Minutes Approved at the 621st Meeting – April 6, 2015

GRADUATE COUNCIL MINUTES
620th Meeting
March 2, 2015

MEMBERS PRESENT: Arado, Armstrong, Bond, Gaillard, Goldblum, Gowen, Hathaway, Hoffman, Howell, Levin, Liu, Ma, Majumdar, Mantzke, Porter, Rodriguez, Schraufnagel, Smith, Stoddard, Ueckert, Woodstrup (for Bell)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Bostwick, Johnson, Lukaszuk, Osorio, Pamerla, Wilkins

OTHERS PRESENT: Brown (DGS, Music) Hughes (Secretary)

Bond called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

Approval of Minutes

Gowen moved approval of the December 1, 2014, minutes; Levin seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. Bond thanked Levin for her assistance editing minutes prior to distribution and commented that it was advantageous to have a faculty member from English on the Graduate Council.

New Business

Overloads and Underloads: Bond informed members that current policy requires students to obtain permission to enroll in more than 12 hours per semester. There are approximately 200 overload requests each year. Bond stated that the HLC requires that we report on the number of students taking excessive hours, although that process is relatively new and the consequences of excessive hours are still unknown. He told members he was looking for creative ideas with regard to overloads. Bond asked members to think about why we should care if a student chooses to enroll in more than 12 hours, especially considering the number of compressed classes and classes that start early or late.

Bond informed members that current policy also requires graduate assistants to obtain permission to take less than 9 hours. There are more than 500 underload requests each year. Again, Bond asked members why we should care if a student chooses to enroll in less than 9 hours. Bond asked members if any of their departments had a maximum time frame for students to receive graduate assistantships. Numerous members indicated that their departments limit graduate assistantships to 5-6 years for doctoral students and 3-5 semesters for master’s students. Goldblum suggested that graduate assistants may be held to higher standards with regard to enrollment to prohibit them from extending beyond the maximum time frame for a graduate assistantship, which would result in degree completion without a tuition waiver or stipend. Hathaway and Goldblum suggested changing the requirement for underload permission to less than 6 hours. Bond stated that he would take the idea to the next Standards Committee meeting for discussion.
**Affordable Care Act (ACA):** Under the ACA, Bond explained that NIU is responsible for making available health insurance for employees working 30 or more hours per week. Extra employment and retro pay for GAs are problematic in regard to employee benefits. Institutions across the country are addressing implementation in numerous ways.

Bond discussed issues related to retro pay and extra employment for graduate students, particularly graduate assistants. He cautioned members to pay particular attention to international students and the hours that they worked. Federal regulation strictly limits them to 20 hours per week during the Fall and Spring semester.

Bond was asked which office was responsible for paying health insurance for employees exceeding 30 hours per week. Bond responded that it was unknown at this time.

**Application Process:** Bond anticipates that soon the Graduate School will ask the State of Illinois to issue an RFP to facilitate purchase from a third-party vendor of an application for admission process. The current application was built around 2008, and it has been tweaked. However, the application is not as responsive or capable of self-management. Effectively, the industry standard has shifted over the past 3-5 years, and the best way to embrace the standard is to move to a third-party vendor.

Three specific weaknesses affect the current application: communication with applicants is cumbersome; self-management is impossible; and uploads are restricted and cumbersome.

Third-party application systems address each of those concerns. Council expressed interest in moving to a third-party vendor if greater self-management, video uploads, and speed of development were possible. Providing a better application is necessary to recruit students in the pipeline, and it provides improved customer service.

Because of estimated costs associated with moving to a third-party vendor, the Council recommended changing the application fee for domestic students to $60 (which is the same as the fee paid by international students) and $10 for non-degree students (Students-at-Large). In order to ensure that the Graduate School has the ability to pay the additional costs of a third-party application, the categories of applicants to whom application fee waivers are made will need to be reduced.

Bond indicated that he would take that proposal back to the Standards Committee for consideration. The Council would then have the opportunity to approve an increase with the understanding that a third-party vendor would be found.

**Graduate and Professional Student Association:** Bond presented a constitution for a Graduate Student Association that has been written and approved by the Graduate Student Advisory Committee. GSAC has been very interested in the notion. The Graduate Student Association would consist of all graduate students, and the association would have an elected Senate. The purpose of the association and senate is to ensure that graduate student interests are accurately and fully reflected before the administration of the university. Minor revisions were suggested, and the Council agreed to vet the
document with colleagues and graduate students prior to taking an electronic vote on the revisions. Among the revisions that were included were provisions to allow law students and non-degree students seats in the Senate. The Council approved the revised document unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 11:40 a.m.