse from the different departments to see what issues arise as graduate and professional students continue the in-person classes, their in-person research and fellowships. As students continue these in-person classes, there may be a host of other issues that arise. We want to keep in good communication with them and our senators and provide that information not only to the Graduate Council but also to the UTK administration.
- I want to say a big thank you to the Graduate School for Welcome Week. I participated in orientation. The online format went very well. We received great feedback from the students. The Graduate School also hosted a community fair that was well received. GSS had a table and we met and spoke with many students. I also want to brag about the kickoff event at the Knoxville Zoo. We had a sold-out crowd. Many students came with their families and significant others. It was great to interact on a non-formal level and network around that. The Graduate School put a lot of effort in that event, and I really appreciate them for their work in making that happen. We received so many positive responses.
- We are creating different events this year, from professional to social. I welcome all communication. If you hear of something that may help the students – socially or professionally, please reach out to me.
- I want to thank Dean Thompson for increasing the GSS travel awards and academic support awards. These awards will be greatly appreciated once they get in the hands of our students. For me personally, I know conferences, both in-person and virtual, that I attended last year have been some of the best experiences in my graduate school career. Having that opportunity to not only present my research but to also network with some of the top researchers in my field, has been very beneficial to me.
- Our first GSS meeting was on Monday, August 30. We had a great turnout. We brainstormed the different initiatives and strategies for this semester. We discussed our top needs to include social reconnection, well-being, and student fees. We also discussed the purpose of the graduate student. How, even though graduate school is very hard it is also very rewarding. We feel our work is contributing to society to make it a better place. Whether it is publishing our work or getting certifications, we want to make a positive difference. We talked about the important roles and responsibilities that the senators have.
- As the GSS president, my goal is to motivate our students for them to succeed, to relay the student's issues and concerns, and to talk about the big wins. I also want to encourage our Graduate Student Senators to be true volunteers and leaders for their constituents. I welcome any questions.

A. Fathy: Thank you, Hunter. From your presentation, I am very optimistic for GSS. Have you thought of inviting graduate students who have graduated back to UT to talk with the GSS?

E. Brothers: I would like to communicate to Hunter, related to the well-being of our students, opportunities coming forward with GPSPD (Graduate and Professional Student Professional Development). We have two upcoming workshops. One is on September 9, "Managing Rigors of Graduate and Professional Studies" hosted by Dr. Bill Peterson (Haslam College of Business). And, on September 16, "Cultivating Skills for Well-Being in Graduate School" hosted by Dr. David Patterson (College of Social Work) and Dr. Allyson Neal (College of Nursing). The GPSPD have these events and others posted.

L. Gross: Concerning the graduate student fees – it is great that some of that revenue is coming back to graduate school for use, but the fees may hinder recruiting.

S. Ohnesorg: Is there a new GSS Travel Form?

D. Thompson: We are in the process of creating a new dynamic electronic form. We hope this will not only make the process easier but will also ease the burden of each new GSS leadership to have to recreate the travel award application process. We should have this new application available within the next week.

7. Items from the Floor

A. Fathy: I have a question for Dr. Thompson about the decrease in applications from China. Any updates?

D. Thompson: All US institutions are facing this same problem with the changes in the government regulations. Departments should get involved in the Graduate Recruiters Network. It is a great resource to get updates concerning international applicants. There is also a group looking at both undergraduate and graduate international applications.

S. Cantrell (Center for Global Engagement): The biggest inability currently is for international students to obtain Visas. UT was hit particularly hard when President Biden signed the Presidential Proclamation on the suspension of entry as nonimmigrants.

With no more items from floor, the different committees will go to their breakout rooms.

8. Breakout Sessions:

At this time, the Council meeting will end. Members on the four committees will now go to their breakout sessions. As a reminder, the Curriculum Committee and APC need to appoint a chair.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Cox
Graduate Council Liaison