Minutes Approved at the 597th Meeting – November 7, 2011

GRADUATE COUNCIL MINUTES
596th Meeting
September 12, 2011

MEMBERS PRESENT: Abdel-Motaleb, Arado, Beeson, Bennardo, Bond, Garver, Gowen, Hathaway, Konen, Kopp, Macdonald, Morris, Osorio, Patitu, Sagarin, Selig, Sido, Smith, Sunderlin, Umoren, Walker, Willis, Zaleski

MEMBERS ABSENT: Han, Radosta, Zittel

OTHERS PRESENT: Hughes (Secretary), Smith (Catalog Editor/Curriculum Coordinator), Wright (Former Secretary)

Brad Bond, Dean of the Graduate School, called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. Bond welcomed both new and returning Graduate Council members. He asked members to introduce themselves beginning with the graduate students. Bond highlighted the new faculty members to Graduate Council this year: Abdel-Motaleb (ELE), Garver, (HIST), Morris (AHCD), Patitu (CAHE), Sido (ART), and Willis (PHYS).

Priority Business

Establishment of 2011-2012 Standing Committees of the Graduate Council: Over the summer, Graduate Council members were asked to choose which committees they would be interested in serving on. Faculty members were placed on at least one committee of their choice. Additional vacancies have been filled with non-Council members to ensure appropriate representation by college. Approval for the standing committees list as distributed was moved by Morris, seconded by Willis; motion passed unanimously.

Selection of an Assistant Chair of the Graduate Council: This person will serve as acting chair when the chair is absent and assist with creating the agenda when called upon. The assistant chair also serves as an ex officio member on the University Council and Faculty Senate. A motion was made by Macdonald and seconded by Konen to nominate Sunderlin. Sunderlin accepted the nomination, which was unanimously approved.

Selection of a 2011-2012 graduate student representative to the University’s Libraries Advisory Committee: Bond informed members that Beeson agreed to serve as the representative on this committee since all of the graduate student seats on the standing committees of the Graduate Council have been filled. The Council unanimously approved his appointment.

Selection of a 2011-2012 graduate student representative to the Campus Security and Environmental Quality Committee: Umoren nominated Kayci Sterzer as the graduate student representative on this committee. The Council unanimously approved her appointment.
Committee Reports

Bond distributed brief reports to members of the Graduate Council.

*Criminal Disclosure Review Committee Report:* Bond stated that this is a fairly new committee that has a standing meeting on the last Friday of every month, but only needed to meet four times this year. The committee consists of five faculty members, as well as representatives from University Legal Services, Housing and Dining, and the judicial office. Bond reviewed the report. There have been seven appeals filed by applicants to the Graduate School since January, 2011, and six of those applicants were permitted to proceed with the application process.

Bond explained that applicants are required to answer a question on the Graduate School application asking whether or not they have ever been convicted of or are presently under indictment for a felony. If an applicant discloses the information, there must be an investigation and the applicant is asked to provide documents related to court proceedings, charges, police reports and probation reports. Bond informed members that two of the seven cases were more recent convictions. One of the applicants was under indictment while the other was on probation. The other five cases involved individuals who were convicted 15-20 years ago in their youth, which is more typical of the cases reviewed by the committee since 2009.

Willis asked if applicants who answer yes on the application are automatically denied and have to appeal. Bond stated that they are not automatically denied, but they are “frozen” in the process until the required documentation is received and reviewed. He added that no one has ever answered yes to the question then refused to provide details.

Sagarin recalled Graduate Council discussions last year and asked Bond whether or not he was comfortable with the current process. Bond stated that he was not, and that he would like to see the rules slightly altered so that anyone with a conviction who had passed probation for “X” number of years would automatically be allowed to proceed with the application process. Bond stated that the point of the committee and the reason there are external people from the university on the committee is to do what amounts to a risk assessment. As an example, Bond suggested that an individual who was convicted of drug charges back in the 1970s is not likely to pose a threat now. He said Legal Services has indicated that any process we devise is fine as long as we can document what we are doing.

Bond stated that there have not been any cases involving international students. He said he was concerned about what would happen with those students if they had to provide documentation. Abdel-Motaleb commented that Immigration would have taken care of those issues when the student applied for the visa. Bond agreed, but said the student would still have to answer the question on the application and the rules would still require the student to go through the process. Bond stated that his concern was more with translations of documents, etc. Sunderlin noted that applicants would have to volunteer the information in order for us to know if they were convicted overseas. Willis commented that that would be the case even if the conviction was domestic.
Macdonald asked if it was the same process for undergraduates who answer yes to that question. Bond stated that undergraduate applicants answer different questions about all convictions and any dismissals from another institution. He said the Graduate School deals with adults and did not want to ask a question about past behavior without more limits. In addition, other institutions that use a similar question on their application have indicated that it generates a high volume of unnecessary information.

Graduate Council Appeals Committee Report: Bond reviewed the report. There were forty-eight cases reviewed by the committee since May, 2010. The committee meets about three times per year, usually during intersession. Thirty-four of the cases were typical reinstatements; however, there was a vast, odd variety of other appeals that came through. Four of the cases involved additional attempts at a qualifying or comprehensive exam. Bond said that was an unusually high number that had not been seen in the last five years, at least. However, those cases were not from any one department and there did not appear to be a pattern.

New Business

Ad Hoc Committee on Graduate Learning Expectations: Bond reminded members that the University recently completed a review process and issued reports for baccalaureate goals. He stated that the Provost’s Office has asked if the Graduate Council would be willing to take on the task of doing something similar for graduate learning expectations. Bond suggested that part of the impetus for the question was not only due to the University’s experience in the baccalaureate review process, but also because of the report/study on learning expectations issued by the Lumina Foundation in December 2010. The Lumina Foundation had a specific goal in mind when issuing the report, which was to move us toward a national set of standards for learning expectations. Bond stated that whether we embrace that goal or not is probably irrelevant, but the idea that we would have a general, broad agreement on what learning expectations are by degree-level, is probably a good idea. Bond said he did not anticipate that it would take more than a few months for this committee to complete the task. He asked for volunteers from each of the colleges.

The following Graduate Council members agreed to serve on the committee: Abdel-Motaleb (EET), Garver (LAS), Gowen (BUS), Patitu (EDU), Sido (VPA), and Umoren (HHS).

Bond stated that he had a packet of information prepared for the committee and that he would convene the meetings.

Ad Hoc Committee on Graduate Assistantship and Tuition Waiver Policies: Bond informed members that this committee will review policies to make sure we are doing the best thing for NIU with regard to graduate assistantships and tuition waivers, particularly as they are associated with graduate assistantships. The task for this committee will likely take longer than just a few months to complete. Bond indicated there is a strong sense that we are probably not in alignment with what other institutions are doing. He
stated that we need to take a look to see what will work best for us within our culture, although that could be what we are presently doing.

Bond informed members that we have commissioned Hanover Research for a study. Hanover does research for institutions all over the country, and, since NIU is a client, it is not costing the Graduate School to have the study done. Hanover is in the process of finishing the study, which is a look at what other institutions do in terms of assistantships, minimum and maximum awards, and how they treat tuition waivers for graduate assistants, as well as for others. It is a lengthy study that includes approximately twenty institutions. Part of the charge for this committee will be to look at the study and our current policies to ensure we are doing the right thing for the institution. Bond asked for volunteers and said there could be more than one representative from each college since this is a longer-term committee. The committee may need to meet twice per month in the beginning.

The following Graduate Council members agreed to serve on the committee: Arado (LAW), Beeson (VPA), Hathaway (VPA), Konen (LAS), Morris (HHS), Sagarin (LAS), Sido (VPA), Umoren (HHS), and Willis (LAS).

Bond stated that he would try to find a representative from the College of Education. In addition, he will ask three other people to serve on the committee, in large part because of their interest in the topic, but also because of their access and ability to manipulate local data: 1) Jeff Hecht, Associate Dean in the College of Education; 2) Jeff Reynolds, Director of Operational Analysis and Reporting in the Office of the Provost; and 3) Lesley Rigg, Associate Dean in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Old Business

**Plus/Minus Grading System:** Konen asked about the status of the plus/minus grading system that was discussed at the last Graduate Council meeting in May. Bond thanked him for bringing up the issue. Bond stated that the graduate learning expectations and graduate assistantship and tuition waiver policies issues would normally have been assigned to the Graduate Council Standards Committee; however, that committee has a lot to deal with this year, which is why he created the ad hocs. One of the issues that the Standards Committee will deal with is the plus/minus grading system. Bond said there is a list of other issues for that committee.

Miscellaneous/Announcements

**Graduate School Application and Recruitment:** Abdel-Motaleb stated that he would like to see the Graduate School application revised to include items that would assist departments with recruitment of appropriate students. He said there was more than one issue that would need to be addressed on the application. Bond suggested that he submit something in writing and address it to the Standards Committee.

**Graduate Student Research Association:** Smith announced that the association will have a kick-off/organizational meeting on Thursday, September 22, from 4:45-5:45 p.m. in the HSC Illinois Room. They will elect officers and begin organizing the research
conference in March. He asked members to share the information with their graduate students and encourage them to attend. Bond asked Smith if he had information that he wanted distributed to graduate directors, chairs, and support staff. Smith indicated that he had already distributed the information to those individuals.

On behalf of the Graduate Council, Macdonald thanked Liz Wright for her hard work and dedication over the years. Members applauded in appreciation of all of her efforts.

Bond apologized for not introducing the individuals at the front of the room. He introduced Liz Wright, Administration Assistant to the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies, Dr. Freeman. He stated that Wright had served as secretary for Graduate Council under Drs. Freeman, Erman, Bose and others over the years, and has been a force of stability on the Graduate Council. Bond then introduced Dana Hughes, his administrative assistant, who came to the Graduate School on August 1 from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Donna Smith, Curriculum Coordinator and Catalog Editor, who sits in on various committee meetings of the Graduate Council.

Meeting adjourned at 10:33 a.m.