

**GRADUATE POLICY COMMITTEE
MINUTES
February 28, 2011**

The following members were present: Nancy Marcus, Dean, The Graduate School; David Johnson, English, Chair; Eric Chicken, Statistics; Marc Gertz, Criminology; Tomi Gomory, Social Work; Gary Burnett, Communication and Information; Bob Pekurny, Communication and Information; Jamila Horabin, Biomedical Science; William Fredrickson, Music; Ike Eberstein, Sociology; Brian Gaber, Film/Music; Young-Suk Kim, Education; Rodney Roberts, Engineering; Dianne Speake, Nursing

The following members were absent: Stanley Gontarski, Arts and Sciences; Sudhir Aggarwal, Computer Science; Ron Doel, Arts and Sciences; Bong-Soo Lee, Business; Rick Feiock, Social Sciences and Public Policy; Patricia Born, Business; Ithel Jones, Teacher Education

Also present: Colin Creasy, The Graduate School; Judy Devine, The Graduate School; Anne Rowe, Dean of the Faculties; George Williamson, History

The meeting was called to order at 3:35 P.M by David Johnson, Chair.

Report on Presentation of New Bulletin Language to the Faculty Senate – Dr. Johnson began by reminding the GPC of the Graduate Bulletin changes they had proposed during the Fall 2010 semester and informed them that 7 of the 9 proposed changes were accepted by the Faculty Senate without revisions. He continued by explaining that two of the proposed changes, “bullet points eight and nine,” has significant alterations made by the Faculty Senate.

In the case of #8, the Faculty Senate excised the clause, “*The student, the major professor and the university representative must be physically present in the same room,*” with the justification that distance technology could be used in lieu of physical attendance. In an additional clause, the Faculty Senate changed the original wording, “*A minimum of four members with Graduate Faculty Status must **be present,***” to “*A minimum of four members with Graduate Faculty Status must **participate,***” further cementing the Faculty Senate’s opinion that distance technology would be a sufficient alternative to a member’s physical presence.

Dr. Johnson explained that the Faculty Senate had concerns regarding international students and instructors on sabbaticals in remote locations led to this revision, but added that his concerns for the revision involve the possibility of “defenses that consist of four computer screens in a room with no humans present.” He added that the Faculty Senate suggested that it would be up to the units to create stricter guidelines for situations in which the student or major professor could not be physically present.

Dr. Gertz wondered what options the GPC had to re-amend these revisions. Dr. Johnson explained that there were several options: 1, the President could veto the changes, 2, further language could be added to the proposal and it could be resubmitted, or 3, require, as was the case with GFS, units to define their own standards that meet or exceed the university requirements.

Dr. Pekurny explained that this Faculty Senate decision was based on a resistance toward centralization. Dr. Gertz pointed out that the role of the GPC was to bolster centralization, but Dr. Johnson argued that this wasn’t the case.

Dr. Eberstein argued that the revisions by the Faculty Senate were sound in that they are in line with the advances of technology and are convenient and fiscally responsible for both the student and the committee members.

Dr. Gertz wondered how distance technology would impact the proceedings of a failed defense.

Dr. Burnett noted that the faculty in his department was “unanimous” in their support for the Faculty Senate changes. Dean Marcus wondered, since all defenses are open to all faculty, how they would accommodate additional faculty who may want to sit in on a defense being carried out via distance technology; Dr. Burnett explained that this would be handled “the same way as with anyone else” and would involve a microphone and camera setup. Dean Marcus asked what would happen if there was a connection failure; Dr. Burnett explained that the defense could be rescheduled. Dean Marcus wondered how the student could be “asked to step out of the room;” Dr. Burnett explained that there are programs [i.e. “Illuminate”] that allow for the muting/blocking of an individual’s communication temporarily that could satisfy this possibility. Dean Marcus wondered about the possibility of unequal committee requirements being applied to different students, i.e. one student being required to physically attend their defense vs. another student being allowed to use distance technology; Dr. Burnett pointed out that the unit would define their rules governing the possible use of distance technology, and that it would not be defined on a student-by-student basis. Dr. Pekurny added that options would be available, that committees “within a parameter, could choose a method,” and that [similar to the unit-based GFS requirement] the units need to have their defense attendance policies be on record in order to insure equal access to options for students.

Dr. Johnson presented updated wording for a revision to the policy: “*Departments and other degree granting programs must have on record in their by-laws and approved by the Graduate Policy Committee a written description of their dissertation defense procedures.*” Dean Marcus argued that the departments would simply “default to the minimum standards” instead of writing their own policy; Dr. Johnson disagreed and noted that many departments created more stringent policies regarding graduate status and committee composition.

Dean Marcus presented a collection of dissertation defense policies from other universities, stating that “not a single one allows for such a flexible policy.” She added that the university does not offer a completely online degree so they should not allow for the possibility for a “completely online defense.”

Dr. Eberstein argued that the new policy provided departments with a level of autonomy, and that the best solution may be to require departments to define their own policy. Dean Marcus pointed out that it’s not an issue of centralization due to the fact that it came from the GPC rather than The Graduate School, adding that “The Graduate School is confused” by these revisions and that she will not be able to implement the new policy as it lacks regulation of the equitable treatment of students.

Dr. Gomory pointed out that the university grants degrees, not the department and questioned who would decide how a committee would look at a defense if this policy were to remain. He argued that such a policy could “devalue the Ph.D.”

Dean Marcus echoed Dr. Gomory’s thoughts, questioning who within the committee or among the unit would define how a defense should be carried out. Dr. Eberstein argued that the unit should define those expectations.

Dr. Johnson noted that the University Representative must be able to have access to the guidelines for committees and dissertation defense procedures for each unit on record. He added that without requiring units to define their specific guidelines, this would be very hard for the University Representative to do.

Dr. Pekurny stated that the Faculty Senate seemed to be leaning (in many of their decisions) toward giving more autonomy to the units themselves when it came to issues of graduate policy. Dr. Eberstein agreed that it should be up to the units and perhaps the GPC should require them to establish their policies in their handbooks. Dean Marcus asked who in the unit would decide the guidelines for dissertation defense requirements; Dr. Eberstein explained that a graduate committee would decide on this, adding that it would not be something that would be required to be added to the departmental by-laws but would instead be an “operating procedure.” Dean Rowe explained that there were certain things required by departmental by-laws, but that she would need to check if this would fall under that umbrella. Dr. Pekurny speculated that most by-law revisions do require full faculty approval.

Dr. Chicken noted that “*approved by the GPC*” could go against the unit-centric ideology that the Faculty Senate appeared to be favoring; he suggested changing the language to “*reviewed by the GPC.*”

Dr. Horabin questioned whether the “milestones” that the student must satisfy were present in the individual unit handbooks. Dr. Johnson suggested adding the wording, “*must have on record in their Graduate Handbooks a written description of the dissertation defense procedures.*” Dean Marcus explained that individual departments don’t have such detailed policy in the Graduate Bulletin. Dr. Pekurny argued that there simply needed to be a mechanism that could relay the options available to students in a location they would be likely to see.

Dr. Chicken questioned whether equality between students is really that important of an issue, citing the fact that students are not always paid the same. Dr. Pekurny explained that the issue is students being treated the same (or having the same available options) within a given department.

Dean Marcus reiterated her stance that the current policy cannot be implemented by The Graduate School and noted that the President was also concerned about the policy, adding that it would put him in an awkward position to have to veto a policy approved by the Faculty Senate. She insisted that the GPC would need to come up with some form of modification to the policy as it currently stood, adding that the policy as it was approved by the Faculty Senate compromised the “minimum standards” of the university. Dr. Eberstein suggested that the President discuss his concerns regarding the revised policy with the Faculty Senate; Dr. Pekurny agreed with this suggestion, making the argument that perhaps the university bureaucracy needed to “recalibrate” itself in the wake of various policy conflicts and push toward decentralization.

Dr. Pekurny questioned if Dr. Johnson’s suggested revisions would be seen as acceptable to the President; Dean Marcus explained that the President had not yet seen the revisions.

Dr. Chicken suggested resubmitting the original revisions with detailed explanations of the GPCs reasoning behind them and/or encouraging the Faculty Steering Committee to appeal to the Faculty Senate to approve the original GPC revisions. Dr. Johnson explained that this would not be possible due to the amount of time it would take to coordinate and carry out.

Dr. Pekurny wondered if there could be a section added to the Graduate Bulletin which could address and itemize these departmental policies. Dean Marcus explained that not all policies are added to the Bulletin, but that minimum university standards are expected to be present in the Bulletin. She added that each program should have a Graduate Handbook that “spells out” the specific policies for their students, but oftentimes these Handbooks include sections that are “verbatim what is university policy.”

Dean Marcus wondered how difficult it would be for a graduate committee within a department/unit to change by-laws (or the Graduate Handbook) without a full faculty vote. Dr. Eberstein reiterated his stance

that these decisions were made by committees without the need for a full faculty vote. Dr. Gomory explained that the College of Social Work required the full faculty to vote on a new policy or policy change.

Dr. Pekurny suggested adding the clause “*Departments must publicize their policies in their Graduate Handbooks [and in the Graduate Bulletin]*” to the revision. Dean Marcus noted that it could be too complex to revise the Bulletin for every department, but Dr. Pekurny argued that every department proof-reads their Handbook and specific Bulletin sections on an annual basis.

Dr. Devine inquired as to whether or not the Faculty Steering Committee might pass the changed without need to forward them to the Faculty Senate; Dr. Johnson said that he did not know and could not comment on this.

It was moved by Dr. Gertz and seconded by Dr. Horabin to accept the proposed wording revision:

“All committee members and the student must attend the entire defense in real time, either by being physically present or participating via distance technology. Individual departments may impose stricter requirements on physical attendance, e.g., all members must be physically present. Departments and other degree-granting programs must publicize their policy on defense attendance in their Graduate Student Handbook and in the relevant section of the Graduate Bulletin. If exceptional emergency circumstances, e.g. medical or other emergency situations, prevent the participation of a committee member then it may be necessary to arrange for an additional appropriately qualified colleague to attend the defense. A minimum of four members with Graduate Faculty Status must participate.”

Passed (13-1)

Dr. Johnson continued by pointing out the changes to Bulletin revision #9 in which the original clause, “*A grade of PASS for the defense of treatise or dissertation requires **unanimous** agreement of the committee,*” was changed to “*A grade of PASS for the defense of treatise or dissertation requires agreement of the committee, **as determined by the unit.***” Additionally, the clause which read, “***Each member** of the committee must sign the Manuscript Signature Form to substantiate the grade of PASS,*” was changed to “***A majority** of the committee must sign the Manuscript Signature Form to substantiate the grade of PASS.*” He clarified the problem inherent in this rewording by explaining that a form that comes to the Graduate School with only two signatures for a four member committee could be denied a PASS; the intent of the GPC was that a signature simply indicated that correct procedures were followed, not a vote on the defense outcome.

Dean Marcus argued that the language in this revision is too vague, noting that if the major professor approves of the PASS (and this is what is “determined by the unit” to substantiate a PASS) then the other committee members could theoretically go along with this decision despite having their doubts. She suggested that “majority” be added before agreement in order to make this clause less vague and give the other committee members more power.

Dr. Johnson and Dean Marcus suggested the revised wording, “*A grade of PASS for the defense of treatise or dissertation requires **majority approval** of the committee, as determined by the unit.*” Dr. Chicken questioned the definition of “majority” which he argued could be interpreted in different ways and if it would include the vote of the advisor.

Dr. Johnson suggested “*A grade of PASS for the defense of treatise or dissertation requires **at least majority approval** of the committee.*” Dr. Chicken suggested a revision of “*If a student passes, all must*

sign [provided there is a majority];” Dr. Johnson agreed to work on the clause’s wording for a future meeting.

Dr. Gomory expressed his concerns regarding the possibility that a committee could include members who are “adamantly opposed” to the student passing, yet the student still passes due to a majority approval.

Dr. Pekurny wondered if the Manuscript Signature Form could include a set of check boxes next to the signature blank which would allow members to select “PASS” or “NO PASS” on the form; he argued that this would allow members to sign the form without a conflict of interest. Dean Marcus explained that this policy and procedure would need to be “spelled out” to the students in each program so that it was clear and easily accessible, especially when establishing the unit’s definition of “majority.”

Dr. Johnson suggested an additional clause in the revision which read, “*Individual departments may impose stricter on requirements on what constitutes a grade of PASS.*”

Dr. Eberstein questioned whether these departmental policies need to be in the Graduate Bulletin. Dr. Johnson explained that they would need to be in the unit’s Graduate Handbook.

It was moved by Dr. Gaber and seconded by Dr. Pekurny to accept the proposed wording revision:

“The oral examining committee will certify in writing to the academic dean of the major department the results of the examination: passed, failed, or to be reexamined. The report of results following a reexamination must indicate the student either passed or failed. To receive a passing grade, the written dissertation must be in final form or require only minor revisions at the time of the defense. A grade of PASS for the defense of treatise or dissertation requires at least a majority approval of the committee. Individual departments may impose stricter requirements for what constitutes a grade of PASS. Departments and other degree-granting programs must publicize their policy on this issue in their Graduate Student Handbook and in the relevant section of the Graduate Bulletin. If the student passes, each member must sign the Manuscript Signature Form to substantiate the results of the defense. It is the responsibility of the major professor to submit this completed form either directly to the Clearance Advisor or to the appropriate college or departmental office for subsequent delivery to the Clearance Advisor in The Graduate School. The degree cannot be awarded until this form has been received by the Graduate School and the final version of the manuscript has been submitted to and approved by the Clearance Advisor.”

Passed

With no new business to be presented, Dr. Johnson adjourned the meeting at 4:50 P.M.