MINUTES
The Graduate Council
September 23, 2020
Zoom

Members Present: Ron Bramhall (ex officio), Robin Clement, Marina Guenza, Felicia Gutierrez, Beth Harn, Burke Hendrix, Andy Karduna (ex officio), Hauxin Lin, Kate Mondloch (ex officio), Fabienne Moore, Dorothee Ostmeier, Ellen Peters, Jeremy Piger, Julia Pomerenk (ex officio), Joan Rocklin, Leslie Straka, Chelsea Wright, Hong Yuan, and Annie Zeidman-Karpinski (ex officio)

Members Absent: Ihab Elzeyadi, Frances White (ex officio)

Graduate School Staff in Attendance: Jered Nagel, Tara Kaiser, Hannah Schneider-Lynch

The meeting was called to order at 3:30pm. The meeting opened with introductions of those in attendance.

Nomination and Election of Graduate Council Officers

Chair of the Graduate Council: The chair of the Graduate Council will also serve on the Academic Council and report to the Senate. Professor Dorothee Ostmeier nominated Professor Robin Clement for the Chair position. Professor Joan Rocklin seconded the nomination motion. The motion passed unanimously to elect Professor Clement as Chair of the Graduate Council.

Secretary of the Graduate Council: The secretary is responsible for certifying the minutes of each Graduate Council meeting. Professor Fabienne Moore self-nominated for the Secretary position. The motion passed unanimously to elect Professor Moore as Secretary of the Graduate Council.

Graduate Council Overview

Associate Dean Andy Karduna had provided council members with informational documents via Teams that explain the charge of the Graduate Council including guidance on how to review proposals and provide helpful suggestions during discussion. Representatives from departments who submit proposals are often invited to Graduate Council meetings to address questions or concerns. Ex officio, or non-voting members, are also included in the Graduate Council to represent a wider range of departments across campus. Votes cannot take place within a council meeting unless a quorum is met.

The Graduate Council is charged to advise the Dean of the Graduate School on matters related to graduate education. This year is expected to be particularly challenging and Associate Dean Karduna emphasizes the need for council guidance on Graduate School decisions at a university level.

Graduate Council members will also be asked to serve on Graduate Council committees such as the fellowship selection committee and the academic grievance committee.

Graduate Funding and COVID

Interim Vice Provost and Dean Kate Mondloch shared information received from the Dean’s Council regarding the graduate student funding situation in light of the COVID crisis, including what kinds of extensions are needed for students to complete their degree. This year, the Graduate School worked with DGSs and Graduate Coordinators to create a process to identify specific cases of previously-funded students in good academic standing who experienced COVID-related delays and could not graduate this
All students identified were able to receive additional GE positions to keep them on track, however there are no more central funds to support positions outside of the regular GE allocation process. We need a new plan moving forward.

Kate continued to share details of an emerging national conversation where university programs, mainly at Ivy League institutions, are freezing graduate admissions this year in order to free up funding in support of current doctoral students whose research was interrupted by COVID. With this model in mind, the Graduate Council offered suggestions on the best way for the UO to move forward in this regard, as well as voiced a number of concerns.

First and foremost, there was discussion on whether or not the UO should adopt a blanket policy with set criteria on which students would be eligible to receive an additional year of funding, or to allow departments to make that decision on a case-by-case basis. In either model, it was determined that drawing distinctions among students would cause grievances, so the guidelines must be clear and supported at a higher level. It was argued that departmental faculty and graduate coordinators know their students and could work with each individual to determine the best course of action. Under a blanket policy, however, finding a balance across all departments would also be challenging. This had to do with the fact that some departments are externally or nationally funded by grants and may not be as affected as those relying on University funds. Therefore, if one department decides to freeze admissions, and another continues to recruit new students, it could be seen as unfair. Granting extensions to an entire cohort would also negatively impact the following cohort since twice the number of students would be on the job market at the end of the year.

The Graduate Council also discussed the possibility of allowing unfilled GE positions to be filled externally, or at least be allocated to another department if there is no other option so as to not let them go to waste. A drop in GEIs however, would have long-term consequences for any given department. Additionally, there is stress on many students who have had to completely rethink their dissertation projects in order to adjust to the circumstances of the pandemic, such as a diminished timeline for completion and limited resources.

The Graduate Council still has an ongoing concern in terms of mental health of students and faculty. Interim Dean Mondloch has shared that the Graduate School is being proactive in locating and sharing resources both on and off campus, such as sponsored workshops, webinars, training courses, and group discussions. The Graduate School has also recruited new members of both the Grad Student Advisory Council and the Diversity Advisory Council to discuss student needs and determine a plan of action for providing the best support.

Environmental Humanities Certificate

The Graduate Council invited Professor Marsha Weisiger into the Zoom meeting to give an overview of this new certificate program and answer any questions. She explained that this certificate allows graduate students majoring in environmental or natural sciences to expand their field of study into the environmental humanities realm. The capstone course is a creative, interdisciplinary project beyond their dissertation or thesis such as museum exhibit. This field is intended to be public facing and involve public events that could take place somewhere on campus. However, it ultimately depends on the students own interests.

The required courses are environment and humanities oriented, and is intended to be an evolving list where new courses can be added and obsolete courses removed. Once the proposal is approved, departments will be asked to reach out if they have any courses that could be applicable for this certificate.

Lastly, Professor Weisiger explained that the Center for Environmental Futures is a research and outreach center under the Environmental Studies program but is not an academic unit. The center is
currently funded by the Mellon Foundation through summer but plans on submitting a proposal for renewal.

The Graduate Council could not vote on this proposal today due to lack of time, as well as awaiting final UOCC approval. A vote on this proposal will take place in the next meeting.

The Council adjourned at 5:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

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Fabienne Moore
Graduate Council Secretary