Graduate Education Council
Minutes
Thursday, January 22, 2015
9:00-11:00 am, 238A Morrill Hall

Present: Melissa Anderson, Jay Austin (via video conference), Victor Barocas, Lyn Bruin, Dick Brundage, Phil Buhlmann, Belinda Cheung, Celeste Falcon, Michael Goldman, Emi Ito, Linda Lindeke, Jan McCulloch, Keaton Miller, Henning Schroeder (chair), Nicole Scott, Phil Sellew, Carissa Slotterback, Kathleen Thomas, Sabrina Trudo, Randall Victora, Char Voight (staff), Betsy Wattenberg

Guests: Takehito Kamata (CIGS)

1) Discussion and vote: COGS proposal regarding CIGS GEC representative (Celeste Falcon, Takehito Kamata)

The GEC revisited the issue of whether or not the Council of International Graduate Students (CIGS) should have a designated seat on the GEC similar to COGS. Some members were concerned about over-representation of students on the GEC relative to faculty. There was also concern over creating a precedent and a situation in which other student groups would also request representation. On what basis would additional requests be evaluated and decided? It was suggested that perhaps COGS could designate one of the organization’s three seats specifically for an international graduate student (CIGS) representative. The discussion ended with the following proposal: CIGS will be granted observer status (non-voting) for one year. During the remainder of this academic year, COGS and CIGS will determine if a COGS seat should be designated for a CIGS representative next year and beyond. The CIGS representative will also have the opportunity during this year to learn about governance and policy issues related to graduate education, which the GEC believed was an important qualifier for service on the Council. The vote on the proposal was fifteen in favor and two opposed. The motion carried.

2) Update and discussion: GEC Policy Subcommittee (Kathleen Thomas, Jigna Desai; handouts: Current policy on Application of Graduate Credits to Degree Requirements and proposed revisions to policy; revisions to Credit Requirements for Master’s and Doctoral Students)

Credit Requirements for Master’s and Doctoral Students: Thomas and Desai reviewed the proposed changes to the Application of Graduate Credits to Degree and Credit Requirements for Master’s and Doctoral Students policies. Discussion began with the Credit Requirements policy. The subcommittee tried to simplify the policy and policy language to make it easier to understand. The suggested revisions do not represent significant changes from the past policy, but instead express the requirements in a more straightforward manner in terms of the minimum number of types of credits (e.g., course versus thesis) required.
For doctoral degrees, a major change was the removal of language and examples defining “course” credits. Instead, credits are defined as either thesis or non-thesis credits.

Discussion:
Several GEC members wondered why pre-thesis credits were included in the definition of thesis credits. Pre-thesis credits are counted as thesis credits because many programs allow students to convert these credits into thesis credits. This definition is also in alignment with the U-wide course numbering policy, and cannot be changed by the subcommittee (though a change could be suggested if the GEC wished to take this action). Desai and Thomas reminded the GEC that defining pre-thesis credits as non-thesis credits (e.g., course credits) would mean that they could not be converted. Some wondered why pre-thesis credits were needed since there is now a policy allowing for early thesis credit registration. The policy allows for flexibility at the program level. Some programs do not allow the early thesis credit registration, so the pre-thesis credit option is still needed for some students.

If pre-thesis credits were counted as course credits, couldn’t students use these to meet the minimum credit requirement? In other words, could they have a significant number of credits that would not reflect actual student activity/faculty workload? Programs could simply refuse to count these credits toward the non-thesis credit requirement, but this would leave a loophole in the actual policy whereby a program could theoretically choose to count them toward the minimum requirement. GEC members agreed that this would not be desirable.

When students register for pre-thesis credits, does this really reflect faculty workload and student activity? Anything that we count as “course credit” should have more instructor involvement. If pre-thesis credits were counted as non-thesis credits, would we need to ask for some sort of evaluation of the activity? Would we need to set a limit to the number of credits that could be used to meet the minimum requirement? Could programs use directed studies instead of pre-thesis credits?

This policy is about setting the minimum required thesis and non-thesis credits. Ultimately, the question from a policy perspective is not whether or not programs are using pre-thesis credits in the manner in which they should, but in which of the two categories of credit (thesis or non-thesis) they should be placed. The consensus of the GEC was that pre-thesis credits do not fit in either the thesis or non-thesis credit categories. It would be helpful to have a third category. Can we suggest a revision that would place these in the special registration category along with GRAD 999 and the one-credit FTE registration? The consequence of this would be that students would not be allowed to convert them to thesis credits. Will it cause confusion to define these credits differently than the course numbering policy?

The subcommittee will take into consideration all the feedback on this policy, and will bring another revision to the February meeting for further discussion.
Application of Graduate Credits to Degree Requirements: Again, the current policy is very confusing. As with the credit requirements policy, the subcommittee’s intention was to simplify and streamline this version, as well as to create more consistency across various scenarios (e.g., student who transfers from another institution, student who earns a master’s in one program here and transfers to another for the PhD, student who earns a master’s degree “along the way”). The basic question the policy addresses is what constitutes earning a degree at the U of MN in terms of the number of credits earned? How many credits would a student need to earn in a new program that are unique to that degree?

A major change proposed in this revision is the elimination of a specific limit on the number of credits that can be transferred as long as stated minimum University graduate course and thesis credits are included in the master’s degree plans that cannot be counted toward any other University degrees (for master’s students) and as long as a minimum of 12 University graduate course credits and 24 University thesis credits are included in the degree plan that cannot be counted toward any other University degrees (doctoral students).

Discussion

• Should we differentiate between master’s and doctoral degrees because of the research focus of doctoral degrees? Should there be a minimum for PhD?
• Would this allow for a scenario in which a student could earn two master’s degrees without doing any coursework for one and just taking thesis credits (e.g., transfer all the non-thesis credits from the first degree)?
• What about a scenario in which a student transfers very late because their faculty advisor has taken a position at the U of MN? This does happen? Could it be made noted as an exception? If there are exceptions, then we need to have some transparency about what qualifies for an exception. Transfer accompanying a new faculty hire should be outlined as a specific exception.
• There is no consensus about what people think constitutes a “U of MN” degree. Some think it’s a “brand,” and that a student needs to have received education and training while at the U. Don’t we want the student to be part of the intellectual community and discussion? Isn’t this also part of the training and work of the program. Others believe that contributing while they are here as a student is sufficient as a basis to grant a U degree.
• This policy seems inconsistent with the previous policy discussion. Are we saying that a student needs “credits” or needs competency and knowledge?
• Eliminating the limit on the number of transfer credits does not mean that programs will be forced to accept any credit that a student may want to transfer. The programs will evaluate the quality of the credits and choose which, if any, to accept.
• What about credits earned from non-US institutions? Do these need to be approved by the Graduate School? Answer: No. The Graduate School provides a service to help programs assess international credentials, but the program determines whether or not to accept them.
• What about a scenario in which a student has taken a lot of credits as a non-degree seeking student? They would have to take the 12 required credits at the U while enrolled (e.g., as a degree seeking student). This is more for the protection of the student to keep the program from stringing them along and having them pay tuition without admitting them. Is tuition revenue handled differently for degree versus non-degree seeking students? Yes, all the tuition for non-degree seeking students goes to whoever owns the course designator because there is no college of enrollment.

The subcommittee will also bring this policy back for further discussion at the February meeting.

3) Discussion and vote: GEC Spring Election process and timeline (Henning Schroeder; handouts: draft communication seeking nominations, CGS broad fields represented on GEC spring 2014 and fall 2015, GEC faculty membership with collegiate and CGS affiliations)

Schroeder gave a brief overview of the handouts, and Char Voight summarized the proposal for the GEC spring election. Rather than seeks nominees to represent their collegiate units, we will (as we did last year), seek nominations in the following 7 broad CGS fields:
- Biological and Agricultural Sciences
- Business
- Education
- Engineering
- Health and Medical Sciences
- Math and Computer Sciences
- Public Administration

Nominees will be allowed to choose their own broad field based on which they believe best represent the viewpoint and experiences they would bring to the GEC. We would like at least 2 candidates for each field. If there is only one candidate, we will allow for a write-in. We will not add an at large representative at this time, though we may revisit this next year for future elections. We will issue the call for nominations and accept these through February 23rd. The voting will be open from March 23-April 6, with results posted and announced in mid-April.

4) Discussion: Graduate School sponsorship of “3-minute thesis” competition (Schroeder)

Schroeder briefly explained that the Graduate School was considering sponsoring a 3-minute thesis competition next year that would expand beyond what is currently offered in the biomedical sciences. Is this something that we should pursue? While not all
GEC members indicated that they would encourage their students to participate in such an event, the general consensus was that it is a good idea to further pursue.

5) Updates from the Vice Provost and Dean (Schroeder) – Deferred to February meeting due to lack of time.

6) Announcements (Schroeder) – Deferred to February meeting due to lack of time.
   a. Surviving Graduate School February Workshop Series
   b. Career Week (March 9-12) and Career Networking Event (March 27th) (handouts: Career Week and Career Networking Event descriptions)
   c. Spring 2015 GPEA (handout: draft GPEA description)
   d. Input on possible Graduate School Summer Institute (handout: Summer Institute Key Points)