

Graduate Council Minutes

March 14, 2018

Attendance: Amy Bishop, Gaylord Candler, Thomas Caswell, Matthew Gilg, David Jaeger, John Kantner, Chau Johnson Kelly, Chris Leone, Holly Miller, Betsy Nies, Sarah Provost, Mohammad Rahman, Zhiping Yu, David Hoppey

Dr. Kantner called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

Announcements

- Research Week, April 1-8, 2019 (SOARS on 4/3)

Dr. Kantner provided a quick update on Research Week by saying that that the applications for presentations were due on March 8 and that the Graduate School is currently preparing for the event. He passed on that he hopes that everyone will have the opportunity to come out and see the great work that their students have done.

Agenda Items

- Approve February minutes

Dr. Kantner called for a motion to ratify the February 2019 minutes and they were unanimously approved by the Graduate Council members.

Discussion Items

- Graduate Council "By-Laws" changes

Dr. Kantner provided members with a copy of the Graduate Council "By-Laws". He pointed out that that previous changes were marked in red and newer modifications generated from the last meeting were in yellow.

Dr. Kantner stated that because the attendance at this meeting would not be enough to attain a 2/3 majority, this document could not be approved today. However, he went on to say that if there are any comments/recommendations on the changes showing, he would be happy to make future adjustments.

Dr. Kantner highlighted a couple of the yellow marked passages:

Referring to Section 2. (a), he explained that no matter how many departments were involved in a particular program, there is only one department that is assigned the responsibility for that program. He added that, as opposed to previous verbiage which stated that any department involved in a graduate program can appoint a member to the

Graduate Council, it now reads that the “department or school that is responsible for the management of one or more graduate programs” can appoint a member.

Referring to Section 1. (a), Dr. Kantner cited the addition of the statement: “voting members may select designees to attend and vote in their absence”. As an example, Amy Bishop, who attends the Graduate Council in place of Dr. Dawn Russell, is also authorized to vote on behalf of their program. He added that this would also cover certain situations in which council members are absent and they send a replacement to the meeting.

➤ Proposed graduate tuition changes

Dr. Kantner referred members to the yellow and green colored handout (“UNF+ Pathway Pledge for Exceptional Students”). He informed everyone that following this meeting, he is scheduled to go downtown to brief the Board of Trustees on this proposal. This document lays out a vision of how “Pathways” will function. Everything marked in green were items that have been implemented thus far and those in yellow were things that are still being worked on.

As was mentioned at the last meeting, there is an interest by the President to use this proposal as a way of locking in high school students that are entering UNF with many earned accelerated mechanism credits already. These would be exceptional students that UNF will entice to consider staying and becoming graduate students.

Dr. Kantner explained that working from right to left on the handout, the document includes mechanisms in place for UNF’s undergraduates to more easily become graduate students. It also contains possible tools for high school students to begin to track toward certain programs.

Dr. Kantner pointed out that many institutions already do this and that the University of Pittsburgh, for example, has about a dozen graduate programs which recruit high school students. Referring to such soft commitments as a “Pledge”, he explained that if a high school student comes to UNF and does well, the university will pledge to admit that person to the graduate school, but not necessarily a specific program. The idea is to ensure that students keep this option in the forefront.

Dr. Kantner mentioned that the critical element to make this successful is the tuition piece. As was discussed at the last meeting, the conventional wisdom is that if the base tuition is lowered, it could never be raised again, even as costs may increase.

Dr. Kantner stated that the most successful angle he has been able to take thus far is to look at lowering graduate tuition for UNF’s own recent undergraduates. He plans to propose that the cost be lowered to \$275.00 per credit hour, which would be a 1/3 discount over the current graduate tuition rates. Because this is a differential tuition approach, it does not touch the core tuition and this would likely not have the same political ramifications of lowering and then gradually raising the core amount later to keep up with the pace of expenses.

Dr. Kantner commented that there has been enthusiasm for this plan because it is seen as a way to make things easier for undergraduates to continue on as graduate students. They would not have the same disruptions to their finances with an almost tripling of their tuition as they move from undergraduate to graduate students. This would also help undergraduates who take graduate courses early, because it would be less expensive. Additionally, for those with “Bright Futures”, that scholarship money would go farther, because they would be able to carry it into their graduate studies. He added that this would likely provide a good marketing angle, as well, since UNF can offer a tuition rate that none of the other SUS schools are proposing.

Dr. Kantner addressed the uneasiness among some that the current process has made it too easy for undergraduates to apply and be pre-admitted to graduate programs. There may be some question as to whether those students will be committed enough to actually matriculate as graduate students. He went on to say that the hope is that by reducing the tuition and offering admission within three semesters after earning their undergraduate degree, it will incentivize students to stay at UNF to finish a master’s program.

Dr. Kantner touched on another concern that the Graduate School may be routing young students into graduate programs relatively early. To address this, the Graduate School is looking for resources to develop some professional workshops for “Pathway” students. The idea would be to collaborate with the Writing Center or other units on campus to try to make sure that potential graduate students are getting themselves properly prepped to be able to complete graduate course work.

Dr. Kantner then provided answers to a series of questions/comments raised by various council members:

When asked about the reduced tuition eligibility, Dr. Kantner relayed that this new tuition initiative would **not** only be for “Pathway” students. All UNF student would be eligible for the reduced tuition as long as they finish their bachelor’s degree and begin graduate school within three semesters of graduation.

An issue was raised about undergraduate scholarships and that the requirement to take a full-load of five courses is very stressful when one or two of those classes are graduate classes. Dr. Kantner stated that Foundation tends to establish gift agreements in which credit hours are specified, as opposed to focusing on “full-time” vs. “part-time” status. This has tied the Graduate School’s hands, as well. The Graduate School has been in conversation with Foundation about having those agreements state (if it is the preference of the donor) that a student has to be in a full-time status according to the Program’s own handbook or guidelines. This provides more flexibility. Dr. Kantner added that there are currently graduate programs which are below nine credit hours that are considered to be full-time, particularly when students are completing their thesis or dissertation work. He commented that he knew this initiative could likely cause some issues, because everything is being implemented so quickly and a lot of unintended consequences are difficult to predict. Dr. Kantner acknowledged that problems like this still need to be worked and

asked that everyone continue to make him aware of any concerns, so the Graduate School can keep pace or stay ahead of these problems as they arise.

A question was asked about where the funding for the reduced tuition would be made up from and if it would affect graduate programs in other ways. Dr. Kantner responded that the Graduate School worked with administration and finance on modeling everything. It was concluded that the Graduate School only needs 50-60 net new graduate students across the entire university to make this work. Just in the last few months alone since the "Pathways" program was instituted, there have been over 60 students that have signed up to participate. Dr. Kantner stressed that is not known if all of those students will actually matriculate. Nevertheless, the university feels comfortable that this plan will not create a financial burden. As a result, there have been no commitments made by the Graduate School that it will, for example, relinquish X amount of waiver to support this. Dr. Kantner commented that this initiative may actually have the opposite effect. For example, if in-state tuition waivers are used for students on a graduate assistantship and they are reduced tuition students, that would be less waiver being used and the excess could be disbursed elsewhere.

Addressing a comment on the performance metrics, Dr. Kantner stated that a couple of metrics could be impacted. Metric One (What are students doing after they finish their undergraduate degree?) would count positively if students are attending a graduate program after graduation. It also impacts Metric Eight. Thus far, although only a small sample, about 75% that are using "Pathways" are entering programs of strategic emphasis. This is higher than UNF's normal graduate student body, which is about 52-54 % for that area of study. Like most graduate student metrics, only about ten students need to be "moved" to have a fairly substantial impact on the numbers.

A question was asked about the statement on the "UNF+ Pathway Pledge for Exceptional Students" handout: "juniors in good standing with a 3.25+ GPA are invited to a Pathway". Specifically, Dr. Kantner was queried on who will do the actual inviting. Dr. Kantner responded that the whole pathway initiative is voluntary. It is really up to the discretion of the programs if they would like to participate. Students are only promised that they can apply and they are not being told that they will automatically be admitted to any program. It is possible that participating programs may see more applications and this may be a good thing, because a larger pool of candidates would be considered. In the end though, it is really up to the programs to decide if they want to participate. As was stated before, even if programs do not participate in "Pathways", students applying using the regular admission process will still be eligible for the reduced tuition.

When asked, Dr. Kantner clarified that the UNF+ Pathways Scholarship is to cover the difference in cost for undergraduates that are starting to take graduate coursework. He clarified that it is important that this be put into place, because undergraduates that are allowed to take graduate courses had to pay double or triple for that course. The Graduate School is looking to "scholarship" the difference to make sure that these students are "held harmless" in case they decide or the program chooses not to admit them into the program.

He added that this is not a huge amount of money (budgeted for about \$750 currently for the senior year), but it does help the student.

Dr. Kantner addressed a comment about some possible discontent among students who must continue to pay the full traditional rate, while others are only charged the reduced rate. He admitted that there may be some risk with this, however, he also believes it is still worth implementing and commented that it may compel the university to reconsider the overall tuition rate, if this is seen as successful. He went on to say that the Graduate School must be careful on how this is marketed. This initiative is about providing UNF undergraduate students the opportunity to attain a master's degree. If they depart, they would be less likely for them to ever come back to UNF or anywhere else to achieve this.

Dr. Kantner also stressed that very few programs can take advantage of the "Accelerated Pathway", because the majority of the graduate programs are 30 hours in length. So, there is no financial incentive for most students entering most programs, because they are not starting graduate coursework as undergraduates and are not receiving this UNF+ scholarship. All the "Express Pathway" does is to allow the Graduate School to "snag" students early, but everything else remains the same.

With the assumption that it will be approved, Dr. Kantner responded to a query of when to anticipate the first semester for the reduced tuition rate. He stated that in June the Board of Trustees always approves the tuition and fee regulation that will apply to the next academic year. As a result, it would likely be the upcoming Fall (2019) term if everything falls in place. When asked, Dr. Kantner added that the reduced graduate tuition rate would be the most inexpensive in the SUS (by \$5.00).

➤ Exit Survey for graduate students

Before Dr. Kantner departed to present at the Board of Trustees meeting, he introduced Amanda Kulp, the Director of Assessment at UNF, who would be briefing the Council members on the implementation of exit interviews for graduate students. A handout with various past survey statistics was provided to everyone.

Amanda began by describing the Graduate Senior Survey (GSS) for undergraduates. Over the years, students were notified by email to complete the survey and response rates were consistently flat (at about 30%). Last Spring, changes were made to the survey itself and how it was administered. The survey link was incorporated into the graduation application itself. Although it is not really required to complete, the survey now appears as though it is part of the graduation application. Additionally, students are provided an incentive to submit the survey. After submission, they become eligible to enter a lottery to receive additional commencement tickets. As a result of this change, the survey response rate has increased from 30% to 66% in the past year.

Amanda went on to say that a similar survey is now planned for graduate students. Last year, a set of questions that the Graduate School created were piloted and distributed with a campus life survey. This provided some good data. Dr. Kantner and Megan Kuehner have been working with the piloted questions from last year, as well as gathering questions from other resources, to develop a Graduate Student Survey. The hope is that the survey could be implemented for the upcoming summer graduation. The same mechanism would be used for delivery, which was previously described for the undergraduate survey.

Dr. Kantner has a copy of the Graduate School questions and Amanda believes that he would be happy to share those with anyone interested in seeing them. Some example questions/topics include:

- Are you satisfied with your experience at UNF?
- If you had challenges during your time to degree at UNF, what were they?
- Were you working? Are you getting a promotion? How much do you plan on earning?
- Questions regarding the student's perceptions of the advisor and advisee relationship.
- Questions regarding students' perceptions of program requirements and curricula.

Amanda passed on that there is also an opportunity for program specific questions to be inserted into the survey. Currently, the survey takes about 5-7 minutes to complete. Programs are encouraged to create their own 4-6 questions, if they like. Those would be added on to the end of the standard survey and will only be seen by the students from that program. They can be write-in or drop down questions. Almost any type of format is possible.

When asked, Amanda believes that the survey results will be treated the same way as the current GSS. They will be able to be aggregated at the program, department, college levels and at the university aggregate level. Unless someone has a better method, her thoughts would be to share the survey results at the end of the academic year with every department chair, program directors and the deans at the college level and then produce a university-wide report.

Amanda clarified that she does not have the capability to distribute survey questions to students at the beginning of their program studies. She can only do this at the end. However, she offered to assist folks with developing questions for the start, if requested.

Amanda verified that employment questions are also asked, however, they are all self-reported answers. Also, she cautioned that the survey is actually completed at the beginning of the graduating semester, so employment information can often change as things are firmed up later in the term.

Adjournment

With the completion of Amanda's presentation, the meeting ended at 12:50 PM.