



Graduate Council Meeting Notes

Wednesday, October 18, 2023

10:00-11:30 am

[Zoom](#)

Attendees: Alexis Lothian, Autumn Dawn Perkey, Chris Ellis, Christina Getrich, Edmond Shenassa, Ernest Calvo, Evelyn King-Marshall, Hiro Iseki, Jose Arand-Espinoza, Janet Walkoe, Jason Rudy, Jeffery B. Klauda, Jessica Gatlin, Jillian Rothschild, Lauren Cain, Leila De Floriani, Leonid Koralov, Souradip Chakraborty, Stephen Mount, Thomas Cohen
(20 of 32 voting members)

GS Staff: Steve Roth, Jason Farman, Will Reed, Brent Hernandez, Fan Tsao, Heather Kissinger, Kate Oravec, Leena Moses, Matthew Nessian, Robyn Kotzker, Henry Gittens, Yi Hao
(12)

AGENDA NOTES

1. Welcome
2. Approve [September 11, 2023 Graduate Council Meeting minutes](#)
 - a. Approved with no recommended changes.
3. Updates and announcements
 - a. Subcommittee review of collective bargaining requested (GSG)
 - Collective bargaining has become an issue brought up by both students and faculty.
 - It is unclear what will happen for the university and for students if the university would unionize.
 - We need to make sure students understand the consequences of this, as it seems that many do not.
 - Striking is not an option in Maryland, because it's a state law.
 - We want to have a neutral party that is not involved in this.
 1. Comment from Dean Roth: I think this will help to have a better lens on the situation.
 - Comment from Thomas Cohen: What is the difference between teaching assistants and research assistants?
 1. Teaching assistants are paid from the state funds.
 2. Research assistants have their job supervisor as also their academic mentor.
 - Comment from Autumn Perkey: At Big Ten peers, RAs have the potential to get paid more than TAs.
 - Comment from Hiro Iseki: I experienced a strike when I worked at UCLA. I supported the benefits of collective bargaining for students and employees. I



was paying out-of-state tuition, so the strike required me to skip classes to support the TA strike. I was paying from my pocket.

- Comment from Jillian Rothschild: Sorry that happened to you, Dr. Iseki. One of the reasons it's so important to look into this is because striking is a fundamental tool that wouldn't be open to students in Maryland. It would be good to have an analysis that takes into consideration peer institutions but also specific local state laws.
- Comment from Jason Farman: I remember feeling a lot of the same issues Hiro described. I didn't have a lot of education about unionization, or context, just this feeling of "I'm losing money." We need clear communication of benefits to students, and cost to students, so they can make informed decisions and advocate for themselves based on those facts.
- Asked for reactions to get a sense of support for Grad Council taking this on in some way, this neutral analysis of collective bargaining:
 1. Lots of green check marks and thumbs up, no "No's".
 2. Dean Roth asked for volunteers for the subcommittee, and will send out a message to all Grad Council members. Aiming for a team of 5-8 people, and a mix of faculty and students.
 - a. Goal is to be as neutral as possible
 - b. Comment from Dean Roth: These are difficult waters. There is a cohort of students on campus who are angry and frustrated, and feel that collective bargaining is their only way to be heard.
 3. If someone has strong opinions or is biased one way or the other, please stand down from volunteering in favor of developing an objective review. Autumn Dawn Perkey also emphasized this request to stand down if biased, in a closing comment to the discussion.
- b. Seeking faculty to serve on awards review committees (Robyn)
 - Competitive awards - There is a full list on our website ([link](#))
 - Many of you have made nominations or had a student who received an award, or sat on a committee - thank you for that.
 - Robyn is assembling committees for the upcoming cycle, and wishes to involve more Graduate Council members.
 - Benefits: Allows you to read outside your discipline, engage with and work with faculty across campus, and have a say in where Graduate School money goes.
 - We hope you will consider joining a committee.
 - Robyn will send out invitations/communications to faculty in the next few days.
 1. We generally don't send invitations to faculty in the DGS role. If you are a DGS, you may not get an invitation to serve on a committee.



- c. Future Graduate Council meetings will be in-person (hybrid)
 - Dean Roth wants to move these meetings in-person, or at least a hybrid approach in order to make the discussions more robust. He will find a larger space on campus to be able to do so.
 - Comment from Hiro Iseki: I would appreciate the hybrid format to give the option to join by Zoom. Meeting in-person requires travel time, which could be a barrier to some people.
 1. Comment from Dean Roth: We will continue to make these meetings accessible to everyone.
 - Comment from Jillian Rothschild: It is hard to hear the meetings in the hybrid format sometimes when on Zoom. The Zoom meeting sometimes has the volume down and is hard to hear.
- d. [International PhD Career Readiness Series](#) for UMD doctoral candidates and Postdocs (Yi Hao)
 - Half of the Ph.D. students and postdocs on campus are International.
 - 3-part series:
 1. Navigating the Career Landscape and Workplace Culture in the U.S.: November 2
 2. Job Search Strategies for International PhD Candidates: November 9
 3. Using Professional Development to Strengthen Immigration Portfolios: November 16
 - Goal is to provide better support across a diversity of career paths.
 - Comment from Autumn Dawn Perkey:
 1. GSG is happy to support this; I suggest posting flyers to social media.
- 4. Proposed policy discussion
 - a. [Time Conflict between courses](#)
 - This is the current practice when a student desires to enroll in two classes that overlap or conflict in time.
 - If the overlap is more than 10 minutes, they need to get approval from the Graduate School. If it is less than 10 minutes, then the department can just approve this.
 1. Often, students will submit a request without getting formal approval by faculty first.
 - Students should submit a written request with approval from both professors of the class, and have evidence that this is the ideal time for the student to take both courses.
 1. Students can do this until the last day of the schedule adjustment period.
 - This isn't new, just fixing the language around this.
 - Comment from Jillian Rothschild: It could be helpful to have a link to this form that students submit.



- Comment from Hiro Iseki: Clarifying that this occurs during the schedule adjustment period?
- Comment from Thomas Cohen: Redact “~~The Graduate School is reluctant to approve more than this time window because there is concern that the integrity of the course will be compromised.~~” since the Graduate School will generally approve if both faculty members support it.
- Comment from Steve Mount: The wording seems ambiguous. It is unclear if wording is for overlap of courses of more than 10 minutes, or not.
 1. Jason answered and edited text: “A time conflict greater than 10 minutes” to indicate that the exception is specifically for time conflicts of 10 or more minutes.
- Question from Evelyn King: Does the justification for taking the courses now have to be signed off on by the department?
 1. Jason answered: No, the justification can be from the student, from the advisor, etc.
- Vote Outcome: Passed
 1. Yes: 94%
 2. No: 0%
 3. Abstain: 6%

b. [Statement of Mutual Expectations](#)

- It’s been a few years since the Graduate School developed this as a way to improve communication between GAs and their supervisors.
- Goal is that in the beginning or in advance of each semester, the GA and supervisor would sit down and establish expectations for performance.
 1. Overall, this initiative has been positive and initiates these conversations.
- However, we are hearing from some students that faculty aren’t taking this seriously. What kind of enforcement is behind this? How can we make this more consistent and ensure faculty are taking it seriously?
- We’ve considered the idea of using a Google Form or Qualtrics so the Dean’s Office and the Graduate School gets a copy. There is not sufficient staffing to review all of these, but in case of conflict, it’s helpful to have a record that these conversations are happening.
- Ideas: Is this working in your program/college? Not working? Why? How could it be better to support GA and supervisor?
 1. If either side is not living up to expectations, this provides an avenue for mediation.
 2. Comment from Thomas Cohen: In the case where you have an RA, you have two separate roles: you are their academic advisor and their employer. This can become awkward, as we expect much more from our students working as RAs than when the student is working on



- their own research. The form refers to the student as an employee but not as a student. This gets muddy.
- a. How do we work to help students understand what role they are playing?
3. Comment from Jason Rudy: Having different forms is a good idea. In the English department, we have a system for having faculty/students meet and report back about their meeting. We have a separate form just for grad students to share anything they are uncomfortable sharing with their advisor.
- a. There would be resistance to a formalized oversight process. The word “surveillance” has been used regarding the forms Jason already used. He argues that it’s about equitable treatment for students, knowing when someone is struggling, and providing assistance.
 - b. It is not advisable to have this more centralized. The Graduate School could provide models and advice for DGS, so they know they are doing assessment as well as they can, but it might not be effective across campus.
 - c. Dean Roth’s response: Oversight is a strong word. Accountability is the goal; if these conversations aren’t happening, then we are doing students a disservice.
4. Comment from Alexis Lothian: I’m honestly not sure if my department will fill out this form. We have processes, sometimes it’s written down. I like the idea of tracking things, but due to concerns with surveillance, I am hesitant to use a form. It may be good for some faculty in some departments. A Statement of Mentorship could be more helpful just to help the advisors understand their role more clearly.
- a. Dean Roth’s response: When a student comes to us and says ‘this isn’t working’, we are very limited in verifying that these conversations are happening.
5. Comment from Lauren Cain: Could we keep using the form, but having someone else verify it? As a TA, I assume the program manager collects them all. I am fortunate to have had wonderful mentors, but I found the form really helpful. I didn’t have to initiate this conversation, it was spelled out for me. I assumed CGS was collecting and reading them.
- a. Dean Roth’s response: We are definitely looking to add a more nuanced set of forms for GAs in different settings. We are trying to ensure that this process is happening, less focused



- about the form. It is inequitable for GAs to not have clear expectations.
6. Comment from Jillian Rothschild: The hesitation to fill out the form is why it needs to be centralized. There's a power imbalance; it's difficult to go to a supervisor and say "you have to fill out this form." It is not fair as the student with less power than the professor. Even if everyone thinks everything is going well, the person with less power in the situation may not be comfortable saying, "No it's not." There should be a basic expectation that this information will be stored; we shouldn't have to hope that you're in a good program that is sensitive to this. One faculty was upset that their student wasn't addressing them properly in email, but the student might not know that. These conversations don't have to be bad or scary, but rather just a time for students to talk about expectations.
 - a. This is also good for faculty with RAs. We all struggle with work/life balance. It's good for faculty to understand "Okay, what are we doing for 20 hours, what parts are for your dissertation, what parts are for co-authorship" etc.
 - b. It could be good to have different forms in different contexts.
 7. Comment from Autumn Dawn Perkey: The purpose of the form is to have a conversation. We know that the closer you are to the person you work with, the more willing you are to have these conversations. Potential grievances can result from not having these conversations at all, and rather just filling out the form. For administrative positions, maybe listing out what the student will learn could be helpful.
 - a. Half of the issues students have are driven by a lack of clear communication between two parties. We have a responsibility to students in the developmental department. Each position should contribute to their career trajectory.
 8. Comment from Evelyn King: From the faculty side in SPH, it's helpful in using it for conversation and communication. Faculty might assume everyone is on the same page, but a form helps to confirm we are on the same page. "X person isn't doing this", but have you explained what your expectations are? Any new job would have orientation, but we assume it's innate. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds, and this helps to level the playing field.
 - a. Forms are difficult to remember sometimes. We'll forget, so it could be good to put a calendar reminder "this form is due next week", "let's talk about it today", etc.
 - b. What are our expectations from the ground?



9. Comment from Tom Cohen: My colleague down the hall was listening in, and said “Don’t make us fill out this form!”. Forms make things formal. You want to have the conversation, but this might not be what the form is saying. We might not anticipate the issues that come up during the semester. Sometimes things that seem obvious may not be for the student. What we really want is ongoing, organic communication between faculty and students.
10. Comment from Jason Rudy: I am 100% in agreement in the importance of having these conversations. I think resistance is to a centralized process. A solution might be for the Graduate School to know that each department has their own process in place. If you want to hear from English what we are doing for this process, I am happy to share and am proud of it; I think it’s working. I don’t think it will work if our student is standardized to a centralized method. I don’t see a need for oversight from student to student because I am confident in the system we have in place here. I am not resisting in giving mentorship; it is foundational for what we do in this department.
 - a. Dean Roth’s response: The idea of a form ensuring that this process is happening might not be the best way to go.
11. Comment from Stephen Mount: It seems like a possibility; rather than tailoring forms, perhaps create a certification process. People can say, “Yes, we talked about the relevant things for this position.” This could be easier to enforce, just checking a box.
12. Comment from Autumn Dawn Perkey: I’m hearing a lot of constraints. These are the exact problems we’re trying to resolve. What do we need to do to change the culture to make this work better, if forms won’t work?
 - a. I’d like to not have grievances around communication.
 - b. Leaving it to grad students to confirm, “Yes this conversation happened,” or “No it didn’t” could help.
13. Comment from Jeffrey Klaude: This is not a Graduate School issue, but rather a department-level issue. Students should work through the chain of command to resolve issues.
 - a. The consensus is that it seems that everyone wants this at the department level.
 - b. Dean Roth’s response: We do want this to be resolved at the department-level first. When grievances come up, we facilitate the conversation.
14. Comment from Jillian Rothschild: I do think this is a Graduate School-level issue. It’s hard for a student to go up the chain of command if something is not working. We need some oversight, since



there are tons of GAs, RAs, etc. We should have some consideration that every department might not be working as well.

15. Comment from Autumn Dawn Perkey: I concur with Jillian. We need to understand which departments have policies working well, and those that do not. We wouldn't have as many complaints as we did, which is why centralization is important. Maybe not a form, but gather data to compare and contrast which departments are experiencing success, and which are having difficulties.
 16. Comment from Dean Roth: Surveying the DGS/CGS group might be a good idea. Do we feel that the departmental mentoring statement adequately includes student and faculty needs?
 - a. We have enough information here to know we won't implement a form or centralized process tomorrow, but good information to engage with the DGS/CGS group to better understand processes. We will continue to work with you and find a way to support the students who are struggling.
5. New Business and Future Discussion
- a. Tom Cohen: There are new policies in place that international students who were educated in the U.S., who never took TOEFL, have to undergo MEI assessment before teaching in a TAship. MEI is failing a large fraction of students from East Asia, particularly severe for Math who had 7 students, Physics had three. We can't change the policy on the fly.
 - I'm asking one of two things: you, as executive action, or committee, suspend this rule for students admitted this year and next year, then discuss why the policy was put into place, and determine how to move forward in an equitable fashion in the future.
 - Dean Roth's comment: I am meeting with Jon Malone next week. International students who completed a Bachelor's in the U.S. are a unique category of applicant. We need a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and what would address it.
 - Ernesto Calvo's comment: I sent an email to my international students, and got significant complaints about income issues. We need more information on how MEI is conducting their affairs.
 1. Dean Roth's response: Graduate Council membership turns over fairly commonly. There was a fairly extensive report and analysis of MEI's reports in 2018-2019. There's been a long-standing conversation around the role of MEI in helping students succeed in programs, and also in teaching assistant roles. It's a unique element given that they are undergrad-facing. We need to support a high quality undergraduate education. These are challenging issues.



- Tom Cohen's comment: It's not just Physics and Math. There's large discussion among departments in CMNS including Computer Science and Geology. I do think there should be a long-term discussion on MEI, but also a short-term discussion that needs to be addressed by November: discriminating against students in East Asia.
- Christina Getrich's comment: In Anthropology, there are bigger picture concerns. Students have had negative experiences with both MEI courses from TOEFL and GAships. MEI is part of the university, but also distinct in other ways. For example, a student with an external scholarship doesn't pay for language training because MEI is coded as tuition. This student ran into issues with their scholarship program.
 1. MEI is in talks with the Provost Office to have courses coded as credit-bearing to possibly cover with tuition remission? This is pending.
- Stephen Mount's comment: For students who we admit and assign them a TA, we expect them to pass, but they don't. It comes up against the very strict MEI policy that they do not do the oral examination on Zoom, and rather in-person. I don't see why this isn't possible due to the high quality of online communication.
 1. Dean Roth's response: I thought MEI moved to doing interviews virtually in May/June to accelerate.
- Ernesto Calvo's comment: Every international student I've seen as a GA has failed, and then passed 3 months later. I am concerned with treatment at MEI, and the rates in which they are incoming and outgoing in MEI.
 1. Dean Roth's response: I will ask Jon for recent data. I met with CADGE last month, and shared data then.
- Leila De Floriani's comment: I have the same concern. Maybe have the exam in May/June and not in August. It is still tough to have to change plans at the last minute, or who teaches which courses. This way, you have the summer, and then they have to start. It's still better with May/June testing, but problems persist even with earlier testing.
- Ernesto Calvo's comment: We might not be talking about the same group of people: international students in general vs. those who earned a Bachelor's in the U.S..
- Dean Roth's comment: I am meeting with Jon regarding Tom's short-term concerns, and will gather more data from MEI for the long-term about numbers and credit-bearing.
 1. Tom Cohen's comment: Making MEI courses credit-bearing could have a negative consequence. Depending on how many credits MEI courses are, it could push students over 10 credits.



2. Dean Roth's response: It's viewed as an inherent positive due to the requirement to move through programs taught in English, and to produce written documents, dissertations, and publishings in English.
3. Tom's clarification: There is one little negative with the credit-bearing MEI courses. I hope the courses will count as two credits instead of three.