

Graduate Council Minutes

October 14, 2017

Attendance: Tiffany Baffour, Catherine Christie, Roger Eggen, Matthew Gilg, Elizabeth Gregg, David Jaeger, Chau Johnsen Kelly, David Hoppey, Megan Kuehner, Jody Nicholson, Betsy Nies, Richard Patterson, Sarah Provost, Dawn Russell, Sherry Shaw, Tulika Varma, Brenda Vose, Richmond Wynn, Chad Learch

Dr. Kantner called the meeting to order at 12:15 p.m. by welcoming the members of the Graduate Council. He began, by introducing Brian Armbruster, the current Graduate Student Organization President and asked him to provide a brief description of what the GSO is presently working on. Brian stated that his organization is currently attempting to identify the needs of graduate students. He went on to say that he would like to meet with Program Directors sometime in the future to collect data and create questions for a student survey. The expectation is that this would eventually lead toward providing better support for the graduate school population. Dr. Kantner commented that he met with Brian yesterday and they agreed that it might be a good idea to include the Program Directors in this process, because they are best equipped to provide a comprehensive understanding of student needs for their different programs and levels. Their inclusion could also assist in ensuring that more students will participate and that the GSO will receive better quality responses. Additionally, Dr. Kantner stated that over the past several years The Graduate School has made a number of changes in the kinds of resources made available to graduate students. Those were largely driven by anecdotes and faculty thoughts on what students could possibly need. The GSO effort could be an opportunity to rethink and reevaluate where those initiatives may or may not be working and how The Graduate School might be able to better deploy its otherwise limited resources. Before finishing this segment of the meeting, Dr. Nies, who is an advisor to the GSO, informed everyone that the organization is exploring the possibility of changing from a club to an executive agency status. This would provide access to funds that could potentially be used to help support graduate students. Dr. Kantner added that switching from a club to an executive agency is definitely a reasonable way to try and advance its status within the student government. He then closed this segment by thanking Brian again for spearheading the survey project.

As the next agenda item, Dr. Kantner asked the Council members to approve the minutes from September's Graduate Council Meeting. Dr. Jaeger mentioned that his name was mistakenly omitted from the attendance roster on the draft document and Dr. Kantner agreed to make that addition. The minutes were then approved by all attendees.

Moving to the "Discussion Items" on the agenda, Dr. Kantner mentioned that during September's meeting he provided a list of Graduate Council topics that he believed should be considered this year. In his opinion, the three subjects showing on today's agenda handout were perhaps the most pressing. The first topic concerns international applicants. Dr. Kantner commented that there are currently two policies in place. One is for international students and the other for graduate admissions. The international student policy is applicable to both international graduate and undergraduate students. The

graduate admission policy (handout) provides a list of options for an international student to be able to demonstrate proficiency in English. This was updated about a year ago. The TOEFL score is what everyone is likely most familiar with. The Graduate School added a couple of other options. The complete list is shown in Paragraph 6a-d. When students apply, The Graduate School ensures that international students have at least one of these requirements fulfilled before referring a file to the Program Directors for a decision. Dr. Kantner noted that The Graduate School does not actually check to see if students have achieved the level/grades/or minimum test scores. Program Directors are given the flexibility to make that decision. Dr. Kantner observed that there seems to be no issues with the current requirements, but there has been a suggestion that perhaps the addition of a GRE verbal score to the list, as another way to demonstrate English proficiency, should be considered. He pointed out that the GRE verbal, unlike the TOEFL score, does not actually test speaking or oral comprehension ability. He also noted that from student accounts that he has researched, the GRE verbal section appears to be more difficult than the TOEFL exam. For additional background, Megan Kuehner added that there is also a minimum SAT verbal score that UNF uses to fulfill language requirements for international undergraduate applicants. After opening the floor for comments, there appeared to be no opposition to a possible addition of a GRE verbal score to the list. Dr. Kantner confirmed that he would move forward to implement a policy change and that since this would take some time, he could still consider any objections before it is finalized.

During the discussion, several related issues were discussed. At Dr. Jaeger's request, Megan Kuehner agreed to look into the possibility of providing Program Directors with a referral checklist that includes a one-line entry displaying which language proficiency credential is satisfied. It was also pointed out by Dr. Patterson that Paragraph 6b of the Graduate Admissions Policy states that a Bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited U.S. institution would satisfy the English language proficiency requirement and that there is no mention if this could also be applied those who have earned a Master's Degree. Dr. Kantner agreed that this might need to be added. He also mentioned that there may be other changes necessary and described briefly the complications of calculating the last 60 hours and the 3.0 GPA requirement. Dr. Kantner wrapped up this topic by committing to send the members a copy of this Policy to see if there are other tweaks that might need to be made.

Before moving on to the next topic, a question was raised about the admission criteria stated in the Policy (Paragraph II (1) (a)). Specifically, how would the minimum requirement "equivalent (bachelor's degree) from a non-U.S. institution" be applied for Canadian students. Dr. Kantner relayed that UNF, as well as other institutions, have struggled with the term "degree equivalency". He went on to say that the "degree equivalency" piece is a SACS accreditation issue and the SACS uses the language: "bachelor" or "equivalent" degree. UNF has been in discussions with the International Center to come up with a standardized list that it can be comfortable with and meets the SACS criteria. He also added that there are some models from other institutions to rely upon. Because of how complicated this can be, Dr. Kantner stated that he would probably not want to weigh down this policy with too much detail. "Bachelor" and "equivalency" are actual SACS terminology and that is what is replicated in the UNF policy. How "equivalency" is actually

determined can be defined outside of the policy and The Graduate School is working on that.

Next, Dr. Kantner touched on the subject of application deadlines. A handout was provided to the Council members that depicts the different deadline dates for each Graduate Program. He stated that his intent is to place a couple of issues on the table concerning deadlines.

First, he mentioned that some programs are giving so many exceptions to the original deadlines that it might be worthwhile for them to consider actually moving it. He stressed that there is really no university-wide requirement on this and it is up to the individual program's discretion when they want to establish their deadlines. However, he recommended that if programs find themselves making many exceptions for applicants, it might be a good idea to revisit whether their deadline(s) should actually be changed.

Secondly, Dr. Kantner touched on deadlines and the automated on-line application. Currently, the way the system works, when a deadline is reached, the application is closed. When a Program Director approves an exception, students must complete a manual paper application. This results in a great deal of work for everyone involved. Megan Kuehner pointed out that the on-line application is more helpful, because students receive automatic reminders that are not prompted by a paper application. To avoid paper applications, one option that Dr. Kantner proposed is to never close down the on-line application. Program Directors can still enforce their deadlines, but they would also be able to more easily make exceptions to those deadlines. Students can still be referred past the deadline and Program Directors could simply reject the applicant if he/she wants to hold fast to the deadline. This would always provide the latitude to complete late admits or even for Program Directors to contact promising applicants and ask that they defer their applications to another term. A lively discussion ensued with Council members sharing various experiences about students and deadlines. One Council member raised a concern that under this change, students may not know that they are actually applying after the deadline and they may assume that their application will still be considered, when in fact, it may not. Dr. Kantner mentioned that The Graduate School does have some limited ability to customize how deadlines are handled for individual programs and proposed drafting a short form that lays out different checklist options. This would allow Program Directors to choose from various possibilities such as if they would like to close or keep the deadline, accept applications after the deadline or defer to another term etc. He also committed to explore the systems in place to see how they can be modified to accommodate what works best for all.

The last item on the agenda that was discussed concerned whether UNF should have a continuous enrollment policy. This is a topic that was first introduced to the Council in the Spring. At that time, Dr. Kantner shared several concerns. The first is that there are a number of students that always manage to remain active by enrolling once every three terms, but never really seem to complete their degree requirements. He added that there are students, who actually do this for many years. The second issue is that some programs do not require students to be actively enrolled, either while they are working on a thesis

dissertation/final project or during the semester that they are graduating. Dr. Kantner commented that this may be a friendly policy for students, because they are not required to pay anything, however the concern is that they are still in fact utilizing university resources in many cases. In other instances, when not continuously enrolled, it can also have a negative effect, because students may not have access to certain assets on campus. The third issue, which is perhaps the least important, but still worth mentioning, is that UNF may be one of the few universities that does not have a continuous enrollment policy in place.

Resulting from the discussions last spring and using information from other universities, Dr. Kantner provided Council members with a handout providing a draft policy for continuous enrollment. Basically, it requires students to be enrolled for at least one credit hour every semester (Fall and Spring) until they actually graduate (Students are not required to enroll in any Summer terms unless they are using University resources or they are completing degree requirements in that term.). If they fail to register for one-credit hour, the following semester after their active enrollment ends they will become inactive. As a result of the Spring Council discussion, a leave of absence option for students that have personal reasons for not being continually enrolled was also added to the draft policy (handout).

Rather than just leaving the status quo in place, whereby the Program Directors enforce their own individual policies, there appeared to be overwhelming support to create a University policy among the Council members. Some concerns were raised that the one-credit requirement each term may cause difficulty for students enrolled in non-thesis/project or directed studies programs. Dr. Kantner agreed to draft a more complete policy in advance of next month's Graduate Council meeting that would direct the policy toward thesis and dissertation programs only. He also added that, if a new policy is adopted, The Graduate School would likely be responsible for keeping track of the continuous enrollment list.

Dr. Kantner ended the meeting at 1:15 p.m.