Minutes Approved at the 625th Meeting – December 7, 2015

GRADUATE COUNCIL MINUTES
624th Meeting
November 2, 2015

MEMBERS PRESENT: Arado, Ayres, Bond, Clark Bremer, Gowen, Hathaway, Hoffman, Howell, Jaffee, James, Levin, Lukaszuk, Majumdar, Mantzke, McGuire, Menezes, Polala, Porter, Smith, Stoddard, Van Wienen, Yang

MEMBERS ABSENT: Armstrong, Bostwick, Osorio, Sims, Wilkins

OTHERS PRESENT: Arndt (CLAS), Hughes (Secretary), Smith (Catalog Editor/Curriculum Coordinator)

Bond called the meeting to order at 10:07 a.m.

Approval of Minutes

Gowen moved approval of the September 14, 2015, minutes; Levin seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Committee Reports

Graduate Council Curriculum Committee: Howell reviewed the minutes of the October 12, 2015, meeting for approval. He stated that there were numerous revisions and new courses approved by the committee, but no substantial policy changes to report. Howell referred to a discussion about plagiarism software at the meeting. He indicated that Bostwick had suggested discussing with Graduate Council the possibility of centrally purchasing plagiarism software for theses and dissertations. Bond stated that he listed the idea as a walk-on agenda item for discussion later in the meeting. Mantzke moved approval of the minutes; Stoddard seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. (Curriculum Committee minutes and catalog changes are available at: http://www.niu.edu/u_council/committees/minutes/gccc/index.shtml.)

Graduate Council Standards Committee: Bond reported on the September 21, 2015, meeting. He reviewed proposed changes to Section IV, “Graduate Assistantship Policies and Procedures,” in the Academic Policies and Procedures Manual. The majority of the revisions reflect recent changes prompted by the Affordable Care Act and NIU’s need to respond to it. Bond noted one other significant change, which regards graduate assistants and summer enrollment. Specifically, graduate assistants on payroll during the spring semester do not have to enroll during the summer term immediately following in order to maintain their graduate assistant status. Howell moved approval of the revisions; James seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. The proposed changes will be forwarded to the APPM Advisory Committee. (See attached document.)
Graduate Faculty Membership Committee: Bond reported on the September 30, 2015, meeting. The committee reviewed the Department of Economics’ revised criteria for graduate faculty membership. Economics uses a point system for publications and, based on feedback from external reviewers, has taken steps to relax publication requirements slightly to reflect current standards in the profession. The revised criteria include a reduction in the required number of points for full (150 to 100) and senior (250 to 200) graduate faculty status. There are no other changes to the document. The Department of Economics provided significant justification for relaxing the publication point requirement and shared with the committee relevant sections of its policy manual. Committee members unanimously approved the proposed revisions. Levin moved approval of the revised criteria; Hoffman seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

University Fellowship Committee: Bond reported on the October 26, 2015, meeting. The committee reviewed nominations and selected winners for the thesis and dissertation competitions. The Outstanding Dissertation Award, which comes with a $750 cash prize, will be awarded to Stephen Cole from the Department of Physics. Three students are receiving the Outstanding Thesis Award, which comes with a $500 cash prize: Eden Anderson from the Department of Psychology, Alex Haberlie from the Department of Geography, and Disa Patel from the School of Nursing and Health Studies. The students will be recognized at the Outstanding Graduate Student Recognition Reception next semester. He acknowledged and thanked members of the University Fellowship Committee—James Burton, Kyu Taek Cho, Sean Farrell, Janet Hathaway, Judith Lukaszuk, James McGuire, Nestor Osorio, and Thomas Smith.

New Business

Plagiarism Software: Bond asked Howell to introduce the topic. Howell explained that there was a discussion at the Curriculum Committee meeting about the need for centralized plagiarism software or some other method of checking for plagiarism in theses and dissertations. He indicated that Bostwick had suggested having a conversation with Graduate Council about the topic. Bond was open to a discussion at Graduate Council, but indicated that normal protocol would be to take it to the Standards Committee first. He asked members for their thoughts on whether there was a significant problem with plagiarism as well as on acquiring the software. Bond was asked if purchasing such software had ever been discussed in the Graduate School. Bond stated that he had spoken with Carolyn Law, the Graduate School dissertation advisor, about it over the summer. He indicated that some software produces many false positive results and that using it could be a cumbersome process. Many Graduate Council members felt that quality control should be the responsibility of the thesis/dissertation committee and, ultimately, the advisor. Others felt that centralized plagiarism software might be useful as a preliminary screening method. Levin suggested writing a local definition of plagiarism and creating a document for students to sign at the defense. Bond acknowledged the notion of a declaration of the work’s originality. He commented that he would consider all the magnificent ideas coming from Graduate Council and indicated that he would take the topic to the next Standards Committee meeting for further discussion.

Meeting adjourned at 10:31 a.m.
Policies Pertaining to Graduate Assistantships

Section IV. Item 1.

Appointment of a Graduate Assistant

12. A graduate assistant may not accept additional employment in any capacity with Northern Illinois University except by permission of the chair of the major department, the student's academic advisor, the head of the unit in which the graduate assistantship is held, and the office of the Dean of the Graduate School. Hiring units must not permit graduate assistants to begin working outside their assistantship assignment without first securing permission from the Graduate School Human Resource Services. Non-immigrant graduate students are strictly prohibited by federal regulations from working more than 20 hours per week while classes are in session.

Enrollment Requirements for Graduate Assistants

22. Graduate students holding assistantships during a fall or spring semester are expected to enroll in 9 semester hours of course work no later than the close of business on the first day of classes. In the summer session, graduate assistants are expected to enroll for 6 semester hours no later than the close of business on the first day of classes. However, assistants who held an appointment in a spring semester and who remain degree-seeking students are not required to enroll in the following summer term in order to maintain their assistantship, though they must submit an underload petition. Failure to register as described, or failure to remain enrolled for the prescribed number of hours, or failure to secure permission to enroll in fewer hours may result in immediate termination of the appointment by Human Resource Services.

25. Underloads for more than 3 semester hours will be granted only under extraordinary circumstances or as authorized in the Graduate Catalog or in the Academic Policies and Procedures Manual. For example, an underload for more than 3 semester hours will be granted to a student whose assistantship duties require sustained participation in a summer field school, which because of the field school’s location precludes completion of additional coursework. Or, for example, a graduate assistant who held an appointment in spring semester and is appointed to teach a course in the summer may receive permission to enroll in less than 3 semester hours.

Extra Employment for Graduate Assistants

Section IV. Item 9.

In unusual instances, the Graduate School. During the term of their appointment, graduate assistants are prohibited from working in any capacity at NIU for more than 20 hours per week.
Human Resource Services may allow for the extra employment of full-time (20-hour-per-week) graduate assistants appointed to less than .50 FTE if the additional work is “infrequent,” “irregular,” and not aligned with their current assistantship. If a department wishes to employ a graduate assistant for extra time, the Request for Extra Employment for Graduate Assistant Form must be submitted to the office of the Dean of the Graduate School Human Resource Services by the department or other unit requesting the employment.

Extra employment of a graduate assistant holding a half-time (10 hours per week) or three-quarter time (15 hours per week) appointment may also be requested by completing the Request for Extra Employment for Graduate Assistant form. Students on these appointment types may be approved for the difference between the assistantship duty obligation and 20 hours per week. Departments desiring to hire a .25 FTE or .37 FTE half- or quarter-time assistant for extra time may be required to make an additional assistantship appointment.

In addition to consideration of the information on this form, decisions to approve the request will be based on the student's good academic standing and satisfactory progress toward the degree. Permission may take as long as ten (10) days to process and is not guaranteed. The student must not begin the extra work until permission has been granted by the Graduate School Human Resource Services.

The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) strictly limits foreign students entering the United States on a non-immigrant visa to 20 hours of total employment per week while the University is in session, and university policy prohibits graduate assistants, including all students on a non-immigrant visa from working more than 20 hours per week at any time.

Justification: The above changes seek to accomplish three goals, two of which seek to ensure that NIU remains compliant with the Affordable Care Act. 1). They clarify that graduate assistants are prohibited from working in any capacity for more than 20 hours per week. 2). They remove the Graduate School from approving extra-employment for graduate assistants appointed to less than 20 hours per week. 3). They permit a Spring assistant who also holds a Summer assistantship to register for 0 hours. The latter item will allow departments to retain graduate assistants as assistants, which will simplify business processes in Human Resources and make it easier to remain compliant with the Affordable Care Act.
Tuition-Waivers Associated with Graduate Assistantships

Section IV. Item 7.

After the Personnel Action Form (PAF) has been approved, information pertaining to the value of tuition waiver and stipend level are processed by Human Resource Services and submitted to the Bursar's Office where the waiver is entered into the computerized billing system. Tuition waivers are authorized only after the PAF has been fully approved.

Graduate assistants, regardless of residency, are billed tuition at a rate approved by the Board of Trustees that is equivalent to the in-state tuition rate. That annually calculated rate is available to graduate assistants as long as they are eligible for a tuition waiver associated with their employment as a graduate assistant, including during a trailing summer term. The value of a tuition waiver is determined by the calculation of the instructional component of tuition, as well as the length of the assistantship and other relevant policies. The value of tuition waivers associated with graduate assistants is announced after the Board of Trustees approves tuition rates for the coming academic year.

A student with a full academic year appointment will receive a waiver for the number of hours in which he or she is enrolled. A graduate assistant appointed for at least twelve weeks in a Fall or Spring semester will receive a waiver for the number of hours in which he or she is enrolled; an assistant appointed for at least four weeks during a summer term will receive a waiver. If a student resigns or is terminated prior to the completion of at least twelve weeks of the appointment in Fall or Spring or four weeks in summer, then the tuition waiver will be prorated. Tuition waivers will be prorated in instances where students are not on assistantship appointments for a full semester. For example, a student working only 11 3/16 weeks during a 16-week semester will receive a tuition waiver for only 11/16 3/16 of the number of hours in which he or she is enrolled. Tuition waivers cannot be used for study abroad courses and are not applicable to contract courses. Receipt of any waiver depends on proper enrollment during the semester or term.

Tuition Waiver for the Summer Session. A student may receive a tuition waiver for the summer term, if they hold an assistantship during the summer term, or if held an assistantship appointment for at least 8 weeks during the spring semester (see Section IV, Item 1.14). Receipt of a tuition waiver depends on proper enrollment during the semester or term.

Residency. For purposes of calculating the value of a tuition waiver associated with a graduate assistantship appointment, the graduate assistant is considered an in-state or out-of-state resident by the same criteria that are applied to other graduate students.

Justification: In order to eliminate the need for back-dating assistantship appointments and thus creating a need for retro-pay, this policy allows late appointments to receive a full tuition waiver for a semester, thereby removing one of the perverse incentives to back-date appointments and to require retro pay.