Graduate Education Council  
Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, September 27, 2017  
2:30-4:30 pm  
101 Walter Library

Present: Robert Blair, Abhishek Chandra, Etty DeVeaux (staff), Sarah Huebner, Emi Ito, Will Jones, Joe Kapusta, Kendall King, Mary Jo Kreitzer, Nathan Kuncel, Scott Lanyon (chair), Jennifer Liang, Deborah Levison, Ryan Machmtes, Murti Salapaka, Katherine Scheil, Char Voight (staff), David Weerts

Guests: Noro Andriamanalina (Graduate School), Brad Bostrom (Graduate School), Vicki Field (Graduate School), Molly Schwartz (Graduate School), Alison Skoberg (Graduate School), Karen Starry (Graduate School), Yoji Shimizu (Graduate School).

1. Introductions: Scott Lanyon welcomed all GEC members, including the new student and faculty representatives.

2. Overview of GEC as consultative body: Lanyon described the various consultative bodies with which the Graduate School consults, and how the GEC fits in that context. The GEC functions as a sounding board for ideas related to graduate education in the early stages of development. GEC input is sought prior to bringing more fully formed ideas and proposals to groups such as the Faculty Senate.

3. GEC standing subcommittees: Lanyon gave an overview of the GEC subcommittees and ask members to send their service preference to Char Voight by Monday, October 16th. Subcommittee charges will be circulated to the GEC by Friday, October 13th. If members have no preference, Scott will assign to them as need to a subcommittee prior to October 18th meeting. Subcommittee are:

   a. External Fellowships: Work would include review for such things as: Mags Distinguished Master's Thesis Award (PlanA) (5-10 nominations/year), Mags Excellence in Teaching (5 nominations in 2016), Regeneron Prize for Creative Innovation (3-5 nominations/year), Meeting with Nobel Laureates, Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship (0-2 proposals/tear) and possibly the Best Dissertation. Review would not likely require face-to-face meetings, with the possible exception of the Best Dissertation.

   b. Graduate School Sponsorship Requests: This would involve review of internal proposals/requests for Graduate School sponsorship of various initiatives and events. Review would not likely require face-to-face meetings. Decision making by the subcommittee would be guided by Graduate School proposal review rubric based on strategic priorities.
c. **Grievance:** All members of the GEC are considered potential members of the Grievance Subcommittee, and may be called upon depending on the number and nature of grievances that come before the Council. The subcommittee requires a grievance officer from the GEC, who will work with Graduate School staff (Karen Starry) on cases requiring GEC input. Other than the grievance officer, GEC members would typically not serve on more than one grievance review per year. An average of 2-3 grievances have been brought to the GEC the past several years. Work would require face-to-face meetings with number and timing dependent on specific grievances.

d. **Nominating:** Work would involve the solicitation of faculty nominations for new GEC members (5-7 members replaced annual when terms expire) to stand for annual spring election. The majority of subcommittee work would be concentrated in February and March, just prior to the GEC annual election in April. Would not likely require face-to-face meetings.

e. **Policy Review:** Subcommittee work would involve working with the Graduate School policy liaison (Karen Starry) to provide faculty perspective and input on policy issues as these arise. Depending upon the nature of the work, could include occasional face-to-face meetings with most work conducted via email.

4. Graduate School strategic planning: Lanyon presented an overview of the Graduate School’s strategic planning process, including the objectives and initiatives that have been identified and that will drive the work of the Graduate School over the coming months.

5. Discussion on Graduate School Strategic Planning Process:
   a. **Mission:** Lanyon emphasized the words “facilitate” and “advocate” in the mission statement. The Graduate School works in partnership with colleges and programs to advance excellence in graduate education and postdoctoral education. It also acts as an advocate with the Board of Regents, state legislature, and other internal and external stakeholders. Lanyon also highlighted the inclusion of postdocs in the mission, noting that service to postdocs is located firmly in the Graduate School and that he would like the GEC to help find ways to increase our service to postdocs.
   b. **Strategic Objectives:** These are the umbrella objectives under which all Graduate School activities will fall.
      - **Diversity:** This is the number one strategic objective. It is being articulated as increasing the diversity of students and postdocs earning graduate degrees and obtaining postdocs positions at the U. The goal is not about just recruitment, but about retention and a successful experience for students.
Lanyon mentioned also talked about a past initiative called “QMAP” or the Quality Metrics Allocation Program, which sought to have programs reflect on metrics and excellence. This is the last year of QMAP. Next year it will be replaced by a new program, “GAGE,” Grants to Advance Graduate Education, which focus on a particular issue/area such as diversity. Grants are intended to help programs advance their own self-identified goals in this area. Lanyon will be bringing this issue back to the GEC and other consultative groups this fall for their input.

c. Strategic Initiatives: Lanyon gave an overview of some of the new initiatives that are currently underway or that will be underway shortly. These include:

- **3 Minute Thesis:** This is intended to provide students with the skills to speak succinctly and effectively to a lay audience. Several colleges have been hosting their own competitions, and we would like to see the numbers increase. The students who win at the collegiate level are excellent, and Lanyon has been exploring ways to engage them to help raise awareness about graduate education and research to entities like the BOR.

- **Accreditation and graduate student learning outcomes:** We will be engaging in this process over the next year due to accreditation, but should keep in mind that this is and should be an ongoing activity. Duluth will be engaging in this activity in the spring. New GEC member Jennifer Liang would be happy to share the goals Duluth has identified.

- **Annual reports to collegiate deans:** These provide each college with a comprehensive annual report on graduate education. Although we have GradSERU results, in many cases these are not being used to the extent they could be. These annual reports help highlight those areas within colleges that require attention. The reports also highlight trends that might otherwise not be apparent to the collegiate deans.

- **Welcoming Communities:** The existing COSP program is a U-wide program focusing on domestic students of color. This initiative will endeavor to make possible more locally based communities. Yoji Shimizu is leading this, and will speak more to the GEC about what forms this may take as planning evolves.
- **Alliance for Diversity:** We held a forum after the presidential election which yielded great discussion. This initiative seeks to bring students together to confront issues around student’s sense of being welcome at U, and inclusiveness.

- **DGS/Advisor Training:** Good advising is crucial to student success. Poor advising, typically in the form of poor communication, is a major barrier to student success and a key issue identified by the Student Conflict Resolution Center. DGSs do not receive much training or preparation on what is involved in being a DGS.

- **CGS Career Pathways:** Lanyon summarizes the 3-year survey project, which will involve exploring career aspirations and preparation with cohorts of current students and alumni. The Graduate School will be working with the Alumni Association, which is also interested in tracking our alumni. The CGS survey attempts to get at what careers alumni have pursued. Another step is to ask them what should have/could have happened in their graduate education to better prepare them for their careers.

- **Expand Orientation:** Idea is to have students “hit the ground running.” We will be exploring both new programming as well as ways to better serve students who have not had full access to orientation in the past (e.g., part-time students, students on systems campuses).

- **Question:** What is the Graduate School role in continuing to advance and foster interdisciplinarity? This is not called out explicitly in any of objectives, initiatives, or values. However, this is increasingly seen as crucial to successful research and professional endeavors. Lanyon: Identifying and helping to reduce and eliminate the barriers that students and faculty experience in trying to engage interdisciplinarity is a role the Graduate School does seek to play. He will consider if this should be more explicitly stated.

- **Question:** Are these initiatives new? Lanyon: The objectives are static, but the initiatives will be change as some are completed and new ones emerge in their place.

- **Question:** How do these initiatives align with the Grand Challenges? This relates to the question on interdisciplinarity, because the Grand Challenges are big, bold initiatives that depend on interdisciplinarity. Lanyon: It may make sense to call this out as a separate value.

- **Question:** What can we do with advisors who are not interested in being trained? Although it’s not a common problem, when it arises it’s a challenging problem. Lanyon: We have much work to do with the faculty who WANT to be better advisors. If we succeed with those faculty who want to improve their advising skills, then the bar is raised for those who are not as willing to engage in good advising. Our tolerance will
decrease when it comes to bad advising. Higher education must have a means to deal with those faculty who refuse to engage in good advising. Would like to hear from GEC about ideas they may have.

- Follow-up question: There are not clear pathways to deal student/advisor conflict. It is not clear at what level authority and responsibility lie to take action. Lanyon: Since decentralization, authority ultimately lies at the local level with the unit/program deciding who can and who cannot be on the graduate faculty, who can or cannot advise. The key is for the unit to have procedures to arrive at these decisions. The graduate faculty committee has a role, the SCRC has a role, the DGS has a role. SERU indicates also that students report that they don’t know what they are suppose to do in the event of conflict with an advisor. Decentralization may have added to the confusion about who has the authority to act on these things.

- Further question: Does, or should, merit review weigh in this decisionmaking? Lanyon: There have been some preliminary conversations about whether or not the quality of advising, rather than just the number of advisees, should be a factor.

- Question: On the issue of diversifying the student body, is there any focus on the K-12 pipeline? This is an area over which we don’t have much control once students get to undergraduate education and are considering graduate programs. Lanyon: Programs do not have control over the pipeline, so measuring progress would be a question of benchmarking appropriately and then looking at progress over time. We also understand that this is a difficult issue, and some programs will make slower progress than others. Also, the Graduate School definition of diversity is the DOVE fellowship definition, which is very broad. Every college and every graduate program may approach this and focus differently. The Graduate School is not going to directly work on K-12 pipeline because this is not within the scope of our mission. However, if this is a goal identified by programs as appropriate for them, then the Graduate School would support these efforts. One possible approach for programs is to identify talented undergraduate students from underrepresented groups here at the U, help them to identify real and perceived barriers to an advanced degree, and then partner with them to mitigate these barriers to persuade them that they are appropriate candidates for graduate school. We have a better chance of success in recruiting them to the U and helping them to succeed than do other institutions.