MINUTES
The Graduate Council
November 8, 2017
Graduate School Student Lounge, 111 Susan Campbell Hall

Members Present: Lara Bovilsky, Shanka Chakraborty, Cecilia Enjuto Rangel, Stephen Frost, Erik Girvan, Sara Hodges (ex officio), Cameron Kay, Andy Karduna (ex officio), Seth Lewis, Jana Prikryl (ex officio), Nicholas Proudfoot, Aleesa Schlientz, Leslie Straka, Mark Watson (ex officio), Angie Whalen, and Hong Yuan

Members Absent: Alison Kwok, Phil Scher (ex officio), and Hailan Wang,

Graduate School Staff in Attendance: Kellie Geldreich and Marcia Walker

The meeting was called to order at 3:30pm. The October, 2017 minutes were approved as distributed.

Interim Dean Sara Hodges commented on the adverse effects that the proposed federal tax reform would have on graduate students and universities as a whole.

Old Business

Graduate Students Serving on Admissions Committees

Associate Dean Karduna referred to responses from programs who indicated that they would be affected by the proposed policy regarding graduate students serving on admissions committees. These responses were previously sent to Graduate Council members for review.

Associate Professor Proudfoot noted that the response from Physics indicated that the proposed policy would create a new problem for that department. He stated that he was not clear why there was a need for change. Interim Dean Hodges responded that CAS Dean Marcus had asked about the practice of having graduate students serve on admissions committees and voiced concern that this was happening in a non-regulated way. He had asked if this was something that the Graduate Council should explore.

Associate Professor Bovilsky stated that she was concerned with the amount of time graduate students spent serving on admissions committees and asked if this was a good use of their time. Associate Professor Bovilsky asked if it was best practice to have graduate students who have never trained graduate students making these admissions decisions.

Assistant Professor Girvan stated the bulk of the responses did not address the voting piece, i.e. who has the final say on determining who is admitted.

After further discussion, Associate Professor Bovilsky moved to approve the proposed policy for graduate student involvement in admissions. Professor Chakraborty seconded the motion. The Graduate Council unanimously voted to approve the proposed policy for graduate student involvement in admission.
New Business

Graduate Students Teaching Other Graduate Students

Associate Dean Karduna noted that the materials sent to the Graduate Council modified what is currently on the Graduate School website regarding the policy of graduate students teaching other graduate students.

Interim Dean Hodges provided background on the current policy. She stated that the current policy is not very efficient, with a request and decision required for every graduate course with a graduate employee teaching in it every term. Under the new policy permission is granted once. In subsequent terms, departments just have to affirm that the circumstances under which permission was granted are still in place. This would result in less work for departments (while still holding them to the appropriate standard) and less work for the Graduate School to process each term.

Interim Dean Hodges stated that the proposed policy made the criteria listed for approving a petition more flexible, while still minimizing potential conflict of interest and situations where students take classes with peers who then evaluate them in other classes. The proposed policy states that one of the criteria is that the graduate students in the course and the Graduate Employee (GE) are at demonstrably different levels if they are in the same program. Being pre- and post-master’s would obviously be different. However, departments which have other explicitly defined staged in their programs (e.g. pre- and post-written qualifying exams) could also use those distinctions.

Associate Professor Enjuto Rangel pointed out that conflicts can also arise when GEs become romantically involved with graduate students they are evaluating. Interim Dean Hodges suggested reminding departments and graduate directors to be aware of other areas of conflict than can arise as well. Associate Dean Karduna pointed out that when teaching, GEs are considered faculty and in this capacity are held to the same standard.

Assistant Professor Girvan commented that he thought the structure of the new policy was much improved.

After further discussion, Associate Professor Bovilsky moved to adopt the revised policy regarding conditions governing GEs who teach graduate courses. Associate Professor Enjuto Rangel seconded the motion. The Graduate Council unanimously voted to adopt the revised policy regarding conditions governing GEs who teach graduate courses.

Teaching Evaluations

Associate Professor Bovilsky stated that there is a task force of the University Senate considering the nature and content of student evaluations and whether the evaluations need to be changed. Assistant Vice Provost Sierra Dawson will be visiting the Graduate Council today to discuss this process with Council members. Associate Professor Bovilsky noted that if we know these evaluations affect negatively women and people of color, changes should be made. Associate Dean Karduna added that Graduate Council members are being asked to identify issues unique to graduate students.

Assistant Vice Provost Dawson then joined the Graduate Council meeting and referred to the study provided to Graduate Council members, Teaching, Learning, and Achievement: Are Course Evaluations Valid Measures of Instructional Quality at the University of Oregon. She noted that the impetus behind the task force was findings gathered by the study which revealed gender bias. The data on race was not as clear, but data from elsewhere make it reasonable to assume there is a racial bias.

Assistant Vice Provost Dawson said that teaching evaluations can ask better questions, focusing more on student experience in the classroom. There are three categories of questions that are being considered:
1. Student responses to what happened in the classroom; e.g. how often did you do x or y? 2. Learning objectives, e.g. how did the student feel they moved on these objectives? 3. How clear were the instructions, did you receive timely feedback, did you experience inclusivity and belonging?

Associate Professor Bovilsky stated that students may have trouble remembering the learning objectives for the class and asked if they will appear on the evaluation. Assistant Vice Provost Dawson reported that there are 16 objectives already developed by other sources. Faculty would then determine which five or six applied to their class.

Associate Professor Bovilsky asked if the open-ended questions could pull for implicitly biased responses. Assistant Vice Provost Dawson replied that this shouldn’t happen if the students are asked about themselves and their experiences in the class.

Associate Dean Karduna asked if there would be disparate models for faculty vs. graduate students who may teach in a setting such as a lab. Assistant Vice Provost Dawson replied that it would be necessary to be mindful of the environment, such as instruction in labs or on-line courses. She noted that the task force is interested in talking to graduate students who have evaluations completed on their teaching and who also complete evaluations on faculty from classes they take.

Interim Dean Hodges noted that GEs often don’t have a lot of latitude in developing the courses they teach. Often course materials and curricula are chosen for them, so it would be important to keep that in mind as well.

Academic Affairs Manager Kellie Geldreich suggested that the task force may want to speak with the Graduate School Advisory Board to get their input.

**Announcements**

There will not be a meeting of the Graduate Council in the month of December, 2017.

Future meetings of the Graduate Council will be held in the Graduate Council Student Lounge, 111 Susan Campbell Hall.

The Council adjourned at 5:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Shanka Chakraborty
Graduate Council Secretary