

MINUTES OF THE GRADUATE COUNCIL

The University of Alabama

April 6th, 2022

Members Present: Angela Benson, Blake Berryhill, Jeffrey Carver, Katherine Chiou, Bill Evans, Martin Evans, Allison Grant, Peter Harms, Paul Hubner, Sebrina Jackson, Seung Eun Jung, Kevin Kocot, Deidre Leaver-Dunn, Dana Patton, Troy Pollard, Daniel Riches, Cecil Robinson, Nicole Ruggiano, Jon Shemwell, Steve Shepard, K. Merinda Simmons, Brenda Smith, Wei Song, Firat Soylu, Peggy Swails Trospen, Miriam Sweeney, Nicole Swoszowski, Teresa Welch, Mesut Yavuz, Lea Yerby

Members Absent with Alternate: Hilary Green, Kristina McDonald, Alan Tidwell

Members Absent without Alternate: Arthur Allaway, Heather Carmack, Pat Carter, Kenon Brown, Susan Dewey, Janie Hubbard,

Student Representatives: Quin Kelley, Dudley Moore

Ex officio Members Present: Donald Gilstrap (Dean of Libraries), Jaber Abu Qahouq (Faculty Senate)

Graduate School Representatives: Susan Carvalho, Dean; André Denham, Associate Dean; Andrew Goodliffe, Associate Dean; Angela Abrams, Admissions Counselor Senior; Karin Bryson, Asst. Registrar; Amanda Maltbie, International Graduate Admissions Officer; Kerri Morthland, Dir of Administration; Shenika Williams, International Admissions Counselor; Catherine Walker

Guests: Ginger Bishop (Institutional Effectiveness), Ken Foshee (University Registrar), Jacqueline Hodges (CCS), Carmen Jones (Institutional Effectiveness), Sharif Melouk (CCB), Leslie Yow (Institutional Effectiveness)

Dean Carvalho welcomed everyone. The meeting began with a correction to the minutes of the February 2022 meeting, included in the packet – the vote to raise the AMP admission standards was recorded as 31 in favor and 1 opposed, but should have been recorded as 30 in favor and 2 opposed. There being no further amendments offered by Council members, the minutes as amended were approved by unanimous consent.

Dean Carvalho also updated the Council members on the approval process for the AMP changes. Having been approved by the Graduate Council and Undergraduate Council, the proposal will now go to the Council of Deans for discussion later this month. Council members were advised to share any further concerns with their college deans so that they may be raised in that conversation. The approval process at all levels is designed to balance accessibility of the program against accreditation concerns having to do with the program being only for “exceptional students.”

Committee reports then followed.

The Graduate Admissions & Recruitment Committee had no new business to report.

The Graduate Fellowships and Scholarships Committee report was presented by committee chair Mesut Yavuz.

- Now that all four rounds of fellowship awards are complete, the committee notes that the number of nominations this year was higher than the number received from departments last year. In addition, in a bit of good news, more students accepted our offers this year. That prompted the Committee to cut down on the number of new offers that could be extended in the fourth round, in order to stay within the Fellowships budget.
- Dr. Yavuz reminded the Council that the deadline for students to accept or decline their fellowship offers is April 15th (next week).
- Dr. Yavuz thanked the committee members for their hard work in reviewing so many nominations. Dean Carvalho pointed out that the committee engages in difficult predictions of student behavior, in changing external conditions, when deciding by how much they can over-award the fellowships, to still be aggressive in providing as much support as possible. Associate Dean Goodliffe had pointed out that uncertainty is built into the statistical model, so that predictions can be as accurate as possible.

The Graduate Curriculum Committee Report was presented by committee chair Cecil Robinson.

- The Curriculum Committee reviewed requests from eighteen doctoral programs to reduce their minimum required number of 699 doctoral research hours, from 24 to 18, in accordance with the policy change approved in February. The 18 programs were:
 - Anthropology
 - Biological Sciences
 - Geological Sciences
 - Modern Languages & Classics
 - Communication & Information Sciences
 - Aerospace Engineering & Mechanics
 - Computer Science
 - Electrical & Computer Engineering
 - Mechanical Engineering
 - Interdisciplinary PhD
 - Health Education & Promotion
 - Curriculum & Instruction
 - Higher Education Administration
 - Educational Leadership
 - Instructional Leadership (concentration in Instructional Technology)
 - Instructional Leadership (concentration in Social & Cultural Studies)
 - Finance
 - Economics

The Committee reviewed each request to ensure that the documentation demonstrated sufficiently the department's confidence that the 699 reduction would not negatively impact dissertation quality, and that departmental and college approval processes had been followed.

The Committee recommended approval of all 18 requests. The Council approved them, with a vote of 28 in favor and zero opposed.

- An information item was introduced by associate dean André Denham. The online PhD program in Aerospace Engineering currently has a requirement that students come physically to campus at least once per semester. This requirement was relaxed during the pandemic, and the program did not see any loss in content or quality when they moved the twice-yearly evaluations to a virtual format. The program thus requests that this change become permanent – that the requirement for an evaluation each semester be changed from an in-person campus visit to a virtual format.

This change was approved at the Committee level and is brought to the Council only as an information item.

The Graduate Academic Policy Committee Report was presented by committee chair Dana Patton.

- Proposal related to Dissertation Embargo Requests. The Graduate Catalog currently does not contain any language regarding conversations or approval processes for students to request an embargo of their dissertations. Thus some students may be placing unnecessary embargoes while others who should embargo their work may not be doing so. The Committee feels that the student should retain the decision-making rights, but in consultation with their dissertation advisor. Thus, the proposal recommends that check-boxes be added to two current forms – the Change of Committee form and the Committee Acceptance form – where the dissertation advisor attests that they have discussed the embargo options with the student.

In addition, the Graduate School will create a video and accompanying prose for the website, to inform students and advisors more fully about the pros and cons of dissertation embargoes.

The proposal was approved with a vote of 28 in favor and 1 opposed.

- Proposal on Transfer of Credit. Revision to the transfer policy was required, since the proposal approved in February now allows doctoral programs' minimum coursework to range from 36 to 48 hours. Transfer of credit is limited to 50% of the minimum required coursework. Thus, the the previous policy stated that a maximum of 24 credit hours could be transferred into a doctoral program, on the assumption that all programs had 48 hours of required coursework.

The proposal for revision of this policy allows for variation in the number of credit hours, by replacing the "24 credit hour" maximum with a percentage: "50% of minimum required coursework" may be transferred into a doctoral program.

In addition, this section of the Catalog had created confusion in the past, regarding how it applied to credits earned in a prior UA master's program. The "50% rule" has always been applied by the Graduate Registrar, as regards a prior UA master's, but this created confusion since a prior UA master's doesn't seem like transfer credit. The Policy Committee took the opportunity to clarify that language for the next iteration of the Catalog.

Further, the revisions include clarifications regarding transfer of credits earned as an AMP student, and credits earned by the Master's En Route to the doctoral degree.

In the coming year, further formalization of the Master's En Route practice will be needed, in order to track the double-counting of credits accurately. Programs offering the "en route" option will need to submit a proposal that outlines exactly how this works in their department (e.g. at what point a master's student might opt into the "master's en route" option), so that the appropriate documentation can be maintained within the Graduate School and in the Graduate Catalog.

Discussion from Council members included further clarification about the differences between transfer courses, prior UA master's, and master's en route, as well as the future approval process for the en route pathway.

One question that will need to be clarified, regarding credits from a prior UA masters, is the following: if a student takes excess master's hours beyond the 30 required hours, can the excess hours be applied towards the PhD and be "outside" the 50% rule? Dean Carvalho will discuss this question with the Graduate Registrar.

The proposal for revision to the Transfer Credit policy was approved with a vote of 29 in favor and one opposed.

- Final Dissertation Submission and Approval. The proposed revisions include a clarification of all of the Graduate Catalog sections related to dissertations, to make the guidelines easier to find for students and faculty.

Additions to the policy include that the final dissertation must be submitted within 60 days of the doctoral defense, as well as clarifications on Graduate School deadlines related to each term's degree conferral timelines.

The proposal was approved with a vote of 30 in favor and none opposed.

- Ed.D. Committee Size. The College of Education requests that minimum Ed.D. advisory committee size be reduced from 5 members to 4 members, in line with Ed.D. practices elsewhere in the US as well as the professional focus of the degree. Students must receive a vote of 3-1 or 4-0 in order to pass the exam or dissertation defense (a vote of 2-2 will be considered as a vote to fail the student). This change, if approved by the Council, will appear in the Dissertation Committee section of the Graduate Catalog.

The proposal was approved with a vote of 28 in favor and none opposed.

- Update on plus/minus grading discussion. Several proposals continue to be discussed, including a "plus-only" option (e.g. A, B+, B, C+, C...) as well as "plus/minus" (A, A-, B+, B, B-, ...). The Policy Committee felt that insufficient input had been received from graduate faculty across the campus, given the broad implications of this change.

Thus the Policy Committee will distribute a brief survey in May, and take up this issue again in the Fall semester in light of the responses received.

- Finally, Dr. Patton expressed her thanks to the subcommittee chairs on the Policy Committee who did a great deal of heavy lifting on the policy changes that have been considered this year.

The Report from the Committee on Teaching, Research, and Service Awards was presented by committee chair Katherine Chiou.

- The awards reception will be held on Thursday, April 14, in Alston Parlor.
- All awards handled by this committee will be given during the Spring semester beginning next year, including the Outstanding Mentor Award and the Outstanding Non-Traditional Thesis Award.

Reports from the Dean's Office

- Associate Dean Denham announced the inauguration of the 1-credit Preparing Future Faculty and Professionals course (PFX), to be offered for the first time in Fall 2022. This course was designed with national models in mind. The "X" in the title stands for the infinite possible career paths that doctoral and MFA graduates may pursue. Students will need to be approved in order to register for this pass/fail seminar-style course, that will offer career preparation guidance and mentorship. Students must be in their third year in order to apply to take the course. A webpage will be available in the future, to inform students about the course.
- Based on a request from the Provost to all academic units, the Graduate Council was asked to vote on a policy for how the search committee will be selected, for future Dean of the Graduate School searches. The policy will be vetted by the Graduate Council since, as the Faculty Handbook states, the Council stands in for the graduate faculty as a whole; and a vote by the entire graduate faculty is unwieldy.

The proposal that Dean Carvalho presented to the Council is aligned with the processes drafted by several colleges in their recent dean searches, and contains the following provisions:

- The senior-most associate dean, who is a tenured faculty member, will organize the election process.
- The majority of the search committee will consist of graduate faculty.
- Each academic college will hold a separate election. All graduate faculty with a rank of full-time assistant professor or higher will be eligible to vote.
- All graduate faculty are eligible to be on the ballot but can opt out if they wish.
- The UA President will determine the size of the committee, and will appoint additional members.
- The Council recommends that the committee include one GSA-appointed graduate student member.
- An elected member will serve as chair of the committee.

The document was approved by the Graduate Council with a vote of 31 in favor and none opposed. It will be forwarded to the Provost for adoption.

- Dean Carvalho updated the Council on the progress of the Strategic Plan for Graduate Education, and thanked the committee chairs who worked on this project during the Fall semester. The organization of the plan was discussed, as it has evolved from the original “five committees” to two major divisions -- “Growth” and “Quality” -- with cross-cutting threads of inclusive excellence and continuous improvement. Work on refining the plan will continue through the summer months, and endorsement from the Council of Deans will be sought, so that the plan can be released at the outset of the Fall 2022 semester.

Dean Carvalho summarized the major recommendations in several powerpoint slides that will be appended to the Graduate Council packet.

Faculty mentioned the importance of tracking career outcomes of both higher-education-focused and industry-focused graduates, so that in the broadening of career outcomes we don't lose track of our responsibility to train faculty for the nation's colleges and universities. Discussion about future growth of tenure-stream faculty also ensued, in relation to the vision for doctoral program growth.

- Discussion ensued about how students will be informed about 699 reductions from 24 to 18 hours. Because programs have very different implementation plans for this change, we expect that departments will manage this communication. Any Graduate School communication will be targeted only to those students immediately affected by the change, and will refer those students to their program directors for clarification.
- Council members requested a copy of the Oklahoma State study of graduate stipends; Dean Carvalho will share that, as well as the average stipends of the SUG subgroup (16 comparator institutions) against which UA is measuring its own stipend averages in each discipline.

No new reports from UA Faculty Senate.

No new business.

Dean Carvalho ended the meeting by thanking those Council members who would be rotating off the Council, for their years of service.

Meeting adjourned at 4:21 pm.