Graduate Education Council
Meeting of Tuesday, February 28, 2012
1:00 – 3:00 p.m., 433 Johnston Hall

Minutes

Present: Victor Barocas, Belinda Cheung (staff), Kathleen Conklin, Shawn Curley, Jigna Desai, Vicki Field (staff), John Goodge (via conference call), Kimi Johnson, Ameete Kelekar, Joe Konstan, Ann Masten, Chris Phelan, Tim Salo, Henning Schroeder, Fran Vavrus, Char Voight (staff), Elizabeth Wattenberg, Pamela Weisenhorn

Guests: Brad Bostrom (Graduate School Systems and Data Management), Nita Krevans (chair, Policy Review Committee)

For action:
1) Approval of the notes and minutes from the January 20, 2012, GEC meeting: The notes and minutes from January 20 were unanimously approved.

For information:
1) Updates: Henning Schroeder informed GEC members of several upcoming events and resources:
   - April 12 Graduate and Professional Education Assembly on advising.
   - April 13 Career Networking Breakfast (http://www.grad.umn.edu/network).
   - The Versatile Ph.D. service (http://versatilephd.com): The Graduate School is exploring the purchase of premium services on this site for graduate students at the University. There is free content on the web site, but the value of the premium paid content outweighs the cost (about $3,000/year).
   - April 17 Doctoral Dissertation Research Showcase. This year, the research showcase will be held from 12:00 to 2:00 p.m. in the Great Hall, Coffman Memorial Union.
   - Revised Policy Review Committee web page: The site has been revised and now has a table with links to the most recent version of draft policies and accompanying materials. There are also links to those policies that have already been through the approval process and are currently in effect. (http://www.grad.umn.edu/Transition/policy/index.html)

For discussion:
1. Training grant matching fund: Henning Schroeder asked for input from the GEC regarding how the Graduate School should collaborate with programs, departments and colleges to distribute these funds. These are NSF IGERTS, NIH training grants, and a smaller number of Mellon. There is now a recurring budget line for these matching funds. GEC members generally agreed that funding would be best leveraged if provided in the form of matching funds from the Graduate School rather than to buy out faculty time to write training grant proposals. Matching funds also show institutional support, which is increasingly required to successfully secure grants. They also agreed an announcement about this funding source should be made. It was suggested that the Graduate School continue to distribute the funds in a manner similar to the past (first-come/first-served for successful proposals) for the sake of retaining flexibility; however, there should be monitoring to see if a more refined approach is needed. Colleges
could be asked to assess the initial quality of the proposals, and only those that receive collegiate matching funds would move forward in the process. Another question to be addressed is how to prioritize requests (e.g., long-term renewals versus new grants; priority for areas with few sources for student support?). These are issues that can be brought back to the GEC for consultation once the Graduate School has more information on the types of requests that are being submitted.

2. Issues in the implementation of early doctoral thesis credit (8888) registration: Henning Schroeder gave an overview of the context for the new policy. It allows students to register for thesis credits before taking the preliminary oral examination. The policy review committee made the decision based on academic factors, although committee members were aware that allowing early registration for thesis credits could have financial implications for colleges and programs in terms of tuition revenue. Programs can decide if they want to allow early thesis credit registration, but the college must also approve the decision. Some colleges are supporting programs that wish to allow early registration because they have heard from the faculty that it would be beneficial for students (e.g., students can take courses later that they want and need, they receive credit for research they are doing early in their careers before they have taken the prelim oral). Schroeder asked what GEC members had heard in their own collegiate units.

The response was mixed. Program faculty in some departments voted overwhelmingly to allow early thesis credit registration, while others either had not yet decided or had decided against this action. In some cases, programs favor allowing early registration but the collegiate dean does not support this action. It is not clear that all programs are aware that this new policy is in effect.

The GEC views the policy as a generally positive one for students, who are doing dissertation research before the preliminary exams and who may now receive recognition and credit for this without having to wait. It also recognizes that faculty are advising students before the preliminary exams. The University may want to go further and consider models from other institutions that count advising as part of faculty workload.

3. Determination of time to degree. Brad Bostrom, Director of Data and Systems Management in the Graduate School, reviewed with the GEC a series of scenarios representing how time to degree would be calculated under the proposed new degree progress, completion and related policies (e.g., Leave of Absence). One primary difference is the fact that the new LOA policy provides students with a means to “stop the clock” if they have an approved leave. Although there was general agreement that it is important to have some measure(s) of time to degree for various reasons (e.g., data reporting, identification of struggling students), GEC members did not feel that all of the scenarios presented for calculating the time to degree were meaningful to the same extent. In particular, example #2 (PhD student admitted in fall 2003, no master’s activity, discontinued due to lack of enrollment in fall 2008, readmitted summer 2009, degree conferred 9/30/2010: 7.1 years to degree) compared to #3 (PhD student admitted in fall 2006, no master’s activity, on a leave of absence for fall 2011, degree conferred 10/31/12, 5.8 years to degree) could create potentially discriminatory decisions. They recommend subsuming the #2 scenario into the method of calculating time to degree illustrated in #3.
The suggestion was made that we could simplify the issue by stating that time to degree is counted differently for those who enter a program with a master’s and those who do not, and for those who have an approved leave of absence and those who do not. Programs should determine how they would ideally like students to progress through the degree, assess whether this is happening for the majority of students, and address problems if/when they are identified. The method of calculating time to degree should be a tool to assist with this assessment.

4. Update from the Graduate Education Policy Review Committee:
   - Doctoral Degree: Performance Standards and Progress, draft 2/24/12
   - Doctoral Degree: Completion, draft 2/24/12
   - Master's Degree: Performance Standards and Progress, draft 2/24/12
   - Master's Degree: Completion, draft 2/24/12

Nita Krevans reviewed the policy drafts under consideration and provided an update on the consultation process to date. The performance standards and progress and the competition policies are really one policy, but they were divided into two separate policies to make them more accessible. GEC members have seen several drafts of these in the past. The policy review committee has received detailed input from both individuals and stakeholder groups.

Krevans queried the GEC on the issue of whether there should be a required minimum GPA for doctoral students. The current position is a compromise between those who favor this approach and those who do not. The proposed compromise is to have a minimum GPA requirement of 3.0 for doctoral students to remain in good standing, but to not extend this as a requirement for graduation. Monitoring would be similar to what occurs when students exceed a program’s limit on the number of incompletes allowed: Graduate School staff send a notification to the DGS to say that the student has exceeded the limit. The DGS can then choose to place a hold on the student’s registration or not. There could be a similar practice with minimum GPA.

Krevans also queried the GEC on the issue of maximum time limits for earning the master’s and doctoral degrees. Programs with distinctive student populations can request a program-wide exception to the policy. There was discussion about why issues such as time to degree are institutional, rather than programmatic, issues. GEC members generally agreed that we do want to have program level data on the full-time equivalent time to degree, to have a way to notify early on those students who are struggling, etc. This will require reaching consensus on the measures that should be used to assess programs, as well as the method(s) for calculating time to degree in ways that are meaningful.

5. Graduate program review (Henning Schroeder): Discussion on this item was carried forward to the next GEC meeting on March 20.