



## Graduate Council Meeting Notes

Wednesday, September 11, 2024

2:00-3:30pm

Maryland Room, Marie Mount Hall

**Attendees:** TyJón Culclasure, Varaa Kukreti, Hiro Iseki, Lucy Qiu, Paulo Prochno, Leonid Korolov, Ernesto Calvo, Candace Turitto, Rob Wells, Hernan Rosas, Divon Pender, Alexis Hunter, Laura Schneider, Radu Balan, Jason Rudy, Jonathan Poterjoy, Maria Cecilia Bustamante, Will Reed, Alexis Lothian

**GS Staff:** Steve Roth, Evelyn Cooper, Ryan Long, Robyn Kotzker, Kate Oravec

### AGENDA NOTES

1. Welcome and Announcements
  - a. Introductions and overview of the Graduate Council
    - We try to bring challenging topics to this group for discussion. There's lots of behind the scenes work with DGS/CGS, GSG, deans, etc.
    - There are two ends of the spectrum of the Grad Council. The first is that we talk and hear concerns. On the other end, there is policy implementation, revision, and voting.
    - We meet 3x/semester, and in-person at the beginning of the semester.
    - I encourage you to reach out to discuss or add any agenda items.
  - b. Faculty Mentoring Workshops (1/month in Fall): [REGISTER HERE](#)
  - c. Postdoc appreciation week and [symposium, Sept 27](#).
    - Next week (week of 9/16) is postdoc appreciation week.
    - This year's symposium is system-wide, with the Chancellor visiting.
    - There will be many presenters, including some from Baltimore.
  - d. Office of Graduate Diversity and Inclusion [Networking Reception](#).
    - Thursday, September 19, 2024 from 5-7pm, Colony Ballroom, Stamp Student Union.
    - 348 graduate students have RSVP'd, and there will be 19 units across campus in the resource fair.
    - We are encouraging units to share the [website link](#) with all grad students.
    - This is specifically intended for diverse grad students, everyone is welcome.
    - Email [Christopher Perez](#) with questions or concerns.
  - e. Jason Farman sabbatical; Ryan Long as Interim Assoc. Dean
  - f. Statement of Mutual Expectations Task Force - update and plans
    - The SME is a form (and process) that we encourage all graduate students to fill out at the beginning of each semester.



- It works generally well, but it is not perfect. The task force offers some recommendations.
  - Now, instead of one single form, we have 4 different forms specifically for each type of GA (RA, TA, AA, Graduate Instructor of Record).
  - As part of the Workday transition, these forms will move into the Workday system (November 15 implementation).
  - The Provost is very keen on making this a required element of the graduate student experience.
  - We are seeking programs for the spring to help us pilot the required process.
  - Stay tuned for more information coming. If you are aware of programs that are already doing well with this process and want to be a part of the pilot, please reach out.
2. Consent approval of [April 2024 meeting minutes](#) - reach out with any edits or questions.
- a. We don't have to vote on the approval of the minutes. Approval is not required anymore.
3. Proposed policy discussions
- a. OGC requested a change in GA policy language: The Conduct and Professional Behavior section of our [Assistantship Policies](#) currently mentions "...laws of the state regarding its employees...". This should be revised to "...to applicable federal, state, and local laws..." - [link here](#). Current language: A Graduate Assistant's teaching, research, and administrative activities are subject to the ethical precepts and codes of the academic profession, to the laws of the State of Maryland regarding its employees, and to University policies governing institutional obligations. Proposed language: A Graduate Assistant's teaching, research, and administrative activities are subject to the ethical precepts and codes of the academic profession, to applicable federal, state, and local laws, and to University policies governing institutional obligations.
    - In the current policy, GAs are described as under the employment laws of the state of MD. This is incorrect, as they aren't considered employees, but rather students receiving funding.
    - Suggesting revision of language to say "to applicable state and local laws."
    - There is no change to the graduate assistant policy, but rather just a legal change that OGC is seeking.
    - Comment - Are they still employees? Are there consequences to this?
      - 1. No, the language would not include the word "employees". This would remove reference to state employees.
    - Comment - GAs receive State of MD employee benefits. Does this have any effect?



1. GAs still receive the same benefits as faculty and staff. Stipends aren't taxed the same way as a regular employee, so this makes the distinction. It's a technicality in the description/HR code.
  - Comment - Are there any consequences when the word "employee" is removed?
    1. Technically no, since GAs currently are not considered employees. If there was any legal challenge, it would be thrown out since they are not considered employees.
  - Comment - Any effect on the state of the union?
    1. State legislature limits collective bargaining. This language change does not impact their ability to pursue collective bargaining.
  - Vote: Approved.
    1. 17 approved, 1 abstained.
- b. Propose adding additional committee option for [master's thesis defense outcomes](#): adding "entire committee must approve" (bringing into line with [PhD defense outcome options](#))
  - Add the following language as an additional selection: To accept the oral defense, but recommend substantive revisions to the dissertation and not sign the Report of the Examining Committee until the student has made the changes and submitted the revised dissertation for the Dissertation Examining Committee's approval. The chair will provide the committee and student with a list of the required revisions. The Dissertation Examining Committee members sign the Report of the Examining Committee if they approve the revised dissertation.
    1. Currently, the doctoral dissertation has 5 different outcome choices. The master's thesis has only 4 different choices.
    2. We are seeking to add that 5th option on the doctoral side to the master's side as well, in order to give the master's committee the same flexibility as the doctoral committee.
    3. Comment - Is this something that has seemed to be missing from the master's thesis committees?
      - a. Yes, some thesis committees have inquired about this additional choice. We expect some fraction of the thesis committees to use them.
    4. Comment - Why was this not included in the master's thesis committee?
      - a. It was most likely an oversight.
    5. Comment - In practice, does this mean that MA theses will have a similar digital process of signing off from committee members, similar



to doctoral committees? I seem to find myself spending a lot of time chasing down committee members to sign this document. We have many more MAs than PhDs.

- a. In the long run, we aim to have this form automated, and are trying to address the efficiency in the signature process.
  6. Comment - Is it true that an individual department may have the ability to do this internally?
    - a. It would be a rare case that the committee would disagree with the chair.
  7. Comment - If there is a disagreement between the chair and committee, how would this process be resolved? Is it still the chair's decision, or does it need to be unanimous?
    - a. This will allow the committee to contribute to the discussion to resolve this.
    - b. It is not required to have a unanimous vote on the doctoral side. There is policy on how to resolve this, but it is not part of this policy.
- Vote: Approved.
    1. 17 approved, 1 abstained.
- c. Propose revising our “indefinite dissertation embargo policy” to reflect personal and public safety (in addition to national security) - [link here](#). Note that these are rare and all such requests for indefinite embargo are considered on a case-by-case basis in collaboration with the student and student’s college. Current language: Indefinite embargoes can be placed only in service of a public good (e.g., for national security reasons). Proposed language: Indefinite embargoes can be placed only in service of a public good (e.g., for national security or public safety reasons) or personal safety.
- At the completion of a dissertation, students have the option to obtain an embargo.
  - We want to share their work publicly, but understand that this can impact their career.
  - 2 years is granted without concern, 6 years requires a rationale, and in some cases, a permanent embargo.
  - This past spring, we had a case where a student performed a qualitative study about domestic violence in Afghanistan. The student and advisor were concerned about personal safety if it became published. We made an exception to this policy, and provided an indefinite embargo. This made us realize that our current language may be too limited, and that some may not pursue this option.
  - Any indefinite embargo request would be approved on a case-by-case basis. None of this would change in this proposal. This is rather us wanting to add



language around public safety so that students and departments feel comfortable making this request.

- Comment - How would this protect them?
  1. How it is published separately is more controlled by the student, since it typically won't include the entire dissertation. However, the dissertation may be far more extensive (including appendices, etc).
- Comment - How often does this happen?
  1. This is more rare. There have only been 2 or so in the last year.
- Comment - This seems pretty broad. Could you add more specificity? We are a very public university.
  1. The rationale for the proposal to be developed was because of national security and public safety. We didn't want the phrase "national security" to mean that general public safety couldn't be considered as well.
- Comment - Does the student need to sign off on this? Is it possible for the advisor to request and not the student?
  1. Yes, the student needs to request this. There are instructions on how to do so. The advisor cannot make the request.
  2. In the case of 6 year embargoes, we do engage with the department.
- Comment - Do you have any conception on how this will impact the Graduate School?
  1. We don't want to limit people asking for this indefinite embargo.
- Comment - How does this work in terms of the industry requesting?
  1. That usually comes in as a 6 year request, and these can also be renewed.
  2. We wouldn't see this happening just because it is industry or an NDA.
- Vote: Approved.
  1. 12 approved, multiple abstained.

#### 4. Additional Topics and Topics for Future Discussion

- a. Proposing a move to credit-bearing English proficiency courses (TA and writing courses), making them accessible to tuition assistance as 500-level courses.
  - This is a change to make two of their courses (Pronunciation 006 and Writing 007) acceptable for GA tuition assistance. This would essentially make them credit-bearing courses.
  - The complaints we hear about these are that they aren't credit bearing, that tuition remission can't be used, and that programs can't incorporate these into curriculums. In general, we think this is a really good idea. However, we want to hear about any potential unintended consequences.
  - Comment - Who would cover the cost? Usually the students take 3 courses (9 credits). So this sounds like some of the cost will fall onto their expense?



1. The 6 credit course (005) is not being considered for tuition assistance.
  2. Many students who have 10 credits of tuition assistance, may have a credit available that they could use for this.
  3. Moving forward, we encourage MEI to consider how to structure these courses in terms of credits, such as stretching some out across semesters (1 credit in the fall, 1 credit in the spring).
  4. Three courses at present that are mostly tied to GS:
    - a. TA course is a 1-2 credit course
    - b. Writing course is 2-3 credit course
    - c. Neither is currently available for tuition remission
- Comment - This sounds like a great idea.
  - Comment - Agreed, and this would be great for recruitment.
  - Comment - Who would cover the funding?
    1. The writing course is on the student, and the TA course is on the department. It would be from the same funding as the assistantship.
  - Comment - Why make these at the 500-level?
    1. Our policy doesn't allow us to count that towards degree requirements.
    2. All program revisions come through this group via Grad PCC. I have a hard time thinking that there would be a rationale for these courses contributing significantly to the curriculum/degree requirements, but maybe that could be explicitly stated in the proposal.
  - Comment - Is this a course that students need to take if they don't meet the TOEFL requirements? I have concerns about if the cost would fall on the department, and if this would make them less open for hiring ITAs.
    1. If they aren't TAs, they wouldn't have tuition assistance to apply towards this.
    2. Yes, but that is already the situation currently. This change would reduce the cost to the department, at least for the TA course.
      - a. If a department hires them as a TA, they would pay for that. Your concern already exists - departments may not want to hire somebody due to additional costs.
  - Comment - Where does the funding of the assistantship come from? Would this mean the students would need to take less courses?
    1. The State of MD provides the funds. These credits would effectively be treated equally as the other courses they are taking.
    2. Yes, this could impact the number of regular courses they take. This is already an existing concern.
  - Comment - Some departments ask incoming students to take these courses before the semester. Would that then count as credits? The student also might not be considered as a TA at that point.



1. I think this policy has changed. Right now, students that don't have the certain TOEFL score are required to take it. And it is only offered in the fall.
- Comment - So there are no credits currently? Does tuition remission mean it must bear academic credit? Has to be both or neither?
  1. The simplest way to make it eligible for tuition remission is to make it credit-bearing.
- Comment - Who is required to take the TAship course? Could a student otherwise take it, even if they aren't required to? Would departments be required to do this or address this specifically in their own policies (i.e. who is required to take it and when)? Will students try to use it to front-load credits and skip a normally required course? Do departments need to be proactive about their curriculum structures?
  1. All ITAs whose speaking score falls below a threshold and have face-to-face teaching time are required to take the course.
  2. Yes, anyone can take it (as long as space is available for students who need it).
  3. Campus policy is that any international student with XYZ requirement must take this course. Departments would not want department-specific approaches, as it would be applied uniformly.
  4. This doesn't force anyone new to take MEI courses, rather just reducing the tuition burden on departments and students.
- Comment - Will the State of MD not like paying for the additional credits, if budgets are a zero sum game?
  1. The Provost doesn't foresee an issue.
  2. This would be a small decimal place in the state budget, probably unnoticeable since only about 40 students take this course each year.
    - a. We assign a lot more than 40, but so many test out by our testing deadlines anyway that it becomes around that number.
  3. Either way, the tuition remission is still capped at 10. This is just allowing them to use those 10 credits differently than before.
- Comment - Does this impact students, if they have to pay more (if it pushes them over 10 credits)?
  1. International students are bound by a 10 credit limit. It would only be the writing course that could have additional cost, but in this model, they would still need to fit in the 10 credit boundary.
- Comment - Do these courses now show up on the transcript?
  1. They currently do not count towards the total number of credits taken, but do show on the transcript.



b. TA preparation requirement. See:

<https://umd-ta.catalog.instructure.com/courses/welcome-to-taing>

- TLTC has developed an online, self-paced course. The Provost wants to move towards some requirement for TA training. Is there broad support of this?
- Comment - How long is this course?
  1. Approximately 90 minutes.
- Comment - Would this be added on Canvas? Some departments already have TA training. Would this be a substitute?
  1. Yes, it is through Open Learning. It is currently live.
  2. I imagine this would be an addition.
- Comment - I am in-favor of this, as TA training can vary by department and even within department.
- Comment - In my experience, not every professor is there because they are an awesome teacher. Even if you are relying on the supervisor, the quality is different across instructors. Generally speaking, this is a really good idea.
- Comment - Sometimes the TA has no idea where they fit in the chain of command. They think, “Well, what is my responsibility at the end of the day?”
- Comment - I also really appreciate this training. Some faculty really want to focus on research, and don’t focus on their teaching. This is very helpful. I just want to make sure that anyone who is interested in acting as a TA can take this?
  1. Yes, even faculty can take this training.