Graduate Education Council
Meeting of
Monday, May 19, 2014
2:00 – 4:00 p.m., 433 Johnston Hall

Present: Victor Barocas, Lyn Bruin, Jigna Desai, Dick Brundage, Phil Buhlmann, Liz Davis, Ameeta Kelekar, Sally Kohlstedt (chair), Ann Masten, Keaton Miller, Nicole Scott, Ryan Thompson, Char Voight (staff recorder), Fran Vavrus, Elizabeth Wattenberg

Guests: Paula Baker (Graduate School), Molly Schwartz (Graduate School), Alison Skoberg (Graduate School)

1) Announcements/Updates (Sally Gregory Kohlstedt)
   a) May 9th Board of Regents Presentation: Provost Hanson and Sally Gregory Kohlstedt presented to the Regents on graduate education. Kohlstedt focused on metrics and the various mechanisms we have to assess graduate education, including quality metrics, external review, graduate student learning goals, accreditation, and GRIP. Provost Hanson discussed her ideas about the organization of graduate and professional education, and how this might be reconfigured. The latter topic generated significant discussion among the Regents. The comment was made that the Regents spend a substantial amount of time on discussion of undergraduate education, and that graduate education needs attention as well.

   b) Interview with MPR’s Alex Friedrich on Graduate and Professional Student Diversity: Kohlstedt met with Friedrich to discuss issues of diversity in graduate education. The Council of Graduate Schools provides data every year about national trends, and the University is not gaining ground. We are doing well with Native American students, but poorly with African Americans (especially at the master’s level). Friedrich wanted specific diversity target goals (e.g., percentages), but Kohlstedt explained that this is not how we set our diversity goals for graduate education. The issue is very complicated, and goals are very individual for each program. Friedrich will also have a conversation with R.T. Rybak at Humphrey later this week.

   c) May 16th GRE Search Service Workshop for DGSs: The Graduate School hosted a meeting with DGSs this past Friday to tell them about a tool they can use to support their efforts to identify and recruit under-represented students who have taken the GRE. The Graduate School will pay the subscription fee for the search service and assist programs in using the data most effectively to plan outreach and recruiting. More than fifty people attended in person or online. Kohlstedt explained what data would be available, how and when it would be accessed, and how programs could use this data. GEC members asked if there was a central mechanism to grant application fee waivers, as this might increase applications from under-represented student populations. There is no such a mechanism and waivers are given infrequently. Currently, the two groups that receive waivers are McNair Scholars and veterans. A fee is charged because there is a cost to processing the applications. However, Kohlstedt will consider if there would be a way to waive the application fee.

   d) DGS Workshops on Defining Graduate Program Goals and Assessing Student Outcomes: The Graduate School hosted two workshops for DGSs to discuss how programs might engage in the process of defining program goals and assessing outcomes. Representatives from several of the pilot programs were available to discuss how the process worked for them, and to answer
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questions. Forty-five people attended the first workshop and more than thirty participated in the second one. The response was generally positive. People were encouraged to learn that this is a grassroots, faculty-led initiative, not a top-down mandate, and that the process is not intended to be burdensome and time consuming.

2) For Discussion (Kohlstedt)
   a) Summary of Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship Competition and Discussion of 2014-2015 competition (Handout: Summary of 2014-15 DDF Competition by College): Kohlstedt summarized the past year’s process and opened up a discussion about possible changes for the next cycle. The success rate varied by college in terms of percentage of yield, which is typically the case. Kohlstedt noted that CEHD “donated” a number of their designated slots back to the pool to better align the number of slots they receive with their typical success rate.

The topic of unconscious bias arose following the selection process this year. Kohlstedt did explore this with the reviewers, and it did NOT appear that unconscious bias played a role in the specific situation that had been identified. However, the issue will be raised again in the context of next year’s selection process. The review process has been improved with the decision to have committees review proposals that are more closely aligned with the members’ areas of expertise, rather than having people review proposals from widely divergent disciplines.

It was noted that some faculty have never been asked to serve as reviewers, and the question was raised about how reviewers are selected. Alison Skoberg explained the process she uses to identify reviewers and match them with proposals. People generally serve for 3 years unless they go on sabbatical or feel they otherwise cannot do it. This year there were twenty-seven faculty and four co-chairs for a total of nine subcommittees reviewing files. There is a turnover rate of about nine people per year cycling off the committees. It has historically been more difficult to find sufficient faculty reviewers for the humanities and social sciences. Kohlstedt asked GEC members to please send any suggestions for potential faculty reviewers in these areas to Skoberg.

Other GEC members commented that it would be useful to have information from the reviewers as to why a student was not selected. There was consensus that the reviewer comments currently provided are not helpful, and some faculty do not pass these on to the students as a result. At the same time, there was recognition that it is very time consuming to provide the level of detail in the comments that might be most helpful, and faculty are reviewing a large number of proposals. How can this be balanced? Also, it can be difficult to say what is “wrong” with a proposal. In many cases, there is nothing wrong per se, and is just not as competitive as the other proposals in the pool.

Kohlstedt raised the issue of asking for more detailed comments from the reviewers to the associate deans for graduate education. The proposal was to have each committee member assume responsibility for providing more detailed comments on four to five proposals. The deans did not support this idea. GEC members agreed that it would be seen as burdensome, and would make recruiting reviewers even more difficult than it is currently. It was also suggested that we might consider increasing the number of committees, which would in turn reduce the number of proposals that any faculty member would have to review. Currently, they are reviewing approximately 35 proposals. Finally, it was suggested that it would be useful to provide programs with feedback if they are engaging in any practices that are negatively affecting their chances of success (e.g., if publications are not important to the program, but are a major factor the
committee will look for in the materials they review). A question was also raised about whether all the funding was expended. This year there was a commitment to fund 60% of the applicants/nominees. This is an increase over the 15% rate of just five years ago.

b) GEC Election Results and Debriefing: Kohlstedt shared the election results with the GEC, noting that the participation rate was 19%. The low participation may have been due to several factors, including the timing of the election in April near the end of the semester. Perhaps the ballot could be sent out earlier next year? She also shared the issue raised by the Graduate Education Council in Duluth regarding whether they could have a designated slot to ensure they have representation, and whether they should have their own election process. This was coupled with a comment submitted with the ballot stating that the larger numbers of Twin Cities faculty relative to Duluth faculty could have resulted in an undue influence of Twin Cities voters in determining the person elected as the systems candidate representative. GEC members determined that a separate election for Duluth was not necessary, but did express an understanding of the issues raised and a willingness to remain open to considering changes in the process to guarantee a fair and transparent election.

c) GEC Agenda/Priorities 2014-2015 Academic Year: Kohlstedt asked GEC members to reflect and comment on their views of what topics/issues should be priorities for the 2014-2015 academic year. This will be a major agenda item for the June meeting. GEC members agreed to come to the June meeting with suggestions, which will be discussed and voted upon. Among the topics suggested in this initial conversation were:

i) Henning will be returning to his position in September and will likely wish to focus on international issues, though it is unclear exactly what form this will take.

ii) What is the relationship between graduate and professional education? How do we connect the two? What will the relationship be between the new liaison for professional education and the Graduate School?

iii) Can we advocate for a designated graduate student space (e.g., like Rackham or the Big Red Barn)? We could locate graduate student governance, services, and academic and professional development in this space. The Provost has heard this from Sally and the item should stay on the agenda.

iv) Diversity recruiting, more techniques for recruiting. We should establish an ambassadors program that should be driven centrally.

v) Capital campaign needs to include graduate education!

vi) Interdisciplinarity and how to eliminate barriers to doing this type of work. Support for existing interdisciplinary programs.

vii) Professional development for graduate students – what are the things that nearly all students need for their professional development? What do students have in common?

3) For Information (Kohlstedt)

a) Revisions to Graduate Assistant Template Offer Letters Clarifying Students’ Responsibility to Pay Fees (Handouts: Graduate Assistant Appointment Letter Checklist, Example of Graduate Assistant Template Letter from Template Letter Library): Kohlstedt reviewed the changes that have been made to the Graduate Assistant Template Offer Letters for the purpose of making sure students are aware that they are responsible for paying student fees. Students many times do not understand that the fees are not covered in their tuition benefit with their appointment. This can be a serious issue, as the fees are increasing and can be quite substantial. Letters should NOT be resent to students in cases where these have already been mailed and the changes not included. Rather, this information can be communicated in future correspondence on related
issues. It does not need to be a separate mailing. The point was made that it would be important to make sure that the Human Resources staff that set up these appointments and send correspondence should be made aware of these changes. There has been conversation in RAC, but the information is not reaching everyone who needs to know.

b) Changes in Tuition and Fee Due Dates (Handout: Changes in Tuition and Fee Due Dates Effective Fall 2014): Kohlstedt explained the issue with tuition and fee dues dates for graduate students. Changes were made in these dates without consultation with the Graduate School. As a result, graduate students on assistantships are expected to pay prior to having received their first paycheck. This has now been changed so that anyone with a research or teaching assistantship will not have to pay until the second installment period in October, and will not be charged a late fee if they meet the October deadline. Kohlstedt is now trying to get an agreement that students will also not be charged the installment fee. She is also trying to expand the category of students exempted from early payment so that any student paid through the University (e.g., students on University fellowships) will be exempted from having to pay in September. Kohlstedt will update the GEC as we learn more how/when these issues will be resolved.

Next meetings:
Tuesday, June 10, 2-4