Minutes of the Graduate Faculty Council Meeting

Tuesday, October 2, 2012

Members (15): Thomas Drummer (Math), Amlan Mukherjee (Civil), Andrew Storer (SFRES), Keat Ghee Ong (Biomed), Tom Merz (Bus), Craig Friedrich (MEEM), Erika Hersch-Green (BioSci), Steve Seidel (CompSci), Judith Perlinger (Atmos), Carl Anderson (Eng), Noel Urban (Envir), Mike Bowler (Rhet), Eugene Levin (SOT), Ashutosh Tiwari (Chem), Zhuo Feng (Elec&Comp), Greg Waite (Geo), Kari Henquinet (PCorps), Kim Fook Lee (Physics)

Guests (7): Jackie Huntoon (Grad Sch), Debra Charlesworth (Grad Sch), Nancy Byers-Sprague (Grad Sch), Kevin Cassell (GSG), Erik Nordberg (Lib), Beatrice Smith (ESL)

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

2) Review and approval of 09/04/12 meeting minutes.

3) Committee Reports:
   a. Thesis/Dissertation Guideline Review Committee (Dean Huntoon): This was approved by the Senate on 9/26/12. The next step is to receive administrative approval. After administrative approval we would like to get this in place as soon as possible (hopefully this semester).
   b. Graduate Tuition and Stipend Review Committee (Dean Huntoon): The committee is waiting for all survey/data benchmarking responses to be collected. Once all the information is collected and analyzed the committee will meet again to talk about what the findings ought to be.

4) Old Business:
   a. Requirements for Coursework Only Applicants/Graduate School Prescreening Applications (Dean Huntoon): In the past week Dean Huntoon has received a lot of emails from deans at other campuses describing how they are now doing some initial screening within their graduate schools. For example, if a student’s GRE score is below the tenth percentile, then it does not get forwarded to the department. Dean Huntoon attended the Sciences and Arts council meeting and she did hear feedback about how programs are receiving applicants who have very low GPA and GRE scores. Some programs would prefer it if these applications were not forwarded to them. The Graduate School would like to move into the prescreening role if it would be helpful. The other issue is whether or not programs want to separate coursework only from thesis/report students at the entry phase. At the last meeting representatives were asked to come to this meeting with feedback.
      - (C): Forestry is interested in looking into this opportunity to have a coursework only degree with a different name. Forestry prefers to receive all their applications so that all parts of the application are considered.
      - (C): The School of Technology does not feel this is a good idea at this time.
      - (Q): Is there a marketing issue?
      - (A): Making it clear that there are coursework only degree programs could potentially help us to attract additional students, particularly online students.
      - (Q): Is one of the objectives to get more applicants which potentially leads to more enrollment?
      - (A): In the last few years the incoming undergraduate applicants has slightly declined. The incoming graduate applicants have increased but this year it has leveled off. Enrollment is very important to Michigan Tech and is a key consideration in developing budgets. Forty percent of all engineering degrees are graduate degrees, so there appears to be great potential for growth in the graduate area.
• (Q): Would coursework only programs be presented to the Senate as new degree programs or a name change to a current degree?
• (A): If they are proposals for new degrees (not just the addition of a coursework-only option to an existing degree) Dean Huntoon believes the proposal would need to go through the entire approval process.
• (Q): Would it be possible for a few departments to try this out without having everybody do it?
• (Q): Yes. Dean Huntoon is trying to spread the word that departments can have a coursework only degree option and, if they wish, give this option a different name than is used for the thesis and report options. Some are not aware that this is possible.
• (Q): Chemistry does not feel this would work for them because chemistry is interactive and hands-on. However, they did agree to discuss having a report option which would be less intensive than the thesis option.
• (D): Prescreening: Programs would prefer to review all applications so at this time the Graduate School will not conduct any prescreening.
• (D): Coursework Only: For those departments that would like to try this please draw up a proposal. Other than encouraging departments to try this, everything will remain as is.

b. Using a BC/C in a Student’s Primary Field of Study (Dean Huntoon): Current policy language: “This requirement can be adjusted at the discretion of a student's graduate program to allow for use of “BC/C” grades in up to six (6) credits from outside the student's primary field of study.”

Should the text “from outside the student’s primary field of study” be removed? At the last meeting representatives were asked to come to this meeting with feedback.

• (C): This would benefit Business for two reasons, one being that some of the courses are only offered once a year and two being that if the student does not receive a B or better on the second try they will be dismissed from the program.
• (Q): A “C” seems too low. Why can’t we keep it like it is with departments asking for exceptions?
• (A): Our policy states that a grade below a B will not be accepted. Making exceptions breaks our policy. At this point we either need to change the policy (to allow exceptions on a case by case basis at the department’s discretion) or enforce the policy as it stands to not allow this (exceptions will not be made).
• (Q): With this being at the discretion of the student’s graduate program how can this be monitored in order to make sure the requests are justified/fair?
• (A): Nancy requests a written request from both the advisor and the graduate program director or department chair approving the request.
• (C): This could limit grade inflation.
• (C): This takes the ability away from individual faculty members who wish to make it clear that a student did not complete acceptable work in a required course. Instructors should have the opportunity, along with the advisor and graduate program director, to have a say in whether a grade will be counted or not toward a degree. Nancy says that it can be stated in the department’s policy that the advisor or graduate program director first check with the instructor before approval is given.
• (Q): Why does the graduate program director get to take part in the approval? How would they know whether the BC/C is acceptable or not? It should be in the hands of the faculty member.
• (A): Based on the grading policy, a BC is assigned meaning in the senate policy so for example if a BC is assigned another instructor should not be assigning a D for the same work.
• (Q): What qualifies an exception?
• (A): The Graduate School will not make the decisions about whether or not someone has satisfied the content area requirements because we are not the subject area experts. That is why we ask the department for approval.

• TO DO: This will be discussed again at the next GFC meeting on 11/06/12.

5) New Business:
   a. ESL Services (Beatrice Smith): As of now graduate level language classes are not offered. ESL is in the process of working towards serving graduate students. ESL has no mechanism for verifying proficiency as they do not see the test score or the student until a faculty member refers them to ESL which typically is after the semester has begun. Departments are admitting students with test scores that they find acceptable but upon getting students into the classroom, the departments find that some students are not meeting expectations. Unfortunately, because it is weeks into the semester ESL cannot help. A solution would be for the Graduate School to submit to ESL each student’s test score upon the student paying the SEVIS fee (this confirms their attendance). Beatrice is here to ask permission of the departments to use that score to verify the student’s language skills. If they do not meet the admission standard, ESL can then start a support mechanism for assisting students in need.

   • (Q): How would you do this verification?
   • (A): International students could take the TOEFL ITP (assessment series). Another way is to assign a student an online reading assignment and in addition have a faculty member present a lecture to the student. Based on the reading assignment and lecture the student will be given a task to show understanding of the material. This is what the University of Illinois does. This may be too intensive for ESL to take on.
   • (Q): Would there be a charge associated with the ITP test?
   • (A): ESL has an agreement with ETS for undergraduates who take the test. ESL pays the expense, not the student. If ESL finds that a large number of graduate students need to take the test, a small fee (perhaps five dollars) might be sufficient to cover the expense.
   • (Q): A problem may arise if an international student is accepted to a program where their line of research is working on a NSF funded project. The department would need to know if there was potential for that student to be pulled out of the program and put into ESL.
   • (A): Dean Huntoon suggests conducting an interview with the student via Skype or some other mechanism. This is a good suggestion for those students who will be offered funding. Maybe the department should even send a student an article to read and have a conversation with them to ensure they understand.
   • (Q): Would this be mandatory?
   • (A): No, but departments should fully understand that if faculty determines a student is not meeting expectations after the semester has begun there is nothing that ESL can do at that point.
   • (Q): What happens in the event a student is accepted without a TOEFL?
   • (A): They can be sent to ESL for evaluation before the semester begins.

• TO DO: Bring your program’s feedback to the next GFC meeting.

6) Motion to adjourn at 5:00 pm.