Graduate Education Council
Minutes for meeting
Wednesday, December 10, 2014
2:00 pm – 4:00 p.m., 433 Johnston

Present: Melissa Anderson, Jay Austin, Victor Barocas, Lyn Bruin, Dick Brundage, Phil Buhlmann, Belinda Cheung, Liz Davis, Celeste Falcon, Emi Ito, Linda Lindeke, Henning Schroeder (chair), Nicole Scott, Carissa Slotterback, Kathleen Thomas, Randall Victora, Char Voight (staff)

Guest: Rob Stewart (COGS)

1) Update and discussion: GEC Policy Subcommittee (Liz Davis): Davis gave an update on the subcommittee’s work. The subcommittee was charged with the mandatory review of 13 U-Wide policies. Davis asked GEC members for feedback on the application of credits policy, which has generated much discussion. The policy allows a maximum of 8 credits in common between two master’s degrees. Transfer credits are limited to 40% of total credits. There is no limit on the number of credits in common between a master’s and PhD in the same program, and no limits in credits earned as a non-degree seeking student.

Questions and concerns about the policy include:
- The inequity in how transfer credits earned at another institution versus those earned here are treated.
- The difference in number of credits in common allowed between different programs and the same program (e.g., master’s earned in another field and master’s earned in the same field)
- What happens to earned credits if you don’t finish your program? Can they be applied toward another degree?
- What does it mean to earn your degree at the U? In other words, what is the minimum number of credits that should be earned at the U in order to validate the degree as a U degree?
- When we say “U of MN” if someone earns Physics master’s at Duluth then would all the credits be counted as transfer credits or program credits? Policy as written would allow this, but PhD program here would need to decide.
- Are there currently time constraints to this (e.g., time frame beyond which credits previously cannot be transferred or applied)?
- Why do we limit the number of master’s credits earned elsewhere for students continuing toward a PhD at the U in the same field? Earning the credits indicates that the student has gained some competencies. Why is that not recognized? The real issue is using the same set of coursework to earn multiple master’s degrees.
- How do we position ourselves relative to our peers in terms of flexibility? We want to be flexible to remain competitive.

For the January GEC meeting: members would like to see current policy and new policy side by side to compare. What are the exceptions?
2) Discussion: COGS Student Bill of Rights (Nicole Scott, Rob Stewart; handout: Graduate Student Bill of Rights): Scott and Stewart briefed GEC members on the current status of the Student Bill of Rights. They have been working on the document since June, and have received good feedback from COGS and the Student Senate. They would like GEC support.

Discussion:
- The document does not apply to professional students or undergraduates.
- Where should this be housed? The Provost’s Office? The Graduate School?
- While there was general agreement with the basic premise of the document, some GEC members expressed concern about the feasibility of certain aspects; for example, the clause referring to students’ rights to know what their level of debt will be upon completing their degree. This could vary even within the same program depending on a student’s particular circumstances. COGS will clarify this, as it’s meant to refer to the estimated cost of education and not the total loan debt a student might carry.
- What constitutes a “violation” of a clause of the Bill of Rights? This is not a policy document, so what are the consequences of violations?
- What are the things that are essential versus what might be a good idea?
- How might students use this? This would be a good recruitment tool. Boulder has been using something similar for about 10 years and they are surveying right now to see how it has been working.
- On the issue of pay: This is about students earning a fair wage. If there is no agreement to pay a reasonable wage, then there should be accommodation to allow students to work additional jobs. If you are not allowing students to get another job, then you should be supporting them with a liveable wage.
- GEC members suggested that COGS consider drafting a brief bill of rights accompanied by a detailed list of policies pertaining to the well-being of graduate students. This would be more accessible for people. In addition, the current document is written for a certain type of student (e.g., one who is employed by their adviser), and so does not apply equally to the situations of all students.

The draft will go to the Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee next, and will come back for further GEC discussion in January or February.

3) Update and discussion: GEC Nominating Subcommittee (Victor Barocas, Emi Ito, Carissa Slotterback; handout: summary of GEC nominating committee meeting): The Nominating Subcommittee met to discuss possible changes to the election process and procedures. One issue for discussion was whether we should adopt a system that would solicit nominations based on collegiate affiliation. Questions to consider in rethinking the process:
- What type of representation would be of most value in terms of advising the vice provost and dean?
- What is the best means to get the diversity of perspectives that are important in an advisory body? We need a wide variety of perspectives so that we don’t get myopic.
- Should we adopt a hybrid model with collegiate representation combined with at-large representatives?
• How do we communicate about the role the GEC and the responsibilities of members?
• We want to make the process transparent, and representation according to college makes the rationale more obvious and transparent. Everything at the U is structured by college.
• Faculty would cast votes only for those in their college and for the at-large candidates. This is a little concerning because it may make GEC members more college-focused. Deans clearly represent colleges, so why should the GEC be also collegiate-based?
• Practically, how would we shift? How would we move to balance? No voting for colleges that are already represented adequately?
• What would you do with small colleges that may not be able to get 2 candidates on the ballot? There are not enough full-time faculty members in small colleges to fill all the existing service slots. This could be an argument for grouping the smaller colleges into the at-large category.
• Would there be more proportional representation for larger colleges, with smaller colleges represented only by at-large candidates?

If we want to issue a call for nominations in February for an election in late-march, then we will need to vote on this in January in order to meet the election deadline.

4) Discussion: Procedures for submitting graduate education forms (Dick Brundage): Brundage related his experience with a student's defense and issues concerning the preparation and submission of the reviewer form. The information given to the student by ASR was inaccurate and could have led to the defense being considered invalid and the possibility of a grievable issue. In addition, there was confusion about where the information was originating (e.g., the Graduate School, GSSP, ASR?). GSSP was trying to be flexible to meet the needs of the student. However, when does flexibility become a liability? The order of the form submission is important. Brundage suggested that the advisor should be involved in the information transfer from GSSP to the student. If the student receives information, the DGS and advisor should be copied. The top priority is the integrity of the program, second to the protection of the program. Henning will talk to ASR and get back to GEC.

5) Update and discussion: COGS proposal regarding CIGS GEC representative (Celeste Falcon): Falcon briefed the GEC on the status of this proposal. More discussion will take place among COGS and CIGS members over the break, and the issue will be revisited in January.

Next Meeting Dates:
Thursday, January 22, 2015: 9:00am – 11:00am
Tuesday, February 24, 2015: 1:00pm – 3:00pm
Tuesday, March 31, 2015: 2:00pm – 4:00pm
Tuesday, April 21, 2015: 2:00pm – 4:00pm
Tuesday, May 19, 2015: 1:00pm – 3:00pm