Graduate Education Council

Meeting of Monday, October 15, 2012
3:00 – 4:30 p.m., 433 Johnston Hall
Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Richard Brundage, Juliette Cherbuliez, Kathleen Conklin, Shawn Curley, Ameeta Kelekar, Joe Konstan, Karen LaBat, Keshab Parhi, Timothy Salo, Henning Schroeder, Ryan Thompson, Frances Vavrus, Mary Vavrus. (staff) Belinda Cheung, Vicki Field, Toby Greenwald, Char Voight

For information

1. Announcements
- Members of the GEC Nominating Committee will include Shawn Curley (chair), Mike Kilgore, Joe Konstan, and Mary Vavrus. Char Voight will staff the committee, which will have its first meeting in early November.
- The Graduate School website now features a call for proposals for funding new and existing Interdisciplinary Graduate Groups to seed and support the development of research, educational and training activities. Proposals are due March 4, 2013. Further information is online at https://www.grad.umn.edu/deans-office/idinitiatives/gradgroups/callforproposals/index.html.
- Henning Schroeder informed Provost Karen Hanson of the three topics the GEC identified as possible discussion topics for her conversation with GEC members today: her vision of graduate education, whether she favors a centralized or decentralized model for the administration of graduate education, and what she views as the ideal funding model for graduate education.

2. Update on the graduate education transition
Stacia Madsen, Academic Support Resources, solicited GEC members’ feedback as to whether the preliminary oral examination form should remain a paper process or be digitized. The consensus of the GEC was that the paper process is the most convenient, because all faculty members who need to sign the form are typically present at the exam. Currently, only one faxed or electronic signature per exam is permitted. A meeting to solicit input on digitizing graduate examination forms will be held on October 31 (10:00 – 11:00 a.m., 160c Williamson Hall). Comments may also be sent to mads0066@umn.edu.

3. Advice to Faculty Writing NSF letters of recommendation
Henning Schroeder called GEC members’ attention to information provided by Professor Scott Lanyon to guide those who write letters of recommendation for students applying for NSF fellowships. This information is now posted on the Graduate School Fellowship website at http://www.grad.umn.edu/fellowships/nsfadvice/index.html. The link was sent to all faculty.

For discussion and action:

Notes and minutes from the September 27, 2012 meeting will be considered for approval at the November 19th meeting.

For discussion

1. FY14 Graduate School compact/budget request
The FY14 budget request the Graduate School would be submitting to the Provost asked for an additional $250,000 to bring the Bridging Fund program to a total of $750,000. This fund would pay for the
education allowance and/or stipend shortfall for all NSF fellows and NIH F-award Fellows, and health insurance for Fulbright Scholars. The Graduate School will continue to explore ways to support students’ success with respect to other highly competitive, nationally recognized fellowship competitions. Some GEC members expressed concern that shortfalls for other prestigious fellowships were not included in the request. They feared the issue will lead faculty to ask students not to apply for these awards because departments can’t afford to supplement them. Henning Schroeder and Belinda Cheung responded that the FY14 request is a starting point for the conversation with the Provost to bring this issue to light.

Henning Schroeder would like to see a recurring budget line item of $50,000 for travel grant funding for graduate students who wish to present their findings at conferences. Also, the Graduate School has budgeted $30,000 from its reserves for Interdisciplinary Graduate Groups in FY13 and will request the same amount for FY14. Depending on the success of the investment in graduate groups, the amount requested for this purpose may increase in future years.

2.  Assessment of academic programs and graduate student learning outcomes
Henning Schroeder shared with GEC members details of his recent presentation to SCEP. How can the University prepare for its accreditation review, which is scheduled for 2015? One issue is the development of guidelines for academic program review; the Provost’s office, SCEP, the Graduate School and the Office of the Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education are working together to draft guidelines and a process for programmatic review. Another issue is the identification of graduate student learning outcomes and a means to assess these. A group of faculty and staff has begun discussion on this topic. These need to be measurable, representative of what is thought to be an important skill set for graduate students, and subject to disciplinary interpretation. The GEC will be invited to provide input to the draft outcomes, once these have been formulated.

3.  Discussion with Provost Karen Hanson
GEC members engaged in a wide-ranging conversation with Provost Hanson. Among the topics discussed were: the decentralization of graduate education; the role of the Graduate School and of the GEC with respect to maintaining graduate program quality; the University’s funding model (under which some units may receive less than their contribution to a cost pool, yet benefit from “common goods”); differences between undergraduate and graduate education, and the role graduate education and research play at a research university; the role of central policies in addressing institutional issues; duplication of services; the role of the GEC in supporting high-quality graduate education; and the extent to which budgetary issues like the shortfall in the educational allowance can be managed by institutional policy versus via the compact process.

Adjourn