GRADUATE COUNCIL
MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

NUMBER: 4

DATE: November 19, 1999


Dr. John Boyle called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. in 611 Allen Hall and asked those present to introduce themselves. Dr. Boyle welcomed Dr. Robert Jenkins as a new member of the Graduate Council.

Minutes

The minutes of the October 1999 meeting were presented. A motion was made, seconded, and passed unanimously to adopt the minutes with editorial changes and modification to indicate voting procedures in a more defined fashion.

University Committee on Courses and Curricula Report.

There was no report from the University Committee on Courses and Curricula.

Report from Graduate Studies

Dr. Person announced that approval has been received for the Grad Advantage electronic application program through Peterson’s. The memorandum of understanding has been sent back to Peterson’s for signature. Dr. Person distributed copies of the agreement. Jennifer Boatman, graduate assistant in Graduate Studies, and Allen Ulmer, Information Systems, have been assigned to work on this project. Jennifer Boatman is the developer and webmaster for the Graduate Studies web page. Dr. Person encouraged Council members to visit the web site. The Grad Advantage program allows for electronic submission of graduate admissions applications. Grad Advantage has waived the normal fee of $5,500 per year for the first two years to allow MSU to participate in the program. The initial saving on this is $11,000. We can have five different types of applications. The College of Engineering is working on a modification of the application for their college, and it essentially will be like the generic application with some changes in it in terms of programs of study. It will be more specific for the College of Engineering. There can be five different arrangements like this. Grad Advantage provides another avenue through which
students can apply to the university to attend graduate school. Students pay a $12.00 fee to Grad Advantage, fill out the application online and electronically submit it to the specific department or to the Office of Admissions for consideration. At the present time there will be two documents submitted—the application itself and a statement of purpose. The student will still have to send transcripts and letters of recommendation and any other documents they wish to submit. This is something that several graduate coordinators were interested in trying, and Peterson’s is very excited about working with the university on this. They will also send to us out-of-state application fees collected from the students. They will send a monthly report with the students’ names as well as a check for the application fees. That process is underway and will be up and running before the end of the year. Allen Ulmer in Information Systems can answer any initial technical questions. This is an option for students; applications can still be submitted by hard copy. Having students enter data will save time and money for the university. Peterson’s is partner with Educational Testing Service and pulls scores from ETS and updates files periodically.

The question was raised as to who makes the determination whether an application is submitted to a specific college or to Admissions.

Transcript evaluation will not be a part of the application process through Peterson’s.

Peterson’s updates test scores from ETS periodically. If a student submits an application through Grad Advantage and has test scores in the system, it will be updated.

There will be a generic application for use in addition to the five specific applications. There is a section in the international application, which is different than the domestic application.

Allen Ulmer stated that all information received on Grad Advantage applications will be pulled into Banner.

Application fees were discussed. The university will charge an additional application fee after 12 months. A student who submits an application through Grad Advantage will have to pay a $12 fee per application.

Program coordinators will be able to log into Grad Advantage and will be able to see all applications, complete or incomplete, from students asking about their program. Graduate coordinators will be able to sort this information in any fashion. They will have contact information.

Seventeen research assistant grant awards have been sent out. The total amount of the awards was $13,300. Six of the eight colleges received them. Special awards were made to two applicants in the Physics Department. Their recruiting efforts are going to be broader than just the Physics Department. An extra project was approved for the College of Engineering for recruitment of students.

Report from Graduate Student Association
Matthew Burnham distributed a flyer showing GSA meeting dates for 2000. Approximately 90 people attended this year’s annual banquet. Estimated cost for banquet was $920 but actual cost was $500.

Old Business

Tuition waivers. In 1997 Dr. Boyle chaired a committee that was asked to look at the tuition waiver issue. At that time the university had instituted a policy of eliminating tuition waivers for students supported by external sources of funds. The committee unanimously voted to ask the administration to reconsider the waiver policy. Data was generated at that time, and Dr. Boyle distributed an extension of that data. The committee had predicted that the number of Ph.D. degrees awarded and graduate enrollment would drop. The prediction did not come true. The committee’s data ended in 1996. In 1996 there was a disturbing trend in Ph.D. degrees awarded and graduate enrollment. In 1998 the figures had gone up. It is data like this that makes it hard to argue from the numbers point of view about tuition waivers. We could still argue from desirability to have it, but we cannot argue from the numbers point. There is no correlation between lack of tuition waiver and increase in graduate enrollment.

It was discussed that it could be argued that tuition waivers have something to do with maintaining the quality of graduate programs.

A total of 922 tuition waivers have been set up for this year for resident and non-resident graduate students. This includes out-of-state tuition waivers and sponsored students. At the time the policy of elimination of tuition waivers was put in place the researchers felt they were being hampered. Student tuition had to be paid through grant funds.

The committee in 1997 made a proposal, which was not accepted. The question was asked whether the committee should come up with a proposed package of incentives to attract high quality students to campus, such as stipends. Some universities do not give tuition waivers but give very generous stipends. A tuition waiver is not taxable. If given as a stipend, it would be taxable income.

Tuition waivers are actual money. The university has to account to the Board for the waivers.

The University of Mississippi offers tuition waivers to students without an assistantship. At MSU a student has to have a minimum assistantship of $600 per month in order to receive a tuition waiver. While our sister institutions experienced a decline in graduate enrollment this fall, we had a 20% increase in enrollment.

We cannot use the concept of lack of tuition waivers as harming programs. We will not get the support of the administration to spend more money on this to attract more students. We might get more support to spend more money on stipends and effecting fees, but the issue of tuition waivers for sponsored students is a dead issue.
The question is not tuition waivers but who pays for the tuition waivers. Money has to be added into grant proposal to cover tuition. It will not affect the amount of research dollars brought in, but will effect the amount of research that can be done.

**Fees.** Dr. Monts distributed information from Jimmie Wesley showing tuition and fees since 1994. From 1994-1998 there was no change in tuition. This was because the IHL Board mandated that there would be no increase in tuition during that period of time. The university had increasing expenses, so it raised the fees by a relatively modest amount each year. In 1998 there was an increase in tuition and an increase in fees. Fees can no longer be increased. In 1999 there are no longer “tuition” and “fees.” It is now considered one amount of money called “tuition and fees.” A full tuition waiver is for 73% of tuition and fees. The total amount of tuition and fees for 1999-00 was $1508.50. The university’s expenses have been rising with more students.

There was an increase in parking fees this past summer. We expect to see that again this next summer. Designated parking will be available at different rates for spaces.

Dr. Monts was unable to find out why tuition and fees are now combined. This may have effect on grants. Tuition waiver at present is 73%. There is no longer “tuition” but it is now considered “tuition and fees.” At present the state pays 73%. From 1994 to 1999 fees have gone from 28% of tuition to 36% of tuition. At the last meeting of Graduate Council, Matthew Burnham provided a breakdown of fees that a student has to pay. This breakdown is $96 to Athletics; $60 to Student Health Center, and $251 to General Fund. Several years ago it was itemized what the various fees were going for, such as cheerleaders and pompom squad. The GSA wrote a very strong preference that the money should go to the library rather than the pompom squad. Since that time less details have been available.

Graduate students must pay the fees whether supported by a grant or not. They pay identical fees as undergraduates. From the total tuition and fees, 27% is being designated as fees. The Comptroller’s Office sends bills out to students with one line item of assessment, which is general tuition. If the student is enrolled for less than 9 hours, he/she is charged an hourly assessment. Tuition exemption pays 73%. The balance is left for the student to pay. $407.50 is 37% of tuition total. In 1994 it was 28%. The bottom line is whether it is fair for graduate students to pay the same fees as undergraduate students and can graduate students designate where fees go. It was recommended that the graduate student body find out what percentage they make of total enrollment at MSU, what amount of money the student association receives, and petition to have the percentage of the student association funds distributed, as the GSA preferred.

Summer activity fees are going to be the same as fall and spring. Summer fees are assessed by an hourly rate. Beginning summer of 1999 students were assessed by hour with no cap. It will not exceed the normal semester. Stipends received in the summer are lower than those received during regular terms. Most graduate students take non-thesis
hours during the summer. There is a minimum of 6 hours.

Stipends. Dr. Monts distributed information regarding stipends. He contacted graduate coordinators in Arts & Sciences and compiled information from them. He asked for difference between average graduate assistantship paid at MSU and what is paid by their peer departments. Not all departments responded. Typically, peer institutions are paying $2,000-3,000 more over that period of time. Dr. Monts let each department define its peer. For example, the English Department is in good shape; Geosciences is $5000 lower than competitors.

President Portera increased stipends by 10% and plans to increase them for next 2 years at 10%. The INS is now requiring that assistantships offered international students be above the poverty level over a 12 month period of time. Last summer that amount was $9,541.

One of the problems is that there is a wide diversity in what students are paid by different departments based on tradition or availability of funds. Many departments are paying significantly less than $9,541. In order to bring an international student in, they must be above poverty level. That is a sensitive issue to be considered. A department can argue that we can pay more to a student but will have fewer students.

The 10% increase for stipends was mandated. Most departments whether paying a little or lot are still below peer institutions. Three 10% increases in a row will put us reasonably close to peer institutions. The minimum is still $600 and new people are coming in at $600. The positions that were filled were increased by 10%.

It was suggested that the Graduate Council come up with some policy or recommendation to encourage and foster high quality graduate students.

It was recommended that the Graduate Student Association pursue redirection of student fees. The GSA could petition that their share of the total Student Association fees be transferred to the GSA and that fees be distributed according to graduate student preferences. The petition should come from the Graduate Student Association with Graduate Council endorsement.

It was recommended that Dr. Boyle write the President to encourage him to continue the increase in stipends for the next two years and to emphasize Graduate Council support of the continued increase. Dr. Boyle is also to write the Faculty Senate to maintain support of this continued increase.

Dr. Boyle and Dr. Monts will visit the Associative Vice President for Academic Affairs to discuss fees.

New Business

Diane Wolfe asked that all letters of award to international students state clearly that the international student will be responsible for all fees. This should be included in each offer letter.
New Business to be carried forward to next meeting will be
Updated criteria for graduate faculty.

The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for December 10. Dr. Boyle will email members to determine who will attend. If a majority will not be available, the next meeting will be in January.

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.