Graduate Council
Mississippi State University

Number: 4
Date: January 18, 2008


Guests: C. Butts, D. Martin, A. Rankin

1. Dr. Barbara Spencer called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. in 611 Allen Hall.

2. Dr. Spencer asked for any revisions to the minutes (November 16, 2007).

   Dr. Stephen Cottrell from the International Services Office stated that the statement below made by Mr. Robert Cadenhead during the November 16, 2007 Graduate Council Minutes is erroneous.

   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.

   Dr. Cottrell clarified that only international students in J-1 status are required by federal law to have health insurance and repatriation coverage to maintain their legal immigrant status. However, 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 and includes repatriation coverage. (STUDENT AFFAIRS OP 91.175).

   Motion was made by Dr. Dwayne Wise and seconded by Dr. Nick Younan to accept the minutes with the clarification.

   Minutes were approved.

3. University Committee on Courses and Curricula (UCCC)

   UCCC meeting coincided with this Graduate Council meeting so Dr. Tim Chamblee could not present a report. Dr. Spencer presented three program modifications and a new distance master’s degree program to the Graduate Council.
a) Program Modification for the Master of Science and the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Computer Science

This modification will allow more than one 6000-level course in a program of study for both degrees.

Dr. Dwayne Wise made a motion to accept the program modification to the Master of Science and the Doctor of Philosophy in Computer Science degree. The motion was seconded by Dr. Nick Younan.

Graduate Council voted and the motion carried by acclamation.

b) Program Modification of Master of Business Administration in Project Management

This modification is required to make the requirements for the capstone project the same for the MBA and the MBA in Project Management. Also, an alternative course is added and the required hours in the major will increase from 32 to 33.

Dr. Tom Hosie made a motion to accept the program modification to the Master of Business Administration in Project Management. Dr. Wise seconded the motion.

Graduate Council voted and the motion carried by acclamation.

c) Master of Science in Food Science, Nutrition, and Health Promotion Distance Program

AOCE approval had previously been given to course offerings, now the Department of Food Science, Nutrition and Health Promotion is seeking approval to offer the degree via distance learning.

Dr. Younan made a motion to accept the Master of Science in Food Science, Nutrition, and Health Promotion Distance Program. The motion was seconded by Dr. Don Jackson.

Graduate Council voted and the motion carried by acclamation.

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

Dr. William Person presented the following report:

a) To date, graduate enrollment for spring 2008 is up by 70 students, which is a total of 3,273 or a 2.2% increase from spring 2007. The official graduate enrollment for spring 2007 was 3,203.

b) A total of 220 master’s, 14 educational specialist, and 44 doctoral students graduated Fall 2007. A total of 74 applicants (60 master’s, 2 educational specialist, and 12 doctoral) were redlined. A minimum of 28 doctoral graduates will be needed May 2008 to have a total of 100 for AY 2007-2008.
c) A total of 81 students participated in the inaugural Spring 2008 General TA Workshop on August 13-14, 2007. Of this number, 74 passed and 7 failed. Twenty-eight of the 81 participants were new international teaching assistants and must complete the English Certification component of the TA Workshop. Of this number, 6 have enrolled in ESL 5313 for the spring semester to be evaluated in May.

d) Approximately 100 students participated in New Graduate Student Orientation on January 7, 2008.

e) On January 24-26, 2008, OGS will host the 2008 AGEM Winter Scholars Symposium at MSU. Approximately 300 guests will be on campus to participate in this event. OGS is extending an invitation to all Graduate Council members to attend the opening reception on January 25, 2008. You should have received an invitation via email with details for the reception. We hope that you will be able to join us that evening.

f) On December 19, 2007, a memorandum was sent to Academic Department Heads and Graduate Coordinators regarding a procedural change in the requirements for letters of recommendation. All Graduate Council members should have also received this memorandum. The new procedure states that we will only accept letters previously submitted for a new application when a student is deferring to a later semester, updating an application within one year, or applying to the same program within one year of being rejected due to lack of funding, available faculty, or openings in the program.

g) We have recently distributed a list of graduate students not in good standing in their college for fall 2007 to the academic deans. A total of 270 graduate students (8.1%) are not in good standing.

h) We will begin the next phase of implementation of our electronic admission procedures using Workflow this month. To date, we have processed approximately 128 admission decisions through Workflow. The Departments of Biological Sciences, Computer Science and Engineering, and Electrical and Computer Engineering will be the next departments to begin using the new procedures. Training for these departments will begin later this month.

i) Dates for the fall TA Workshops and New Graduate Student Orientation have been scheduled as follows:

- International TA Workshop — August 4-8, 2008
- General TA Workshop — August 11-12, 2008
- New Graduate Student Orientation — August 13, 2008, 1:30 pm

We will be sending a memorandum to academic department heads and graduate coordinators with this information asking them not to schedule departmental activities during these dates for students who will be required to participate in these Graduate
School programs. Location and times for each program will be announced at a later date.

Dr. Spencer asked about the history of the International Teaching Assistant Workshop (ITA) and whether it was mandated.

Dr. Person explained that the workshop started in 1992 and that the leadership at that time did indeed mandate the implementation of a Teaching Assistantship Workshop due to complaints that the oral communication skills of international students limited their effectiveness as teaching assistants. The ITA is effective because the above mentioned complaints have been reduced.

Discussion followed about other methods that might be used to determine whether an international student could be “screened” differently to determine their language capability. Ms. Julie Goodin added that the workshop also teaches the new international teaching assistants valuable skills in dealing with American culture when they teach their typically assigned freshman classes.

6. Report from Graduate Student Association (GSA) – No Report

7. Old Business

a) Making MSU more military friendly (Handout)

Subcommittee Chair Dr. Jackson presented the following overview:

Making MSU more military friendly is a worthy and needed initiative with so many students serving in the military. The subcommittee met with the MSU administrators and looked at the current Academic Operating Policy (AOP). The committee found the language in the current AOP to be too cumbersome for students to understand. Dr. Jackson shared his insights from meeting with Ms. Lorene Cox of the MSU Veteran’s Center. He presented an interpretation of the AOP that is currently distributed by the MSU Veteran’s Center and pointed out that the AOP does not cover applicants who were admitted to a degree program but received emergency activation or deployment orders from the U.S. Armed Forces prior to enrollment.

Dr. Jackson asked for discussion of the statement below. He suggested that the statement be submitted to the Provost Office for consideration after review by Graduate Council, the Veteran’s Center, and the Registrar’s Office:

*Any student who receives emergency activation or deployment orders from the U.S. Military and who is admitted to a degree program but has not enrolled in a course may request deferment of admission. The new date of admission may be up to one year from the date of release from active duty. This request should be*
addressed to the Dean of the student’s School/College or the Dean of the Graduate School, as appropriate.

Dr. Jackson stated that he considered the current policy regarding military deployment of students to be fair and a good fit for undergraduates. However, he expressed concern that the policy may not be appropriate for graduate students, especially if they were admitted based on funding from a grant.

Dr. Wise pointed out that admission does not equal funding. Dr. Gilbert added that it was previously decided to increase the deferment of admission for applicants who are deployed prior to enrollment to two years.

Discussion followed. It was determined that there is a distinct difference between enrolled students who are deployed and admission applicants. Dr. Gilbert pointed out that the AOP is designed for enrolled students, whereas the above statement deals with MSU admission policy. Dr. Gilbert also stated that there may be legal problems with handing out the interpretation sheet since the APO is the official communication.

Discussion followed and it was decided that the statement regarding deferment of admission be included in MSU policy so that the information can be easily accessible and published in both the undergraduate and graduate bulletins as well as on various MSU websites.

Dr. Jackson made a motion to accept the above statement with the following modification:

*The new date of admission may be up to two years from the date of release from active duty.*

The motion was seconded by Dr. Nick Filipov, and carried by acclamation.

b) Office of the Graduate School Website

Dr. Spencer asked Dr. Younan to comment. Dr. Younan stated that the subcommittee has met, and that a plan of action has been developed. The subcommittee will seek input from students, graduate coordinators, and OGS in assessing the website in terms of appearance, accessibility, and content. Dr. Younan stated that the subcommittee hopes to have a report of the survey ready to present at the next Graduate Council meeting.

c) Transfer of Credit Policies (Emailed Document)

Dr. Spencer stated that the Graduate Council passed several changes to the transfer policy for graduate students related to international transfers and transfer of military credit last year. However, the new information is not yet reflected in the Graduate Bulletin and the information available now is scattered and repeated throughout the Graduate Bulletin. Dr. Spencer stated that with assistance from Ms. Rita Burrell, she
revised the current Graduate Bulletin information to state graduate transfer policy more clearly, given the policies that were passed. The handout divides graduate transfer policy into three distinct sections, domestic, international and military transfers, with guidance stated for each kind of transfer separately. Under each specialized degree, repeated verbiage has been eliminated and replaced with “Transfer policies are the same as listed in the general section of this Graduate Bulletin.” Only specific policies applicable to the particular degree program are stated under each degree program.

d) Can international students apply online to distance programs? (Handout)

Dr. Person presented the following overview:

OGS has worked out procedures to make online application for international students possible. Four different application categories have been identified and students follow application instructions according to the category they fall under. The categories are:

- Distance Learning Unclassified for international students wishing to study who are physically outside of the United States
- Distance Learning degree program for international students wishing to study who are physically outside of the United States
- Distance Learning Unclassified international applicants who are in the U.S. at another institution
- Unclassified for international students in the local area (includes MSU employee or spouse of MSU employee)

Dr. Person stated that the information in the handout will be disseminated to all relevant Mississippi State University parties in the next few days.

e) MSU Graduate Student Health Insurance (Emailed Document)

Mr. Caleb Butts conducted research about what our peers are doing with health insurance for graduate students, and specifically graduate assistants, and how that compares to MSU. He presented the following report:

- Three other universities provide a health insurance supplement for their graduate assistants that is actually lower than the one MSU provides; they are the University of Alabama Birmingham, Georgia Tech and the University of Houston. However, their graduate school population is very different from ours and some of them have medical schools on the premises.
- The average premium cost for graduate students is $1,183 and the university contributes nothing toward the premium.
The average premium cost for a graduate assistant is $514, the university contributes $696.

Two universities cover their graduate assistants the same way they cover an employee.

Most universities have their graduate assistants pay about 40% of the total premium. At MSU, that would translate to about $500.

8. New Business

a) International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Exam (Handout)

Dr. Spencer asked Dr. Cottrell to speak about an alternative to the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) that is used for admission of international students to MSU.

Dr. Cottrell presented a handout detailing the IELTS exam:

Dr. Cottrell stated that a large number of colleges and universities in the U.S. are already using the IELTS exam to evaluate English proficiency of their international students. Many foreign countries do not have easy access to TOEFL test centers but offer the IELTS exam. MSU Undergraduate Admissions is already using the IELTS as an approved method in addition to the TOEFL test. Dr. Cottrell asked the Graduate Council to consider the implementation to the IELTS exam as an alternative to the TOEFL to be used as an approved method in MSU Graduate Admissions.

Discussion followed regarding cost and feasibility of offering the test at the MSU Testing Center. It was determined that details could be worked out later.

Dr. Wise made a motion to accept the IELTS Exam as an approved alternative method for the graduate admission of international students to Mississippi State University. Dr. Younan seconded the motion.

The motion carried by acclamation.

Dr. Rabideau asked that Graduate Council reconsider the motion to amend current graduate policy passed during the January 26, 2007, meeting, and allow graduate students to graduate with grade of U.

Dr. Gilbert voiced concern that unlimited U’s would reflect negatively on a student. In addition, he pointed out that some faculty members may use an unsatisfactory research grade as leverage to force students to do something they want them to do. Also, the research may not turn out the way the faculty member expected and the graduate student may be unduly punished with a U-grade.
Dr. Spencer pointed out that the intent was to allow students to graduate after getting a “U-grade wake-up call” without having to change the grade. Current policy does not allow students to graduate with a grade of U.

Discussion followed. Dr. Spencer acknowledged that Dr. Gilbert presented a perspective that had not been considered previously. She encouraged the Graduate Council to give more consideration to the issue to be discussed again during the next meeting.

Dr. Spencer asked that the last item on the agenda, ESL Issues, be discussed during the next meeting as well.

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

The next Graduate Council meeting will be held at 1:30 p.m. on February 22, 2008, at 611 Allen Hall.