Minutes Approved at the 631st Meeting – December 5, 2016

GRADUATE COUNCIL MINUTES
630th Meeting
November 7, 2016

MEMBERS PRESENT:   Barnes, Beyer, Bond, Clark Bremer, Collins, Hoffman, Howell, James, Jones, Kortegast, Majumdar, Mantzke, Olson, Osorio, Polansky, Silver, Van Wienen, Wilkins

MEMBERS ABSENT:    Arado, Diccar, Gowen, Gaillard, Gallaher, Luginbill, Nimbekar, Smith, Weier

GUESTS:             Law (Thesis and Dissertation Office)

OTHERS PRESENT:     Hughes (Secretary), Klaper (Ombudsperson), Smith (Catalog Editor/Curriculum Coordinator)

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

Approval of Minutes

Howell moved approval of the September 12, 2016, minutes; Mantzke seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Committee Reports

Graduate Colloquium Committee: Bond reported on the November 3, 2016, meeting. There were 40 proposals for colloquium speakers in Spring 2017, all of which were funded. Bond noted that it was the best-attended meeting that Debbie Williams has seen in her four years of coordinating graduate colloquium. He also thanked Michael Barnes for volunteering to chair the Executive Committee this year. Barnes noted that the Executive Committee is responsible for reviewing late or “Window of Opportunity” proposals and asked members to share with their departments and colleges that the committee will entertain last-minute requests for speakers, so long as funding is available.

Graduate Council Curriculum Committee: Howell reviewed the minutes of the October 10, 2016, meeting. He noted approval of the UNIV 590 course revision from 1-9 to 0-9 credit hours, which will allow students to enroll without cost. In addition, the committee approved UNIV 600, which is a new lab safety course for students in the hard sciences. Regarding duplication issues, Howell took a moment to recognize the collaboration between the College of Education and the College of Business to easily come to an agreement on a new course proposal in the Department of Counseling, Adult and Higher Education, which is in the pipeline for GCCC approval. Hoffman moved approval of the minutes; Polansky 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 19 and October 17, 2016, meetings. He reviewed proposed revisions to the front matter of the Graduate Catalog. The first change was adding computer science to the list of programs that do not require a comprehensive examination for masters-level students. Olson asked why a department would not want to require a comprehensive exam since it is a good assessment tool. Bond indicated that the Department of Computer Science had not found the exams to be particularly useful for assessment but was well-aware of the need to re-formulate its assessment plan. Wilkins move approval of the revision; Howell seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

The other catalog change was adding special education to the list of programs that are exempt from the GRE requirement. James moved approval of the revision; Polansky seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Bond also reviewed the proposed “Faculty Credentials Policy,” which will be included in the Academic Policies and Procedures Manual. Bond explained that there have always been faculty credential policies for graduate-level teaching. The Higher Learning Commission now has a set of assumed practices that address both graduate- and undergraduate-level teaching credentials. The HLC states that individuals teaching master’s-level courses should have a master’s degree in the field being taught or at least 18 graduate-level hours in that discipline plus a master’s degree or that the university has and adheres to policies that treat any exceptions. The same applies to doctoral-level teaching, but with a doctoral degree. Bond stated that the proposed NIU policy was drafted by a group of administrators then taken to various university committees for input and has morphed into the current version. He noted that the Standards Committee had some great suggestions that were incorporated. Bond stated that the policy needed to be implemented in order to remain compliant and asked members if there was anything that may have been missed with regard to exceptions. He told members that the Council of Deans would be reviewing the latest document at an upcoming meeting.

Olson asked about faculty with clinical doctorates who are on the clinical assistant professor track. She indicated that the proposed policy states that they cannot teach at the doctoral-level. Collins pointed out the statement, “except in the most extraordinary circumstances as noted above and must secure approval to do so through the Office of the Provost,” but questioned the actual meaning of the statement. Olson indicated that her department currently obtains permission for clinical faculty to teach courses for three-year terms. She stated that her concerns were how to get clinical faculty qualified to teach doctoral-level courses and whether departments would have to do paperwork on an annual basis. Bond said that dealing with clinical faculty might require a different set of changes in the APPM, but indicated that he would discuss the issue with others at another meeting on the topic later in the day.

Bond stated that this policy attempts to discourage having graduate students teach other graduate students, but it allows for exceptions. Hoffman pointed out a necessary wording change in one bullet point regarding graduate teaching assistants in the exceptions section for undergraduate courses. Bond thanked her for bringing the issue to his attention. He asked members to forward concrete issues, changes, and/or suggestions within the next week. Due to the timeline of implementation, Bond informed members that the proposed
“Faculty Credentials Policy” would not likely be brought back to Graduate Council for further review. However, once it is approved, it will prompt an APPM change to the “Policies and Procedures for Graduate Faculty Membership,” which will require the approval of Graduate Council.

**Graduate Faculty Membership Committee:** Bond reported on the October 27, 2016, meeting. The committee met to discuss the School of Theatre and Dance graduate-faculty review. This was a carryover item from last spring. Theatre and Dance recommended renewal of two senior members and ten full members. There were no proposed revisions to the school’s criteria. The committee unanimously approved the recommendations.

**University Fellowship Committee:** Bond reported on the October 19, 2016, meeting. The committee reviewed nominations and selected winners for the thesis and dissertation competitions. There were six nominations for the dissertation award and three nominations for the thesis award. The Outstanding Dissertation Award, which comes with a $750 cash prize, was awarded to Francois Lemery from the Department of Physics. The Outstanding Thesis Award, which comes with a $500 cash prize, was awarded to Catherine Ausland from the Department of Biological Sciences. The students will be recognized at the Outstanding Graduate Student Recognition Reception next semester.

Van Wienen brought up a topic that was discussed at the meeting about how difficult it is for people in the humanities to evaluate dissertations in the sciences and vice versa. He stated that the discussion led to a suggestion that the committee be broken down into two divisions for evaluation purposes. Bond indicated that the tentative plan is to have two groups for evaluating theses and dissertations next year: one for arts, humanities, and social sciences; the other for STEM and health sciences. The thesis & dissertation competitions would be removed from the domain of the University Fellowship Committee and two new standing committees of the Graduate Council would be formed. Bond emphasized that it would require more faculty volunteers who would be willing to read. These committees would only meet once for the sole purpose of selecting winners for the thesis and dissertation competitions.

Collins asked Bond if he would consider offering a similar award or fellowship for clinical doctorate students who do high quality research projects. Bond indicated that he would consider it, but it would not be a part of this process. It would have to be a separate competition. He explained that the reason he included the health sciences with the hard sciences is less because of the clinical and doctoral-level preparation and more because there were consecutive years in which the master’s thesis prize went to students in health fields, and those theses had a decidedly scientific bent. Bond stated that, in those instances, they resembled the sciences more than anything else.

Graduate Council confirmed support of the new process. Bond indicated that it would take effect next year and there would be four award recipients instead of two.
New Business

**Graduate Stipends:** Jones asked if there have been any discussions about program prioritization recommendations to increase graduate assistant stipends. Bond stated that there have been discussions that have prompted mostly data and fact-gathering at this time. He informed members that the Graduate Council is responsible for determining minimum stipends, and this will need to be done relatively soon for academic year 2017-18. He explained that, in past years, the rate has been set in reference to the Consumer Price Index. Over the past decade especially, the CPI has annually changed at a slow rate. Bond stated that there is nothing in policy that states the Graduate Council has to continue doing it this way; it just says the Graduate Council has to set a minimum. In 2012, the Graduate Council was asked to do something different to raise stipends, but this body said no because there will be no guarantee where the money comes from. Jones asked if the Graduate Council raised stipends and there were no funds to support those stipends, would that mean fewer graduate assistantships. Bond confirmed. He stated that the minimum stipend for a 20-hour assistantship is $437 semi-monthly. The Graduate Council no longer sets a maximum stipend amount. Bond said discussions about graduate stipends have been going on for a long time.

Jones asked if Springfield were to pass a budget, would there be more money for graduate assistant stipends. Klaper responded that her understanding was that, even with a budget, everything would have to be reexamined because NIU has been operating in the red for the past two years. Bond suggested that there may be enough interest and pressure on this topic to make some progress, particularly if there was a state budget.

Clark Bremer asked if discussions addressed the disparity in pay across campus. Bond stated that the disparity is known and is a national phenomenon. Some disciplines are paid less than others. He indicated there probably would not be a corrective step in that direction, and suggested that the better solution might be to try to move stipends closer to the national averages within the disciplines. Clark Bremer asked if there was anything prohibiting graduate assistants from accepting external appointments. Bond stated that there is no university policy prohibiting graduate assistants from accepting employment outside of NIU. Bond referenced results of the 2012 GA survey, and stated that faculty were surprised at the number of graduate assistants who had outside employment.

Polansky commented that there was a discussion in his college about graduate assistant stipends, and people were surprised to learn how much of the stipend goes back to the university for non-instructional tuition/fees. Bond stated that students commented on that a lot in the survey and some noted just how many NIU paychecks it would take them to pay off their fees. Bond said that students with a 9-hour course load pay $1,223 of non-instructional tuition per term, excluding health insurance. Members acknowledged that fees have gotten worse and the amount has increased. James indicated that NIU fees are higher than most other institutions, which has significantly affected recruitment in his department. He added that NIU health insurance is also high, but still cheaper than many other institutions. Clark Bremer commented on the year that the cost of health insurance tripled and caused students to use credit cards and go into debt to pay for it. She noted that insurance has gone back down, but stated that it did not compensate for the year when students with dependents paid $6,000 for health insurance. Bond agreed. It was
noted that many of the health care exchanges are cheaper than NIU. Bond stated that it depended on the individual, but usually that was the case for the traditional aged graduate student who has resided in Illinois for one year. It was suggested that fees may be more of an issue than graduate stipends, depending on the discipline.

Bond stated that this is an ongoing issue. Continued discussions are important. Bond indicated there was more to come on stipends, but he did not know the pace. He told members to raise the question any time and that he would tell them what he knew.

**Thesis and Dissertation Office:** Bond introduced Carolyn Law, Thesis and Dissertation Advisor in the Graduate School. Law stated that there have been changes in the role of the Thesis and Dissertation Office over the past few years and invited members to an open house hosted by her office on Tuesday, November 15, from 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. in the thesis office suite, Adams Hall 103/104.

Law informed members that she has been a dissertation/thesis advisor for over 20 years, and emphasized the potential value of the recent transformation, which is innovative in higher education and graduate scholarship with a goal of becoming a model for the future of the enterprise. She stated that the office has become a comprehensive student support unit for thesis and dissertation writers at every phase and a resource for advisory faculty. Law expressed a strong desire to engage thesis and dissertation writers earlier in their work so that they submit documents that reflect well on the advisor, committee, department and the university. Law stated that she believes the common objective is the timely completion of high quality theses and dissertations. She is confident the new infrastructure can help to move along that path, but she needs advisory faculty to better understand what the office does so they can direct students to them earlier in their work.

Law asked Graduate Council members to help communicate this information to advisory faculty. She told members she wanted to welcome them in person to the Thesis and Dissertation Office on November 15 to talk more about what the office currently does and answer any questions. Law indicated she would also like faculty to share their thoughts on what the office can do to better support students, who are expected to submit theses and dissertations in approval-ready form. Advisory faculty need to be aware of the cultural change in what the Thesis and Dissertation Office does and can do. Law asked members to come to the open house and spread the word to faculty and staff who advise graduate students. She stated that an email about the open house went out to graduate directors and chairs. Bond indicated that we would also share that email with Graduate Council. He informed members that Law has training space in Adams 103 with tables and a projector. Bond stated that there are also two graduate assistants who work in the office, and they take appointments and have walk-in hours. Law’s office will also go out to departments and talk to students in various classes and cohorts to talk about the genre and the thesis/dissertation process. Bond said that the Graduate School is trying to get out of the “gotcha” business at the tail end and into the education business at the front end. Please refer students to the Thesis and Dissertation Office website: [http://www.grad.niu.edu/grad/thesis/index.shtml](http://www.grad.niu.edu/grad/thesis/index.shtml).

Meeting adjourned at 11:12 a.m.