Minutes Approved at the 600th Meeting – March 5, 2012

GRADUATE COUNCIL MINUTES

599th Meeting
February 6, 2012

MEMBERS PRESENT:  Arado, Garver, Gowen, Hathaway, Konen, Kopp, L’Allier, Macdonald, Morris, Osorio, Radosta, Sagarin, Selig, Sunderlin, Umoren, Willis, Zhou, Zittel

MEMBERS ABSENT:  Abdel-Motaleb, Beeson, Bennardo, Bond, Han, Patitu, Sido, Walker, Zaleski

OTHERS PRESENT:  Hughes (Secretary)

Sunderlin, Assistant Chair of the Graduate Council, called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

Approval of Minutes
Morris moved approval of the December 5, 2011, minutes; Gowen seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

New Business

Proposed Change to the APPM:  Sunderlin stated that there was an item related to graduate assistantships that needed to be brought to Council. He explained that the University of Illinois has recently dealt with tax issues related to tuition waivers. Graduate assistant tuition waivers are non-taxable for teaching assistants, non-instructional teaching assistants, and research assistants; however, tuition waivers for staff assistants are taxable after $5,250. There are approximately 350 staff assistants on-campus who are affected by the tax rule. In an effort to begin addressing the issue, Bond has drafted proposed changes to the “Policies Pertaining to Graduate Assistantships” in the APPM. The changes include the deletion of the non-instructional teaching assistant title, as well as more clear descriptions of the general duties associated with each. Sunderlin noted that departments may need to reorganize graduate assistant duties and rewrite job descriptions.

Willis expressed concern about eliminating the non-instructional teaching assistant category and lumping all teaching assistants into one category due to TOEFL/SPEAK Test requirements. Macdonald referred to language in the “Financial Support” section of the Graduate Catalog under “Assistantships,” which states, “In accordance with State statute, teaching assistants engaged in oral instruction in the classroom shall be persons who possess adequate competence in spoken English…” Willis stated that her concern was more about how Human Resource Services would handle the SPEAK Test requirement and how they would be able to differentiate between those students who are engaged in oral instruction and those who are not. Macdonald stated that it would be
determined by the job description provided by the department and that any exemptions from the requirements would still just need approval from Bond.

Hathaway suggested amending Item 1.a., Teaching Assistants, to read, “Their duties may include but are not limited to…” Willis added that the amendment should also be made in Item 1.c., Staff Assistants.

Sunderlin noted that in-state tuition for two semesters at 12 credit hours each is around $7,000 of tuition. If you subtract the $5,250, students are being taxed on approximately $2,000. Morris commented that out-of-state students are the ones who are most affected. Willis suggested that all graduate assistants should be charged in-state tuition. Sunderlin stated that Bond has been advocating for that change.

Konen commented that the information needed to be communicated with staff assistants as soon as possible. Willis stated that Bond indicated that Human Resource Services would soon begin withholding from paychecks under the assumption that each student would take 24 credit hours over the course of a year and withhold accordingly for tuition over the $5,250.

Morris commented that it was important for Bond to continue advocating for in-state tuition waivers for all graduate assistants. Willis agreed. Sunderlin stated that he would convey to Bond that Graduate Council encourages him to: 1) try to obtain in-state tuition for any student with a waiver; and 2) facilitate SPEAK Test exemptions for students who are teaching assistants but non-instructional.

Morris asked when the language would go into effect. Willis stated that it would likely go to the APPM Committee, which reports to the University Council. If the University Council does not act, then it takes effect. However, the University Council does have a right to object. Sunderlin commented that the University Council can veto, but it does not have to approve.

**Hathaway moved approval of the revisions to the “Policies Pertaining to Graduate Assistantships”** in the APPM with amendments in Items 1.a., Teaching Assistants, and 1.c., Staff Assistants, to read that duties “may include but are not limited to…” Willis seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. (See attached document.)

**Announcements**

**Update on HLC Accreditation Review Self-Study:** Macdonald provided timeline and subcommittee membership information to Graduate Council members. She stated that there were some corrections to the timeline that was discussed at the last Council meeting. This spring, the committees are meeting and beginning the review of evidence. All of the criteria speak back to the university’s mission statement, which is currently being updated and will soon be disseminated to the university community for a response. Macdonald encouraged members to visit the HLC website. At some point soon, there will be a university-wide call for participation. There will also be plenty of opportunity for volunteers next year to help with data collection, drafting, and responding to the criteria.
The final draft will be prepared in Summer 2013, and will likely be available on-line the first week of September for campus response. The final version will be prepared in Fall 2013, and the site visit will take place in Spring 2014. Macdonald will continue to keep the Graduate Council informed. If anyone wants more information or is interested in participating, please contact her.

Meeting adjourned at 10:45 a.m.
Policies Pertaining to Graduate Assistantships

Section IV. Item 1.

1. Graduate assistants will be designated as:
   a. Teaching Assistants: who aid in the instructional functions of the university and are engaged in oral instruction.
   b. Non-instructional Teaching Assistants: who aid in the instructional functions of the university and do not have an involvement in oral instruction.
   c. Research Assistants: who assist faculty and staff with academic and other research.
   d. Staff Assistants: who assist in roles other than teaching or research; e.g., as residence hall advisers, counselors, administrative assistants, or library assistants.

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Policies Pertaining to Graduate Assistantships

Section IV. Item 1.

1. Graduate assistants will be designated as:
   a. Teaching Assistants. Teaching Assistants aid in the instructional functions of the university. Their duties may include but are not limited to providing direct instruction in classroom, laboratory, and discussion sections, or in studio settings; tutoring students; mentoring engaged learning experiences for undergraduate students; grading tests and assignments; developing instructional materials; accompanying or coaching artistic performances; and proctoring examinations.
   b. Research Assistants. Research assistants apply research concepts, practices, or methods of scholarship by conducting experiments, analyzing data, presenting findings, collaborating with others in preparing publications, or conducting institutional research for an academic or administrative unit.
   c. Staff Assistants. Staff Assistants assist in roles other than teaching or research. Duties of a staff assistant may include but are not limited to serving as a resident adviser, counselor, academic adviser, secretary, receptionist, administrative assistant, or library assistant.

**Justification:** Job codes associated with the current descriptions are confusing. Non-instructional teaching and staff assistant positions seem to cause hiring units and HRS the most confusion. Clarifying the distinctions and ensuring that graduate assistants are properly classified will aid the university as it moves into compliance with federal regulations.

The new definitions are intended to aid hiring units as they determine which job description appropriately describes the work assigned a graduate assistant. The new definitions make more explicit the research and staff assistant categories, and they collapse the teaching and non-
instructional teaching descriptions into one category. Collapsing into one category the teaching and non-instructional teaching categories, while more clearly defining the intent of the remaining teaching role, ensures that the contributions to instruction that graduate assistants make are properly accounted for. Likewise, elimination of the ambiguous “non-instructional teaching” role makes even more plain to which category graduate assistants performing staff functions should be assigned.