Graduate Education Council
Meeting of
Wednesday, April 25, 2014
1:00 – 3:00 p.m., 433 Johnston Hall

Present: Melissa Anderson, Phil Buhlmann, Belinda Cheung, Kathleen Conklin, Liz Davis, Jigna Desai, Tim Kehoe, Sally Kohlstedt (chair), Linda Lindeke, Ann Masten, Nicole Scott, Ryan Thompson, Char Voight (staff recorder), Elizabeth Wattenberg

1) Announcements: The Graduate Revels at Northrop and Career Networking Event (Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, Handout: Career Networking Event information):
   a) The Graduate School will sponsor the Graduate Revels on April 8th from 12-4 p.m. as part of Northrop’s grand re-opening. The Doctoral Showcase will be a main feature, along with tours of Northrop, performances, and music, all showcasing the work and talents of graduate students.
   b) The annual Career Networking Breakfast will be held on April 4th at McNamara. The event is an opportunity for graduate students, post-doctoral associates and alumni to network with each other and with potential employers.

2) GEC election, Spring 2014 and nominating committee (Kohlstedt; Handout: Call for Nominations): Liz Davis, Phil Buhlmann, Ann Masten have agreed to serve on the GEC nominating committee. Nominations are due March 10. The election will be held in mid-April with results to be announced in early May before the end of spring semester. Kohlstedt asked GEC members to think of faculty they might wish to encourage as nominees.

3) Academic program updates (Kohlstedt) The following changes were approved at the February 14 Board of Regents meeting:
   a) Changes to existing programs:
      i) CEHD (Twin Cities campus), sub-plan in Interdisciplinary Studies within the M.Ed. degree in Curriculum and Instruction, effective summer 2014
      ii) CEHD (Twin Cities campus), sub-plan in Parent Education Specialty Teaching License within the M.Ed. degree in Family Education, effective Spring 2014
      iii) CSE (Twin Cities campus), Plan C option within the M.S. degree in Aerospace Engineering and Mechanics, effective Fall 2014.

4) Report from the Chair (Kohlstedt):
   a) Board of Regents Presentation (Handouts: docket materials, pages 10-29; PowerPoint presentation): Kohlstedt presented on graduate education at the February 14 Board of Regents meeting. Highlights included the following (the full presentation, including docket materials, is available on the Regent’s web site):
      • The diversity of the post-baccalaureate experience makes it difficult to apply a single set of standards in terms of assessment; however, it is important to try to identify some overarching commonalities institution-wide.
      • Graduate and professional students comprise over 30% of all students at the U of MN.
      • Employment growth according to educational attainment will be increasing for those with graduate and professional degrees.
Graduate student debt is increasing, and is a major concern. Debt levels are especially high among professional students.

Diversity: Kohlstedt talked about the Graduate School’s collaboration with OED, and the various strategies that have been used to try to increase recruitment of under-represented students. Recruitment occurs at the departmental level, so it can be difficult to identify what we can do centrally. One approach could be partnering within the Big Ten/CIC to coordinate recruitment efforts. The AGAPE initiative for post-docs takes a similar approach in identifying under-represented post-docs with the goal of retaining them within CIC institutions.

Right-sizing graduate programs: How do we determine appropriate program size given levels of funding, employment opportunities post-graduation, etc.? Kohlstedt shared that her review of programs showed we had eliminated about the same number of programs as we had created new, but the decisions had been strategic. The Regents did question if smaller program size would help with recruiting and supporting students.

b) Meeting with Associate Deans for Graduate Education: Kohlstedt reported that these meetings are ongoing and have been very well attended. There has been good discussion of a range of administrative issues related to graduate education, which has been helpful for decision making.

c) Graduate School E-newsletter, Synthesist (Handout: Submission Guidelines): The new Graduate School e-newsletter was sent to over 20,000 people, and had an “open rate” of 41% -- meaning 41% of people receiving it chose to open the email. This compares to industry averages of 15-25%. Only 20 recipients asked to be unsubscribed. Guidelines for submission, deadlines, and other information are available on the Graduate School web site.

d) FY15 Preliminary Budget Allocation: The Graduate School did not receive requested funding for a P&A position that would have been dedicated to academic and professional development. No additional funding was allocated for the DDF either, though the Provost encouraged another request next year. The request on behalf of OED for an additional $100,000 for the DOVE Fellowship was approved and will fund another two fellowships.

5) Recruitment Fellowship Risk Pool: In November/December about half of the collegiate deans indicated that they would participate in the risk pool. However, one of the larger colleges withdrew, making it difficult for the others to maintain their commitment. The Provost is still interested in knowing whether the manner in which colleges are using recruitment fellowships is meeting the goal of recruiting the most outstanding students. Despite the fact that there will not be a central risk pool for next year, the effort did nevertheless initiate a conversation and may be revisited in the future.

6) FY15 Quality Metrics Allocation Plan (QMAP) process (Kohlstedt, Handout: December 3, 2012 memo on FY15 QMAP process, narrative guidelines): This latest iteration of the QMAP process attempted to respond to concerns that were raised in the past (e.g., how the size of programs is taken into consideration, what the goal of the narratives is and what information is being sought). Kohlstedt met with all of the programs and with the committee that was responsible for the review to explain how the information submitted by programs would be used in the allocation process. The committee designated 20% of programs as “excellent,” 7% as “of concern,” and the remainder as “successful.”
The “of concern” category included programs that were too new to be evaluated. Kohlstedt will meet with the committee members again to debrief this year’s process and determine what additional changes might be made. The Special Committee report also suggested some changes in the process (e.g., asking programs to provide information on how they are addressing diversity goals). Kohlstedt has met with each dean and reviewed the commentary from the committee as well as additional data.

Discussion/Questions:
There is still confusion over how the narrative information is used and what is expected. The one-page guidelines on the narrative will be revised and expanded to provide more clarity. The successful programs reviewed the data and explained what it meant for their program, as well as bringing in additional data. We want to have some way of understanding and capturing what programs are doing, what they’re doing well, what they may have changed about what they’re doing.

Most programs are doing a VERY good job. Should we have more programs in the excellent category? Should we have NO programs in the excellent category? Would removing the cap on the percentage of programs that can be categorized as “excellent” put us in a better position to ask for more support for graduate education? Will this process lead to program improvement? Were there any surprises in the findings? Would we have been able to come up with these same categorizations without any of the data? Or using old data? Is this helping make programs better?

Programs got the information/guidelines very late and may not have had time to prepare as well. Can they get information at the same time as the deans? It would be best to get the information out well in advance along with what metrics will be used and what information should be included in the narratives.

The process should be about measuring how effectively programs are using the funding they receive. A program receiving $20,000 and achieving 5 excellent placements is using its funding more efficiently than a program that receives $100,000 and has 5 excellent placements. The block grant process asked programs to show how they had used the money they received. Now that the money goes to the college and not to the program, this process doesn’t work. The real question is how to give programs and colleges the incentive to improve. What incentives are created when money is tied to program assessment? Should there be a conversation with the deans about whether the QMAP funds should go directly to the programs as block grants did in order to provide the programs with an incentive? Kohlstedt will take these last two issues to GrAD and convey the opinion of the GEC that the process is not working as effectively as it should.

7) Graduate Assistant Fringe Rate (Kohlstedt, Handout: graduate assistant fringe rates): In 2005, the University created a subsidy of 10% ($2.4 million) to help address the disparity between available funds and the rising cost of fringe rates for graduate assistants. Beginning in 2009, that $2.4 million was no longer sufficient, and the institution began going into debt to cover the gap. The debt for FY13 is $1,138,241. It would cost $3.8 million to erase this debt and maintain the subsidy. Central administration is now exploring how to resolve this issue. Even holding the total subsidy to $2.4 million would result in a very high fringe rate. If the subsidy were eliminated, the resulting charge would be 100% of the real fringe cost. There is no clarity about what approach Central will take at the moment, but this is an issue that the GEC should be aware of and should follow as it will impact graduate students and programs.

8) Defining Graduate Program Goals and Assessing Student Outcomes (GSLOs) (Kohlstedt, Handout: project overview, timeline): This initiative has been ongoing for approximately one year, and was
motivated by the desire to capture the movement nationwide to establish GSLOs. It is important to emphasize that the GSLOs are not parallel to the undergraduate learning outcomes, which have been tied to mapping outcomes to courses. The graduate approach is very grassroots, and is very flexible in response to the diversity in graduate and professional education. Materials related to the initiative, including a web page with resources and templates, will be made available to the graduate education community over the next two months. Kohlstedt will talk to FCC and SCEP this spring about the initiative and the roll out.

9) Discussion: alternative career paths for graduate students (Nicole Scott): Students do not have access to resources and information on alternative careers. If the student’s advisor does not know of resources, or is not supportive of the student pursuing an alternative career, then this is an even greater challenge. Some other institutions (Columbia, Yale) have very good web sites that bring all of this information together in one place. The U of MN is lagging far behind. We need a central location for collecting and disseminating this information. Workshops, courses, etc. are good to have, but people can visit a web site at any time, from anywhere, and return many times. Faculty do not necessarily have the skill set to train students to work outside academia. We need to be approaching skills development in ways that cut across collegiate and departmental boundaries, perhaps by building nodes of skill set “hubs” among different departments.