Graduate Education Council  
Meeting Agenda  
Tuesday, October 18, 2016  
2:00-4:00 pm  
300 Morrill Hall  

Present: Jay Austin, Victor Baracos, Abhishek Chandra, Liz Davis, Etty Deveaux (staff), Emi Ito, Keven Joyal-Desmarais, Joe Kapusta, Mary Jo Kreitzer, Scott Lanyon (chair), Katherine Schei, Carissa Slotterback, Alena Talkachova, Randy Victora, Char Voight (staff), Andrea Wolf  

1) Resources for faculty to support graduate student advising and mentoring (Scott Lanyon). Scott Lanyon discussed data and resources on advising and mentoring practices and the impacts on students. Many students don’t think their advisor is helpful in terms of career development and other aspects of the graduate student experience. Lanyon proposed an initiative that would provide faculty with tools and resources to be better advisors, and asked for GEC input on the proposal. The GEC would like a breakdown of the survey data between master’s and doctoral students? Do the results include students from Duluth? What was the response rate on the survey? (10-28-16 Scott Lanyon added comments: Survey was only of graduate students (not professional) on the Twin Cities campus. 14% of those students responded to the survey. 50% of respondents were in a PhD program and 50% were not. About 18% of those who responded were international students. Response rates were very similar across all the colleges.)  

Discussion:  
What is the goal and who is the audience? The goal is not to make everyone an excellent mentor, but to prevent people from being bad or abusive mentors. Less effective advisors are often senior faculty, and there may be a power differential between them and junior faculty. DGSs have a sense of who needs training, and also who would refuse training. There may be deliberately bad advisors, but many are bad because they don’t know any better. If we work with junior faculty, then over time the problem will be resolved. Perhaps this argues for focusing training on new faculty.  

Gathering data and student feedback: More data to frame the issues and increase faculty understanding would be helpful. Is this a general issue or more localized? We could increase faculty buy-in by relying on the expertise we have available on campus (e.g., psychology, management), and treating this as a research project aimed at identifying evidence-based best practices. How do we get feedback from students who would never say anything about bad mentoring? If fear of retaliation is a concern, can we do a better job at exit surveys? Maybe use annual committee meetings for students where the advisor leaves the room? Or have a liaison committee at the college level or a student representative from each program who could aggregate the data and present it in ways that protect individual student identities?  

How and where could we provide training? Surveying faculty or using other impersonal methods may not be as effective as having peer-based, face-to-face conversations; for instance, setting
aside a portion of a faculty meeting to discuss advising. Faculty are more likely to take advice from faculty peers than from administrators. Pairing new faculty with senior faculty could be one model, or the DGS could play the new faculty mentor role (assuming senior faculty and DGS are good advising models themselves). An advising module could be added to things like annual retreats that are already happening. It might help spark discussion if the Graduate School could provide 10-12 slides to help frame the conversation.

*Central resources with local application:* The U of MN is not the only institution to grapple with this. What are examples of success from other institutions? We can gather tools and resources (there are many available), but how the content is best delivered is institution-, and even program-, dependent. We need to identify the expectations for students and faculty, and set the standards. What should the advising relationship look like? The Graduate School might provide resources, but this needs to be a local conversation. Departments can and should add specificity. This should be training at the program level by (at least in part) faculty.

*Approach must be incentive-based and not punitive:* Can we use methods for evaluating a model for assessing advising? There are teaching training workshops. Do we have something similar for advising? This may allow us to get to the faculty that are not as open to the idea. How does advising fit into the merit review process? Do DGSs address advising performance in the process? Can we incorporate mentoring assessments into Quality Metrics? Provide programs with funds that they have to use in some way to improve mentoring? This would be an incentive for the DGS and college deans. How do we benchmark advising performance and quality to be able to measure changes over time? What would be the incentive for programs that are already doing well?

2) Policy Review Subcommittee Update (Katie Thomas). Katie Thomas provided a *Summary of policies to be reviewed* outlining the changes proposed to the policy and issues for discussion and input. Thomas walked the GEC through the proposed changes, and led a discussion of specific items/questions for consideration.


*Discussion:

*Time extensions:* The proposed policy states that the request for a second extension must be approved by the Graduate School. Does the Graduate School have the ability to deny a program/collegiate request, or is this essentially a pro forma approval? It would be unlikely that the Graduate School would deny a request that the program and college viewed as appropriate. However, requiring Graduate School approval could give the program leverage with the student to influence him/her to complete more quickly. Programs have also said that having the Graduate School deny a request for an extension in cases where the student should be terminated but the program is struggling with this decision is helpful (GEC members generally agreed that this is not a sound rationale for having Graduate School involvement in the second extension request). How do we currently determine how many extensions a student has received? Who is
tracking this? In the new GPAS system there is a way to flag this so that it can be tracked and notification can be sent to the student, advisor, and DGS. If we want to have the Graduate School involved in the second extension request, then we would need a faculty committee to review these. Ideally, the second extension would be for really extraordinary circumstances.

*Readmission and time limits:* If a student is not granted an extension and is terminated from his/her program, how does this affect the maximum time limits for completing the degree? Does the clock start over upon readmission? If the student is readmitted, does he or she get another 24-month extension with the possibility of a second? If a student is in her/his 10th year, is this because this is a bad student? Is there inadequate advising? Is the program bad? In general, if the program thinks there is cause to readmit the student, then they have a right to do so. Also, remember that any program is free to set more stringent requirements. The policy just represents the *minimum standard.* There was agreement that this is very confusing and we need clarity the implications of readmission on the time limit.

Decision: The GEC accepted the current language in the policy, but would like more clarity on the issues of readmission and the role of the Graduate School in approving extensions, and would like to have further discussion about implementation.

*Question:* If a student decides not to complete the doctoral degree but instead to leave the program with a master’s, or is terminated from the program, how much time does he or she have to file a change of degree objective? Is this an easy process? Do they have until the end of the semester? What are the implications for international students?

*Response:* Clarify and add this information as an FAQ to the policy.

*Question:* Has the option of pass with reservations been eliminated from the oral preliminary exam?

*Response:* No. There is still the option for committee members to vote as a pass with reservations, but this vote will not be officially reported to GSSP. Programs may have their own internal process for dealing with what might have been categorized as “pass with reservations.” Previously, GSSP would be notified of a “pass,” “pass with reservations,” or “fail,” but the subcommittee determined they need only be notified once the student has been deemed to have either passed or failed the exam.

b) **Doctoral Degree: Completion:** Policy draft dated 10.18.2016

*Committee Composition and "outside members":* The policy calls for a minimum of one member representing a “field outside the major.” How are we defining “different field” or “field outside the major?” Some programs count faculty from different tracks as “outside.” Some programs have a substantial number of their graduate faculty who are outside the department. We should be asking why we have this requirement. What was
the original intent? To protect the student from department politics? To make sure the student was tested on her/his breadth of field knowledge? To test whether the student could communicate across disciplinary boundaries? This may also be a remnant of the old requirement for the PhD minor, which was eliminated with decentralization. Some advisors will choose committee members they know will sign off on any exam no matter the quality. We need to discuss collusion like this and how we avoid it. This is a disservice to the student and to the program.

**Language: Major versus discipline and/or field:** The policies use different language in different places. What is the difference between “field” versus “program,” “major,” or “department?” Are the differences intentional, and what are the implications of using one word versus another?

**Chairing the committee:** Why can the advisor chair the preliminary but not the final exam? As chair of either, the advisor cannot act as an advocate for the student. Also, if the advisor chairs, then s/he can see the committee members’ votes and could potentially have the opportunity to intimidate people into voting a certain way. Perhaps the role of the committee chair could be better defined? Whether advisors can chair the committees or not, this should be consistent across the preliminary and final exams.

**Decisions:** The current language in I aii can stand, but add an FAQ including a rationale for the outside person to guide programs in determining what they need to consider when composing a committee, and whether or not the committee composition will meet the intended objectives. This information and background should also be included in training for advisors and DGSs.

The GEC recommended that we advocate for not allowing the advisor to chair either the preliminary or final oral exam and see what feedback we receive. We should also add language to the policy stating that advisors/co-advisors cannot be committee chairs.

Add an FAQ stating that any public portion of the preliminary examination is not a part of the exam that is evaluated in terms of pass/fail.