



## Graduate Council Meeting Notes

February 14, 2024

10:00 - 11:30 am

Zoom

**Attendees:** Stephen Mount, Paulo Prochno, David Van Horn, Lucy Qiu, Janet Walkoe, Hiro Iseki, Maria Bustamante, Ryan O’Grady, Autumn Perkey, Jason Rudy, Alexander Williams, Christina Getrich, Evelyn King, Lauren Cain, Jeffrey Shultz, Jose Helim Aranda-Espinoza, Chris Ellis, Jillian Rothschild, Matthew Nessian, Will Reed, Henry Gittens, Betsy Beise  
(18 voting members / 3 non-voting members)

**GS Staff:** Steve Roth, Jason Farman, Evelyn Cooper, Sparkle Lonesome, Robyn Kotzker, Brent Hernandez, Vikash Gujju, Fan Tsao, Kate Oravec, Christopher Perez, Teddy Wu, Toyin Oguntolu, Brittany Humphreys, Heather Kissinger, Patricia Woodwell, Maria Palmaira  
(16)

### AGENDA NOTES

1. Approval of [November 2023 meeting minutes](#)
  - a. Approved with no recommended changes.
2. Welcome and announcements
  - a. Welcome, Brittany LoBiondo Humphreys, Tuition Assistance Coordinator
  - b. [GA termination](#) - 30 vs 60 days; alignment with USM policy (Steve/Jason)
    - We were out of compliance with the USM policy, which requires 60 days of notice for termination of an assistantship. Our policy had only 30 days, so Jason has updated the language to 60 days.
    - This policy remains identical to what it was, except:
      1. Shifting from 30 to 60 days
      2. Added the link to the USM policy
  - c. Grad Council Task Force to evaluate our Statement of Mutual Expectations (SME) process with GAs (Steve/Jason)
    - We are seeking a task force from the Graduate Council to dive into what would be a better practice for the Statement of Mutual Expectations.
    - This should not be a huge amount of work, but rather just reviewing what other departments are doing.
    - Comment: Alexander Williams - Can you talk more about the task force, to help me better understand if I want to help or not?
      1. We’ve gotten feedback from students saying that advisors or supervisors just use this SME as a “stamp” and don’t go through it thoroughly. This is aimed to provide expectations on days per week worked, hours, clear roles, etc.



2. We want to move this away from busy work for faculty, and set it up better for GAs.
  3. We are also thinking of different formats of the SME for different kinds of jobs students do across campus.
  4. We want to make sure there is a sense of ownership over this. Where does this go? We would love to get recommendations from the team; what should we do for this process?
    - Volunteers identified in the chat - Janet Walkoe, Evelyn King, Autumn Perkey.
  - d. Candidacy Celebration April 9, 4:00-5:30 pm, the President's House
    - This is held 2 times per year, for the previous 6 months of candidates.
    - The April 9th Celebration is for students who reached candidacy between December 1, 2023 - April 1, 2024.
  - e. 3MT Competition April 17, 1:00 -3:00 pm, Stamp Student Union
    - Each college holds their own 3MT competition, and their winners then advance to the college-wide 3MT Competition on April 17.
3. Proposed policy discussions
- a. Combined Degree double counting of credits: move away from [2-credit cap](#) toward a percentage based on overall credit count of Master's degree (e.g. 33% of total credits can be double counted).
    - This is not a Graduate School-specific policy, but rather at the level of the university.
    - This helps to accelerate time to degree.
    - When this policy was introduced, all Master's degrees were 30 credits. Now, we have programs that extend beyond 30 credits.
      1. For example, within the Smith School, there are no 3-credit classes students take; they only take 2-credit classes), so we are hoping to move away from a credit count and change to a percentage.
    - This will be something that has to go up to the Senate. We got support from every Associate Dean from all the colleges.
    - Poll results:
      1. Yes - 89%
      2. No - 5%
      3. Abstain - 5%
    - Comment: Autumn Perkey - I worry, coming from another Big Ten institution for my undergraduate, having students count undergraduate coursework to their Master's program. I worry about academic and professional development here.
      1. Response: Jason Farman - Undergraduate students are taking graduate level coursework, and this gets to apply towards their undergraduate degree.
  - b. [Parental Accommodation Policy](#)



- The current policy is 6 weeks, and this is not a leave of absence, as students are still doing coursework, GAships, etc.
- We are aiming to push this to 8 weeks. This is a change at the Graduate School level to set the floor, but other departments such as English may already have a longer policy, such as 12 weeks.
- We hope to bring GA language into this as well, so that it is all in one location.
- Both parents can take a combined 16 weeks of parental leave.
- Current language says that accommodation can be taken within a 6-month period, and we are hoping to switch that to a 12-month period.
  1. This will help stagger the time away, and will be beneficial for both the department and student.
- Adding in GA language around what the accommodation is during their time away could be beneficial; this could be something like having a TA shift to a research role, if more appropriate.
- Comment: Maria Bustamante - How does this policy apply for different students (PhD vs. Master's?)
  1. Response: This is available to all students. It is a requirement that we make this available to them. How this gets accommodated is really a talk with the department. It is the student's responsibility to contact faculty to stay up to date with courses. This then all gets documented.
- Comment: Will Reed - How does this policy interact with family medical leave policies?
  1. Response: FMLA is for employees and does not directly impact graduate students or graduate assistants. FMLA also only provides for unpaid leave, so this policy is more accommodating.
- Comment: Autumn Perkey - What does this mean for parents that already have kids in school?
  1. This policy is aimed at the initial birth process. The challenges for parents with kids older should be addressed in a separate policy.
- Comment: Lauren Cain - What was the discussion around deciding on 8 weeks rather than 10 or 12? Is it about feasibility for completion of degrees?
  1. We are working incrementally towards the 12 week accommodation, to better reflect what other Big Ten schools are doing, such as Northwestern that has a 12 week policy in place.
  2. In conversations around campus, it was uniformly accepted to extend to 8 weeks. For 12 weeks, there was some pushback.
  3. Maryland is also moving forward some Parent Leave legislation in 2026 that does move to 12 weeks.
- Comment: Evelyn King - I like the revisions. I wonder if some components can be confusing on requirements for a GA vs requirements as a graduate student. Specifically under Application?



- Comment: David Van Horn - In the policy, it requires “8 weeks prior to anticipated birth”. This doesn’t seem very flexible. I would rather see it say 8 weeks prior to accommodation.
  - 1. Comment: Autumn Perkey - If a child is premature, will they be able to work around this policy?
    - a. Yes, we have worked with students before. This process can be done very quickly.
- Comment: Autumn Perkey - Would students also be able to adjust their comps exam?
  - 1. Yes, elements of their progress towards degree can be accommodated.
- Poll results:
  - 1. Yes - 95%
  - 2. No - 0%
  - 3. Abstain - 5%
- c. [Revalidation of Graduate Credits older than 5 years old](#) / Time Extension Policy
  - The current bar for revalidation is quite high, as it requires all members of the department to vote.
    - 1. A pushback we get from this is asking whether all faculty members are required to vote, and people say this seems inflexible.
  - For context, some students may try to pull in past coursework, but some coursework past 5 years may be outdated. Faculty have to go through to review this past course content.
  - Some faculty are asked to vote on this, but some content is completely out of their area of expertise.
  - Changing this so that a small committee could be brought into this could help.
  - We are moving this language outside of the Time Extension Policy.
  - Poll results:
    - 1. Yes - 100%
    - 2. No - 0%
    - 3. Abstain - 0%
- 4. Open Forum
- 5. Future Discussion
  - a. Graduate course-related policy? Or guidance? (e.g., syllabus components) Pre-loaded ELMS page for all registered students with relevant policies and resources?
    - Currently, the university has [language](#) around what is required in undergraduate syllabi.
      - 1. Examples include the basis for determining final grades, class participation, etc.
    - For us, students are unclear of grade cutoffs, curves, etc. How do you clearly communicate to students what those different aspects of the class are?
    - We have some guidance, but not very robust guidance.



- Comment: Alexander Williams - I don't think this should come from the Graduate School, but rather from departments. For a department like mine, which is small, it may seem silly to have such extensive language in the syllabi. This may aggravate faculty to have to break it down similar to an undergraduate syllabus. I can imagine it being useful for other departments, but would not suggest a "one size fits all".
  1. Response: There are so many specifics across campus that we can't predict. Students might expect one thing, but then their grade does not reflect that. They will turn to the syllabus, but then there is no clear language here. Then they end up with a grade that does not reflect their work.
- Comment: Chris Ellis - I think I am in favor of less hand-down from the Graduate School, but rather help from other departments, such as TLTC. There is so much difference across the university, so more help but less regulation would be most helpful.
  1. [Syllabus template](#) from TLTC.
- Comment: Hiro Iseki - We have studio classes, and also work with outside organizations. Sometimes, they may cause some problems, such as not providing data that the students need to work on. In this case, this would negatively impact their grades, but we try to make adjustments so that their grades don't go down due to some outside factors.
- Comment: Jillian Rothschild - As a graduate student, I'm fine with having 5 pages of policy at the beginning of the syllabus. It's nice to know where they are and have them spelled out. For PhD programs, there probably isn't going to be an issue with grading, but if there is, it's good to have this policy. I don't think any graduate student would mind seeing these policies.
  1. I also think faculty putting their preferred name in the syllabus may be helpful.
- Comment: Autumn Perkey - Maybe having a page with pre-loaded policy with links that faculty can then slide into the syllabus could be helpful.
- Comment: Chris Ellis - A lot of our lecturers rotate, so anything that the Graduate School could put together that would help them would be great.
  1. Comment: Jason Farman - When we rolled out our mentorship expectations, we asked for each department to come up with their own standards for mentorship. We asked them to write an expectation sheet for their incoming students.
- Comment: Alexander Williams - I am in philosophy, and it is very term paper-heavy. The entire field focuses more on whether an argument in the paper was well done or not. How would this be articulated in the syllabus, or for rubrics that are generalized for the university?



1. Response: Jason Farman - I have a few student examples I can share.  
First, one student thought a class was online and did not show up.  
There was no clear language around how participation impacts grade in the syllabus. Another case was where a faculty member curved the course according to her own guidelines, and there was no clear communication to students on how this was done.
- Comment: Evelyn King - I think perhaps encouraging departments to create a checklist for what should be in the syllabus could be helpful.
- Comment: Jillian Rothschild - I wanted to mention that students take courses outside of their department, and requirements or expectations may be different. This can be challenging for students to fully understand, as they may not be familiar with the norms in the department.
  1. Response: Dean Roth - We realize there is a hidden curriculum, and we are hoping to get students on the same level. We are trying to put policy into place to help our students succeed.
- Comment: Maria Bustamante - I have a comment on the previous policy about the number of credits counted for combined programs and using percentage instead. What is the discussion around deciding this?
  1. There are two types of combined programs.
    - a. One is through Grad PCC, which establishes courses that are approved to be double-counted.
    - b. The other version is an individual combined degree, which is approved on a one-by-one basis.
      - i. They have to present a proposal to the Graduate School to be approved for this.
      - ii. If it is more than 30 credits, we would let them know the student can have x number of credits to double-count, based on the percentage of total credits for that program.