

## **Minutes of the Graduate Council Meeting held on September 28, 2011**

**Present:** *Chair:* Caramello; *Members:* Laskowski, Kyle, Sprinkle, Newman, Smela, Greene, Raupp, Howland, Leslie, Leone, Shea, Wolniak, Chadha, Sham, Sullivan, Anderson, Cronrath, Mather, Kraus; *Student Councilors:* Bedford, Wiederoder, Watermeier, Williams; *Ex Officio Councilors:* Popper; *Graduate School Staff:* Hale, Maher, Meyer, Williams, Worthington; *Affiliated:* Beise, Finkelstein, Kim.

### ***I. Introductions***

Dean Caramello welcomed the Graduate Council, introduced new Graduate School staff, and reviewed committee chairs for the AY 2011-12:

Academic Standards: Ian Mather

Faculty Affairs: Bill McDonough

PCC: Rochelle Newman

Student Affairs: John Shea

Fellowships: Mark Leone

### ***II. Approval of the Minutes***

A written summary of the meeting of May 11, 2011, rather than minutes, had been distributed to the Council. In transitions of GS staff over the summer, the minutes appear to have been misplaced. Dean Caramello assured the Council that minutes will be kept for all future meetings and that this was a one-time occurrence.

### ***III. Reports on Pending Initiatives***

#### **1) Update on Graduate School initiatives—Dean Caramello**

- a) Thirteen Flagship Fellows appointed for AY 2011-12, representing five colleges and 12 programs.
- b) Seven inaugural McNair Fellows appointed for AY 2011-12, representing four colleges and seven programs.
- c) Joint activities of GS and AAP, enabling McNair Fellows to mentor McNair undergrads, are being planned.
- d) Forty-six Wylie Dissertation Fellows named for AY 2011-12, representing eight colleges and 33 programs.
- e) Forty-seven Summer Research Fellowships named for AY 2011-12, representing eight colleges and 31 programs.
- f) Both of last year's Postdoctoral Associates from the Graduate School have secured full-time employment with prestigious educational policy-making organizations in Washington, DC. Two new Post Doctoral associates appointed for this year, Justin Maher and Shaundra Myers.

- g) The Graduate School hosted a dinner on campus for approximately 55 attendees of the annual AGS Annual Meeting, held this year in Washington, DC. The attendees are the Deans of Graduate Schools at AAU institutions. President Loh addressed the dinner company, and doctoral students from the Department of Music provided entertainment. Dean Caramello also reported making a presentation regarding postdoctoral positions for humanists at the AGS Meeting, using GS Postdoctoral Associates as an example, that was well-received by colleagues across the country.
- h) The GS has representation on three University task forces whose reports will have impact on graduate education: UM China Task Force, UM/UMB Merger Task Force, and Universities at Shady Grove Task Force.
- i) This past June, the Graduate School invited a large group of faculty and students with commitments to diversity in graduate education to come together for an afternoon of focused discussion on the issues and on ways that the GS might take its leadership role in diversity to the next level. As one outcome, the GS is forming a Graduate School Diversity Advisory Committee, comprising senior faculty members and doctoral students and staffed by one of the Graduate School's Postdoctoral Research Associates. The Committee will help the Graduate School in developing a diversity strategy for the future, a strategy that will provide direction for a Graduate School Diversity Program and for the appointment of an Associate Dean to lead it.

## **2) Update on Admissions—Assistant Dean Hale**

- a) Asst. Dean Cindi Hale updated the Council on admissions data for Fall 2011. 23,477 total applications were received representing a 12% decline in domestic applications 6.5% increase in international applications. Overall, the admission rate increased 1.23%.
- b) Councilors expressed concern regarding the quality of domestic applicants for Masters Programs and the decline in applicants for Ph.D. programs during an economic recession. AD Hale indicated that programs across the country are seeing similar declines.
- c) The GS will do a careful analysis of enrollment demographics, looking at qualifications in particular.
- d) GS focus groups will meet with international students to review the international application process with the goal of making it more user-friendly and to get feedback on the effectiveness of the MEI program.
- e) AD Hale indicated that the pay-at-point-of application process is in place. She also discussed new admission software that is being studied as a replacement for MEGS.
- f) An interactive on-line training manual for DGS/coordinators has been completed, and training for DGSs will commence in Spring 2012.

## **3) Update on GOA—Associate Dean Popper**

- a) AD Popper has met with the DGSs of each college this Fall to discuss plans for Graduate Outcomes Assessment (GOA) and to gather feedback. Assessment policies and procedures will be very flexible to accommodate disciplinary and departmental differences.
- b) The GS is reviewing software systems to aid in the assessment process, with the goal of making the GOA process as simple and streamlined as possible.
- c) Several councilors expressed concern regarding the perceived difficulty of such systems.

AD Popper indicated that software systems will be piloted with a small number of programs on campus prior to any broad implementation in order to address these concerns.

- d) AD Popper reported the Graduate Writing and RCR Task Forces have submitted reports and that their recommendations are being reviewed.

#### ***IV. Implementation of Plus/Minus Grading***

Dean Caramello reviewed a memorandum dated September 26, 2011, regarding GS recommendations for the implementation of graduate plus/minus grading (attachment #1). The primary issues discussed were the minimum grade to be accepted for graduate course work and the minimum CUM GPA required to maintain good academic standing as a graduate student. Data summarizing the impact of plus/minus grading on the graduate population, which had been distributed prior to the meeting, was discussed.

Councilors Sprinkle and Shea expressed concern about an impact that plus/minus grading might have on grade inflation, with B- becoming the “new C.” Associate Provost Beise clarified questions regarding the implementation schedule for the plus/minus grading policy for undergraduates. Dean Caramello pointed to the data suggesting that the GS recommendations were in line with grading policies at peer institutions.

The recommendations proposed in the September 26, 2011, memo were approved by a vote of 13 yes, 3 no, 0 abstentions.

#### ***V. Parental Accommodation for Graduate Assistants***

Dean Caramello reviewed a September 26, 2011, memo summarizing current policies for parental accommodation for graduate students and proposing recommendations for Graduate Assistant Parental Accommodation Guidelines (see attachment #2).

Data presented in the memo suggests that the current practice, in which accommodations are made locally at the departmental level, on an individual basis, is working. Dean Caramello noted that only one unconfirmed charge of a department failing to accommodate a student has been brought to the attention of the GS in the past five years.

Councilor Smela expressed concern regarding funding agency regulations that often do not allow a Graduate Assistant to be paid while on leave. Some faculty members have experienced delays in research activity when Graduate Assistants are provided leave, but funding is not available to hire a replacement. A possible central funding source was discussed, but a source for such a fund was not identified.

Dean Caramello explained that there are good arguments for retaining a flexible and local process rather than instituting a central policy and that he had worked with the campus Legal Office to draft the guidelines being proposed. Councilor Smela stated that she also believed that parental accommodation should not be legislated. The recommended guidelines stress the importance of providing parental accommodation as a “best practice”; urge departments and Graduate Assistants to work collegially in determining the particulars of an

accommodation; and specify steps that Graduate Assistants may take if they feel that reasonable accommodations have not been provided. In addition, the Graduate School Ombuds Officer is available to all Graduate Students to assist with mediation of issues.

Councilor Bedford noted that Graduate Assistants would appreciate a policy that protects any students who may feel that they are not being accommodated. Councilors Leslie and Finkelstein recommended consultation with Graduate Assistants to help ascertain if Graduate Assistants felt they were not being provided appropriate accommodation.

The issue was tabled for further consideration at the October 26, 2011, Graduate Council meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.