Graduate Education Council
Meeting of
Wednesday, September 11, 2013
2:00 – 4:00 p.m., 433 Johnston Hall
Minutes

Participants: Melissa Anderson, Dick Brundage, Phil Buhlmann, Belinda Cheung, Kathleen Conklin, Jigna Desai, Vicki Field, Timothy Kehoe, Ameeta Kelekar, Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, Linda Lindeke, Lynn Lukkas, Keaton Miller, Nicole Scott, Betsy Wattenberg

Guests: Paula Baker, Doug Ernie, Vicki Field, Yoji Shimizu, Alison Skoberg

1. Approval of minutes, August 29, 2013 meeting: Sally queried the GEC about whether it was necessary to continue to produce both detailed GEC meeting notes and minutes for review and approval. The GEC unanimously agreed that they would prefer to review and approve minutes only. More detailed notes will still be available for the reference of any interested GEC member.

Sally also proposed a new approach for reviewing and approving the GEC meeting minutes. Minutes will be posted on the GEC Moodle site within approximately one week of the meeting. GEC members will have 2-3 days to review the notes and offer suggestions for revisions before the minutes are posted on the Graduate School web site. GEC members agreed with this approach.

2. Visibility of graduate education: Sally circulated a brochure developed for orientation highlighting available graduate education resources, and asked for GEC input on how to raise the visibility of graduate education. Graduate students comprise 25% of all students. This rises to 32% when all post-baccalaureate students are added. However, the contributions of graduate students do not receive the same attention as those of undergraduates. We want to highlight the students themselves, their research, their contributions, their leadership, and increase recognition that graduate education is a cornerstone of what we do as an institution. It’s important that the legislature and the public understand the importance of graduate education.

Side-note on commencement: With collegiate units organizing their own commencement ceremonies, graduate student commencement is being combined with other events – undergraduate commencement or other celebrations. As a result, this has reduced the sense of a graduate student community, the visibility of graduate education, and the sense of graduate education as being foundational to the mission of the University. Sally intends to ask the associate deans for graduate education about the collegiate run commencement ceremonies.

3. Orientation: Approximately 270 people attended out of just under 400 students who registered. We have some limited evidence about why the no-shows didn’t attend. This was a highly successful event, both content-wise and logistically. The resource tables were popular, and could be expanded upon in future orientations. The breakout sessions were very lively. The Graduate School will probably offer a central orientation again next year.

4. Ad Hoc Recruitment Fellowships Committee: When these recruitment fellowships were managed centrally by the Graduate School, we were able to make three times the offers for which there was available funding because the risk of overcommitting was spread over a large number of fellowship slots. Decentralization of these fellowships to the colleges has resulted in less risk-taking, as colleges are reluctant to absorb the
possible cost of overcommitting fellowships. An ad hoc Recruitment Fellowships Committee has been
created to explore ways to incentivize more risk-taking by colleges. The committee will also explore how we
can set aside funds to facilitate this risk-taking, and help mitigate the potential financial burden on colleges.
The committee will look at several models that could achieve this, and make recommendations by
(hopefully) November so that colleges will know what the options are going into the next fellowship cycle.

**Question:** Will the new model be like the old one in the sense that if you offered a fellowship to one student
and that student didn’t accept you lost the fellowship?

**Response:** The one-time matching fellowship funds for the 2013-14 cohort came from a central pool with
partnership between the Provost Office and the Graduate School. If the student didn’t accept the collegiate
fellowship, the program would not get the central match; however, it would still retain the decentralized
funds. Up to $700,000 was earmarked for this one-time match. Of this, only $287,000 has been spent.

5. **DDF Eligibility and Selection Criteria:** Sally asked for GEC input on the ways in which we could change
aspects of the DDF eligibility and selection criteria to improve the selection process and impact of the
fellowship. Yoji Shimizu and Doug Ernie have served as co-chairs of the DDF committee several times, and
shared their experiences with what did and did not seem to work in terms of the eligibility and selection
criteria.

**Discussion of main issues:**

**Eligibility criteria:** Previously, students needed to be within 18 months of completing in order to be eligible
for the DDF. This was changed recently to allow students who are not as advanced to qualify. The
consensus of the four co-chairs is that this change has not had a major impact on fellowships awards due to
the fact that students who are much earlier in their studies are unlikely to be competitive when compared
to more advanced students. The committee considers what the students are achieving overall. Students
who are within 18 months of graduating will show greater evidence of productivity, as well as of the
significance of their work to the field. It’s more difficult to address the clear significance of the work of
earlier-stage students in a letter of support. It may be the case that this has created more work for DGSs,
who have to write letters of support for these earlier-stage students despite the fact that they’re unlikely to
be awarded a DDF.

**Question:** Would broadening the understanding of “scholarly productivity” to include things beyond
publications make earlier-stage students more competitive?

**Response:** From the perspective of the committee co-chairs, it would be hard to imagine criteria that would
even the playing field when comparing someone who is three years from completion to more advanced
students.

**Question:** Is there flexibility in the eligibility criteria? If we return to limiting eligibility to more advanced
students, some fields have requirements (e.g., an internship) that would make top students ineligible.

**Response:** The process does allow for flexibility in that people can provide a rationale for any aspect of the
nomination that might otherwise seem to be a red flag to the committee. If the rationale is reasonable,
then the committee will take this into account.

**DGS letter:** Do we need a DGS letter?
**Advantages of the DGS letter:**
- Provides a perspective on the student that is more objective/distanced than that of the advisor.
• The DGS can reflect on multiple DDF nominees and be comparative. If there are 3 students and only 2 slots, then the DGS can address which students are more deserving from the perspective of the department.
• The DGS can address the significance of the student’s work for the overall field.

Issues/Concerns with the DGS letter:
• By requiring that the DGS write the letter, we’re placing a burden on this person to write about something/someone s/he may not really know about. This is especially true in departments with diverse tracks, for example.
• From the perspective of the DGS, it is not always clear what is needed/expected in the letter.
• The DGS letter can sometimes be redundant with the advisor letter. We want to clarify and get different information in these two letters.

Rating sheet: Could we use a ratings sheet or some other approach to decrease the burden of the DGS letters? The consensus of GEC was that a ratings sheet would not capture nuances we seek when making decisions about who is most deserving of a fellowship. There is really no substitute for a letter or recommendation, even though these are time consuming to produce. The narrative is important.

Departmental letter: Could we have a “departmental letter” written by the advisor/the DGS or someone else who is close enough to know the field, and who would represent the position of the department? This might include some sort of rating section with clear criteria, but also have a narrative section. This would make the expectations about what is needed in the letter more explicit.

Decisions:
• We will not reinstate the transcript requirement, as no one found it critical to the selection process.
• We will return to the eligibility requirement that the student should be within 18 months of completion at the time of nomination.
• The majority of GEC members agree that the purpose of the fellowship should be to facilitate completion of the writing of the dissertation (hence returning to eligibility criteria focused on advanced students).
• We will explore the notion of a departmental letter that would also include a quantitative section. We will go back to the committees after this next fellowship cycle to ask them if this approach was helpful for their decision making.

6. Bridging Funds: Ann Masten explained the process and criteria that were used to award bridging funds this past year, as well as what the committee determined the funds could and could not be used to cover. Coverage of fees was excluded, for example, and a program match of 50% was required when funds were used to raise stipends to the basic level of RA/TA.

Questions for full GEC Input:
• Should the awards be capped? Some prestigious fellowships carry very small monetary awards, and would consume a large amount of bridging funds. When departments have very high stipend rates, should the GS cover or match that high amount?

Decision: We do not want an arbitrary cap. The recommendation of the committee is to share the cost of the tuition difference between the department and the GS when it is unusually high.
• What should be the timing for changes in the eligibility criteria? These awards are being made on a rolling basis, so the issue is one of fairness and transparency.

**Decision:** Any change would follow the natural rhythm of the institution (e.g., next semester, next year, etc.) and would be publicized widely. Sally would suggest a January 1, 2014 change. Any awards made for this FY will be grandfathered in under the old criteria.

• Should we cover externally-funded traineeships?

**Decision:** No. There is a separate source of funding to cover this gap.

• How should the competitiveness or prestige of international fellowships be determined?

**Decision:** The committee will rely on the expertise and judgment of Graduate School staff on this issue.

7) **Academic Program Review:** Sally asked GEC members to review a preliminary list of questions that Graduate School staff have developed outlining what questions/topics should be included in an external academic program review.

**Discussion/Comment:**
• The preliminary document does not include much about engagement and service, but this is a priority for us as a land-grant institution. How do you train students for leadership?
• Don’t use the word “target” in relation to diversity. Use “goal.”
• Why do we use the narrow definition of diversity as domestic students of color only? This should be broader. Use the term “under-represented.”
• Ask about the quality of advising, and of teaching.
• Is this just about assessing the quality of the program or about obtaining information from the external reviewers about improvements that could be made? **Response:** It’s about both.

Sally solicited GEC member’s additional input via email. Graduate School staff will revise the preliminary document based on this feedback and bring it back to the GEC.