

The University of Alabama in Huntsville
Graduate Council Minutes

May 21, 2021
1:00 p.m. via Zoom

Members Present: Michael Anderson, ENG Associate Dean
Jennifer Bail, NUR
Yeqing Bao, Int'l Services Associate Dean*
Dylan Baun, HIS
Joseph Conway, EH
Eric Fong, MGT
Karen Frith, NUR
Robert Griffin, SCI Associate Dean
Wafa Hakim Orman, BUS Associate Dean*
Sean Lane, Acting Dean of Graduate School*
Phillip Ligrani, MAE
Matthew Niemiller, BIO
David Moore, Library*
Tingting Que, FIN
DongSheng Wu, MAT

Members Absent: Ellise Adams, NUR
Junpeng Guo, ECE
Jason O'Brien, EDU
Janet Waller, Registrar*

Proxies: None

Visitors: Robert Preece, Space Science
Aurora Torres, Psychology

* Non-Voting Member

Approval of Minutes from April Meeting

A motion was made by Phillip Ligrani to approve the April minutes and was seconded by Joseph Conway. The vote was unanimous to accept the minutes as provided.

Update on Graduate School/International Services Searches

1. Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate School - Since the last Graduate Council Meeting, the search committee has reviewed the candidates who participated in the Zoom interviews and provided strengths and weaknesses on each. The Provost has determined a group of four finalists. Although the names of the finalists cannot be announced until they have agreed to move forward with the interview process, it is planned that the candidates will visit campus for at least part of the interview process. Each candidate will meet with various individuals and groups, including the President, Provost, Vice Presidents, Deans, Associate Deans, Search Committee, Directors' Council and various other Directors, Faculty Senate, Faculty, and Staff from the Graduate School and International Services. The interviews are being targeted for the first few weeks of June. Anticipate having the final candidate in place late summer/early fall.
2. Academic Services Coordinators - These two positions are new and will consist of staff who will work directly with students to help them through various challenges with a focus on student engagement. The first of the two coordinators, Melanie Stull, will begin work June 9. The second of the two coordinators' positions was posted on Wednesday of this week.

Update on Admissions System

The University is moving from CAS/WebAdMIT to Banner Recruit; the implementation process has already begun and finalization for opening up for admissions might actually be sooner than late June / early July as initially anticipated. Haley Lewis, Director of Enrollment Management who oversees graduate admissions, will reach out to all graduate faculty reviewers at the department level to offer training and plans to transition to Banner Recruit. Her team will also develop training documents and videos and provide departments the opportunity to train on Banner Recruit in person or via Zoom.

Banner Recruit will be helpful in a number of ways. There are reasons why we used the CAS system, but one of the real drawbacks was that it doubled our application fees, which is a particular problem especially for international students. In addition, because of the way the financial model was set up, we couldn't offer application fee waivers. With Banner Recruit we are going back to the \$60 application fee that was in place before we used the CAS system, and we will also be able to implement application fee waivers.

Draft Bylaws Discussion

The draft of the bylaws uses language primarily from the Graduate Student Handbook. There is some language included that is used in UA's graduate council bylaws, but there are a number of differences. We are largely using the prior structure of the graduate council elections and such. There are three major suggestions/changes to these Bylaws:

1. Addition of a Student Member to the Committee - This was a suggestion based on UA's graduate council having two student members, but their council specifies the organizations that will produce these members. Our draft doesn't include the latter because we don't have the same types of highly organized graduate student associations across the university. If our council thinks a student member is a reasonable item to add to the Bylaws, the Graduate Dean could work with the existing student organizations to appoint a student member. Maybe, in the future, there will be a university-wide graduate student association that we could utilize for this purpose. As a side note, the student members would be voting members, like at UA.

Dr. Bao asked whether it would be a good idea for our graduate student body to have some sort of graduate student assembly. Dr. Lane agreed and mentioned that there are some student organizations that do exist within various departments that could potentially be used to build an overall larger student organization. Dr. Frith suggested that if a faculty member could receive a course release or this would substitute for a teaching requirement for a faculty member, then they could share a student organization and be the advisor to it, which might garner more support from the Administration.

Dr. Baun commented that he assumed, in the early stages, that graduate council members will play a fairly integral role in recruiting and recommending students and suggested that the language be opened up to include something like, *in collaboration with graduate student associations on campus and graduate council members*, or something similar. Dr. Lane had no issue with adding this language as did no one else.

2. Election of a faculty Chair and Associate Chair - We have previously discussed the possibility of a Chair and a Chair-elect. One alternative to this model is to have the Chair Elect be the Associate Chair first. Most of the time, this model creates a Chair without having to push everything back, in terms of all the elections and it also provides flexibility from year to year on the Chairs. The Chair and the Associate Chair would be elected by the Council members. The main point is that these two people would be on the Executive Committee of the Graduate Council. So, there would be the Dean, a Chair and the Associate Chair whose primary role would be to meet in advance of the Graduate Council meetings to discuss the Agenda.

Dr. Ligrani asked several questions with regards to the new election of a Chair and Associate Chair, including their relationship to the new Associate Provost/Dean. How will the Chair and Associate Chair interact with the Associate Provost? And then, who runs the council meetings? Will it be the Chair or will it be the Associate Provost? Dr. Lane responded that, normally, if you have a faculty Chair then the Chair would run the meetings. Dr. Lane also responded that the current draft states the Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate School is an ex officio member. So, the AP/Dean will be in

attendance but the Chair runs the meeting; it is a partnership between the graduate council and the Dean who often brings things to the graduate council for input. Dr. Lane said it is like any kind of situation where you're working collaboratively — the advantage for this council is having clearer, recognizable faculty leadership, not because it's not already there, but because it helps formalize the importance of the Graduate Council as a university-wide body elected by the graduate faculty. This is a way to characterize a partnership that is already occurring using a more formal structure.

3. Increase Limit to Three Consecutive Terms - Dr. Lane explained that this change to the Bylaws would increase the limit to three terms versus what is stated in the current handbook as a two-term limit. The two-year terms would remain but would be limited to three terms total, which would be beneficial with regards to knowledge retention. Two-year terms also allow members to show themselves and provide the opportunity for graduate faculty to vote members off if they so choose after that time period. There were no additional comments about increasing the maximum term limit.

Dr. Lane concluded the bylaws discussion by stating that agreed-upon changes from today's meeting would be added to the draft in a Google doc for sharing and then it will be time for commentary; members should anticipate voting on the new bylaws in the fall.

Academic Bankruptcy Discussion

Dr. Lane screen-shared the current undergraduate policy, explaining the reason we extend academic bankruptcy at the undergraduate level is because various things can happen that might result in some students needing a second chance. These policies, the academic bankruptcy policy and the retroactive withdrawal policy, are paired with each other at the undergraduate level, in that, per the retroactive withdrawal policy, one can go back and withdraw from all classes during that semester within two years; this policy also applies to graduate students. The academic bankruptcy policy goes back a minimum of two years. So, the policies were constructed to work in tandem so that one has to wait two years to declare bankruptcy at which time all courses/grades are erased. In most cases, the information stays on the student transcript but is not used to compute GPA. (At this point, Dr. Lane reviewed various policies from other universities from the shared-screen document).

Initial reactions to the academic bankruptcy discussion were comments from various members, including a question about waiting periods for GPA eligibility; a request to see something that would not allow for amnesty when academic misconduct was the reason for the failures; knowing what the feedback is from the registrar; a request allowing departments to opt out; whether colleges provide input (such as nursing and education, especially in licensed situations); differences among colleges for minimum grade requirements; and the potential for a general university policy that would require support at the program and college level. The council informally agreed to move forward with a concrete policy draft.

English Proficiency Admissions Standards

Dr. Lane reminded the council that UAH recently ended a program, ILC, for international students who had lower English Proficiency test scores. Through that program, they could increase their English proficiency and go on to pursue a graduate degree. With that program gone, applicants' only option is to meet certain standards for test scores (TOEFL, IELTS or one of several other assessment tests).

In addition, there is a set of higher criteria just for GTAs. This is not uncommon at other universities, as sometimes this is mandated per state laws. But we are having an issue with monitoring. GTA offers come from departments and it does not appear they always monitor this criteria before creating offer letters. The Graduate Admissions unit does not compare scores to the higher criteria because they don't deal with GTAs. Because offer letters come to the Graduate School very late in the process, and immigration paperwork has to be prepared well before that, this can lead to problems.

Dr. Lane asked for feedback about ways to address the problem. We could keep the higher GTA standard, and work to develop a process by which we make sure that people at the department level who are making the decisions about offering GTAs are following that standard. This might also involve developing a process by which applicants that fall below the standard are evaluated with respect to proficiency. The other option is to revisit whether the standard is having the intended outcome, and consider discontinuing it. Suggestions from GC members included a potential bridge program and possibly offer flexibility on the admissions criteria but empower departments to use these criteria for GTAs while providing help to them. The GC decided to revisit this issue in the fall.

Open Discussion / Other Issues

None

Adjournment

There being no further topics to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 2:32 p.m.

/srk