Minutes of the Graduate Faculty Council Meeting

Tuesday, January 17, 2011

Members (15): Thomas Drummer (Math), Ashutosh Tiwari (Chem), Craig Friedrich (MEEM), Eugene Levin (Sch Tech), Sam Sweitz (SocSci), Paul Ward (Cog Sci), Steve Seidel (CS), Mi Hye Song (Bio Sci), Julia King (Chem Eng), Blair Orr (PCMI), Dave Watkins (Civil), Andrew Storer (SFRES), Simon Carn (Geo), Carl Anderson (Eng), Kim Fook Lee (Phys),

Guests (6): Jackie Huntoon (Grad Sch), Heather Suokas (Grad Sch), Debra Charlesworth (Grad Sch), Nancy Byers-Sprague (Grad Sch), Felicia Chong (GSG), Jacque Smith (Grad School)

1) Meeting called to order at 4:05 pm.

2) Review and approval of 12/06/11 meeting minutes.

3) Committee Reports:
   a. Thesis/Dissertation Guideline Review Committee (Dean Huntoon): The committee met for the fourth time on 01/17/12. If you have suggestions please share them with Jackie, Deb, or Nancy. There should be a draft ready to present to the GFC by mid-semester.

4) Old Business:
   a. Changes to GACS (Dean Huntoon): Huntoon took the comments from the GFC back to Seppala as well as the dean’s council and provost. Seppala reviewed the comment that although NSF does not allow voluntary uncommitted cost share, this should not preclude us from committing it when a funding agency states that cost-share or other evidence of University commitment is a review criterion. Drummer agreed to propose this as an agenda item for the Research Advisory Council for further consideration by the Research Office. The dean’s council felt that it is appropriate to make the proposed changes to GACS to give chairs more flexibility/responsibility/rewards for funding research. Huntoon will take this back to the deans again. If/when put in place, the process will be monitored and if it does not increase the amount of external funding for graduate students then it will be modified. Seidel commented that this criterion is immeasurable. A recent development is the Senate research survey on which respondents indicated that they like GACS and other centralized funding opportunities for graduate students. What is done at other universities? A lot of other universities do some return of graduate tuition to the departments who have graduate students and we do not do that. Our chairs want some incentive to increase the number of graduate students on campus. There are a percentage of students who are self supported but these students are not considered externally funded. If you want more graduate students and you are excluding a whole group of them, how does that make sense? Why do we want more graduate students, financial gain? It is more of a prestige and survival issue. It is hard to attract students here as the U.S. becomes increasingly urban and more diverse. In order to grow the number of PhD students we need to have a fair bit of external funding. Ideally they would be funded for two years on internal money (TA) and then after that on a research grant. Right now we do not have the number of research grants supporting graduate students to make that work.

b. TOEFL Minimum Score (J. Smith): This has been discussed at the last two meetings. If an application comes in with a TOEFL score of less than 55, the university has no support structures for the student. The Graduate School would like to automatically reject these students without forwarding them to the department. Is there any data that shows how/if TOEFL scores can predict the success of a student? Jackie, Nancy, and Craig looked at data for students who have been accepted (generally have a score of 79) and found TOEFL (for that subset) was a poor predictor for first year GPA, time to degree, overall GPA, final completion, etc. Motion to approve passed.
c. PhD Guidelines (Dean Huntoon): Please refer to the handouts section of the GFC website to review the flowcharts of where a student should be in their academic career and when. The first milestone for an incoming student is to select an advisor. Members were asked to consider the text and timelines and come prepared to vote on the queries (listed on the text) at the next meeting. If there are comments or questions let Huntoon know. Questions/Comments: Are there rules about when all these things should be completed? The Graduate School does have rules but we are unable to track or enforce some of the rules for when a student should complete certain milestones. One suggestion is to move the time limit for the comprehensive exam/qualifier to the sixth semester. Our current rule is that you need to complete a master’s degree within five years and you have to complete a PhD degree within eight years. If you do both your master’s and PhD at Michigan Tech in the same field you have to complete them both within eight years. Some believe this is too long of a time frame. Huntoon believes that some fields (nationally) have an average time to degree of about eleven years. The flow chart on page eight says that required timing for completing a degree is two weeks after advisor approves draft dissertation and within eight years after start. This is confusing because it is not required that they do all their corrections within two weeks (it’s recommended). All agreed. Should coursework be added to the flowchart on page eight so that students know when they should be completing their coursework? Can the second and third box on the right be combined (page eight)? Huntoon is trying to separate out the oral defense from the thesis because they are two different things. She could change the wording to “schedule oral defense” and in that case she could combine them. A review of timelines for master’s students will be conducted after the PhD guidelines are approved. If departments want to make the guidelines stricter for their programs, they can. Huntoon asks you to read through the guidelines/flow charts and answer the questions or provide feedback to the comment boxes throughout the document and bring your thoughts to the next GFC meeting (are these the right timeframes, names, milestones?).

5) Motion to adjourn at 5:05 pm.