Number: 3
Date: November 16, 2007


Absent: J. Ainsworth, W. Batchelor, P. Bonfanti, T. Chamblee, F. Coleman, R. Kaminski, K. Schulz, R. Shivaji, B. Spencer, P. Sullivan,

Guests: A. Rankins, N. Ponder-Lueg

1. Dr. Barbara Spencer was not present and the meeting was chaired by Graduate Council Vice Chair Dr. Dwayne Wise. He called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. in 611 Allen Hall.

2. Dr. Wise asked for any revisions to the minutes (October 26, 2007).

   Motion was made by Mr. Mark Thomas and seconded by Dr. Lynne Cossman to accept the minutes.

   Minutes were approved.

3. University Committee on Courses and Curricula (UCCC) Report (handout)

   UCCC meeting coincided with this Graduate Council meeting. Ms. Karin Lee presented a handout regarding the Program Modification for the Doctor of Philosophy in History Degree.

   UCCC asked Graduate Council to look at the proposed modification because it involves a change in the research requirement. The current requirement reads: Each student pursuing the Ph.D. degree in history must demonstrate proficiency in two research skills. This requirement may be fulfilled by demonstrating a reading knowledge of two foreign languages, or by demonstrating a reading proficiency in one foreign language and proficiency in quantitative methods.

   The proposed change requires doctoral students to demonstrate proficiency in at least one research skill by the end of the fourth semester of his or her enrollment in the program. This requirement may be fulfilled by demonstrating a reading knowledge of a foreign language, or by demonstrating proficiency in another research skill appropriate to the student’s field of study.
In addition, OGS needs clarification as to how the research requirement will be monitored. Currently, OGS does not check for any research requirement other than the number of dissertation hours during the degree audit.

Discussion followed. It was determined that the Department of History will track and evaluate the research requirement. The Office of the Graduate School will accept the signed Program of Study and Admission to Candidacy form as proof that the student has passed the research requirement.

Dr. Don Jackson voiced his concerns regarding the “downgrading” of the rigor of the doctoral program in history by changing the requirement from two foreign languages to one foreign language or another research skill in place of the foreign language requirement.

A motion to deny the proposed program modification to the Ph.D. in history degree program was made by Dr. Jackson and seconded by Dr. Larry Barrow.

Discussion followed. Dr. Gilbert suggested that Graduate Council table the motion and invite the history department to speak to the matter. Dr. Cossman questioned whether Graduate Council should get involved with decisions regarding the rigor of a degree program. Dr. Scott Willard stated that decision regarding the field of study should best be made within the respective department.

Dr. Wise called for a motion to table the previous motion. Dr. Dan Reynolds made a motion to table the previous motion until the next Graduate Council meeting and request someone from the history department to speak to the matter. The motion was seconded by Mr. Thomas. The previous motion was tabled.

Toward the end of the meeting, Dr. Willard asked Graduate Council to reconsider the motion to table the program modification in history. This action would severely impact the History Department because of the time constraints in getting any degree modifications passed.

Dr. Cossman made a motion to accept the program modification to the Doctor of Philosophy in History degree. The motion was seconded by Dr. Willard.

Graduate Council voted and the motion carried. Dr. Jackson voiced his concerns again and voted against the acceptance of the modification to the degree program.

4. Report from Graduate Studies (OGS) (Handout)

Dr. William Person presented the following report:

a) As of November 12, 2007, a total of 738 potential graduate students have applied for Spring 2008 admission. Of that number, 220 have been admitted. These numbers reflect an 18.3% increase in domestic applications received and a decrease of 8.5% in international applications received with an overall increase of 7.3% at this point last year. OGS admitted 18.9% more students for Spring 2008 which reflects an increase of 44.6%
in domestic and a decrease of 20.5% in international students admitted. There are a total of 162 decisions pending.

b) A total of 341 graduate students have applied for December 2007 graduation. Of that number, 47 have been redlined. A total of 42 doctoral students met the deadline for the first submission of their dissertation to the library.

c) To date, there are a total of 1,108 graduate assistants for Fall 2007 (641 GRAs; 149 GSAs; and 318 GTAs).

d) The inaugural Spring General Teaching Assistant (GTA) Workshop will be January 4 and 7, 2008 in the Taylor Auditorium at McCool Hall for both new TAs and those TAs who were granted waivers for the 2007 Fall GTA Workshop. Those international students who successfully complete the Spring GTA Workshop will be granted waivers for the Spring semester and required to enroll in the English as a Second Language (ESL 5313) course to satisfy the English certification component of the TA Workshop.

e) New Graduate Student Orientation (NGSO) will be held on January 7, 2008 at 1:30 pm in the Taylor Auditorium at McCool Hall. OGS is reorganizing NGSO to include separate sessions for those graduate students new to MSU and those who are former graduates.

Dr. Nick Younan asked when the results of the Web-CT evaluation will be available for the Spring GTA Workshop. Dr. Person explained that a new student would have to be enrolled in at least one course to access Web-CT and that OGS will make every effort to have the Web-CT evaluation available to them the next day. The time frame on when results will be available will largely depend on the number of students to participate in the workshop but OGS estimates very little or no delays.

6. Report from Graduate Student Association (GSA)

Mr. Thomas, GSA president, presented the following report:

Mr. Thomas stated the GSA will not have its November meeting until November 29. However, he stated that tentative dates for the annual GSA Research Symposium and the GSA Banquet have been set. The Research Symposium is scheduled for April 4, and the GSA Banquet is planned for April 22, 2008.

7. Old Business

a) Transfer of Credit Policies

Ms. Rita Burrell provided a general update. She stated that the subcommittee has met, and they propose that a more streamlined approach be followed in stating transfer policy in the Graduate Bulletin to reduce redundancy and to rephrase some wording for improved clarity. Instead of stating policies under each degree, the new organization will group transfer policy under three subheadings; international, domestic, and military.
In addition, a new form is being drafted for transfer work under each category that will make the process easier to follow. Dr. Barbara Spencer anticipates the form to be available for discussion by the January 18 Graduate Council meeting.

Dr. Younan stated that the current Transfer Approval Form available on the OGS website does not have a signature line for a minor professor nor a minor graduate coordinator. Ms. Lee stated that OGS will add the lines to the current form.

b) Status of change in online application allowing international students to apply to distance programs

Dr. Person explained that presently international students were unable to apply online to distance programs. OGS has almost completed procedures to allow international students to apply online to distance programs. Since international students have to maintain their SEVIS compliance, application procedures are being developed that take some of these immigration requirements into consideration. OGS hopes to have the electronic application for international students to apply to distance programs in place by the start of the spring semester.

Discussion followed. Dr. Roger King stated that there may be misinformation regarding the number of hours an international student is allowed to take online. He urged OGS to check the regulations carefully.

Rita Burrell asked whether international students on Optional Practical Training will be allowed to enroll in Distance Programs. This question needs to be answered by the International Services Office.

c) Making MSU more military friendly

The Graduate Council Executive Subcommittee report is not available yet since the subcommittee has not met yet.

Dr. Jackson agreed to chair a subcommittee that reports to the Graduate Council Executive Subcommittee with Dr. Willard and Dr. Reynolds. This subcommittee will look at MSU AOP regarding military personnel, communication of policy and deferring admissions for deployed students. The Subcommittee will get feedback from the MSU Veteran’s Center and others, and will report back to Graduate Council at the January meeting.

Dr. Rabideau cautioned Graduate Council regarding the language in the AOP since it may come directly from IHL.

d) Office of the Graduate School Website
A subcommittee was formed to suggest some changes and to assist OGS in making the website more user-friendly. The subcommittee is chaired by Dr. Barrow. The other two members are Ms. Julie Goodin who serves as webmaster for OGS, and Dr. Younan.

8. New Business

a) MSU Graduate Student Health Insurance – Current Policy

Mr. Robert Cadenhead, Director of the Longest Student Health Center, presented the following overview regarding health insurance for graduate students:

Mr. Cadenhead stated that the current product is designed to serve the needs of MSU’s international and domestic student body. **Dr. Stephen Cottrell made the following correction in the January 18 Graduate Council meeting:** International students are required to have health insurance and repatriation coverage to maintain their legal immigration status, thus the product needs to meet those needs. **International students in J-1 status are required to have health insurance and repatriation coverage to maintain their legal status. MSU adopted a policy to require all international students to purchase the MSU Student Association Sponsored Student Insurance Plan which is made available through the Longest Student Health Center. (STUDENT AFFAIRS OP 91.175).** Thus the insurance product needs to meet those needs.

To ensure MSU compliance with this requirement, every international student, graduate or undergraduate, is automatically enrolled in the MSU student insurance once he or she registers for classes, and the charges are automatically assessed to the student’s account. Domestic students are not required to purchase health insurance coverage.

Presently, there are roughly 1,100 students enrolled in the MSU Health Insurance Plan and 63% of those are international students. The MSU health insurance is purchased mainly by domestic students who are no longer eligible under their parent policies due to age restriction. The current policy is underwritten by United Healthcare, one of the top three insurance writers in the country.

The policy is specifically designed for college students, meaning it has a low deductible feature. Statistically, college students are not in a high health risk group, therefore, universities are able to offer a more affordable insurance product to them. Maternity benefits are included, and more specific details regarding the policy are available on the Student Health Center Website.

The current cost for coverage of an individual student is $985 annually. Adding family members to a student policy is costly, just adding a spouse will cost $2,800.00 per year, in addition to the cost for the student.

Mr. Thomas asked how these figures compare to the University of Mississippi and the University of Southern Mississippi. Mr. Cadenhead stated that he was not sure about USM, but the MSU policy is more reasonable than the one the Ole Miss is offering. He
explained that the policy is reviewed on an annual basis and that he already has solicited an estimate from the company that provides services to USM and Ole Miss. Mr. Thomas stated that as GSA president he would like to be included in the policy negotiation process which is set to take place in February or March of 2008, and Mr. Cadenhead was very open to his input.

Dr. Wise asked for explanation regarding the insurance supplement for graduate assistants approved by MSU President Dr. Foglesong. Mr. Cadenhead stated that this benefit is not included in the stipend, it is applied to the student accounts manually each semester. It is only available to graduate students who hold an assistantship and are currently enrolled in the MSU Health Insurance. Students who met these criteria had $100 applied to their accounts in the Fall 2007 semester, and the benefit will be applied again in the spring semester for those who qualify. Dr. Person stated that the current plan is designed to increase the benefit annually in increments up to $400 per semester by Fall 2009.

Dr. Roger King stated that the College of Engineering will now include the full cost of health insurance for graduate assistants with the stipend benefits.

Dr. Cossman stated that she is conducting research with the help of one of her graduate students, Mr. Caleb Butts. They will be looking into what our peers are doing with stipends and other benefits such as health insurance. Dr. Cossman said that she will be on sabbatical during the spring semester but Mr. Butts will present the results at the next Graduate Council meeting.

b) Joint BS/MS program options – MBA research project beginning in January

This item will be revisited under Old Business during the next Graduate Council meeting.

c) Graduate Council December Meeting

Dr. Wise suggested that the December Graduate Council Meeting be cancelled due to the winter holidays and called for a motion to cancel the meeting. Dr. Cossman made the motion to cancel the December 14 Graduate Council Meeting, seconded by Dr. Tom Hosie.

The motion was approved by acclamation.

Meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

The next Graduate Council meeting will be held at 1:30 p.m. on January 18, 2008, at 611 Allen Hall.