Graduate Council
Mississippi State University

Number: 5
Date: January 26, 2007

Present:  L. Barrow, T. Chamblee, F. Coleman, L. Crittenden (for M. Binkley), L. Cornelious (for C. Forde), T. Hosie, R. King, K. Lee, D. Ma (for J. Boyle), C. Matherne, S. Nobles, P. Rabideau, D. Reynolds, F. Sparks, B. Spencer, P. Sullivan, J. To, S. Willard, N. Younan


Guests: W. Kibler, J. Schmidt

1. Dr. Barbara Spencer called the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m. in 611 Allen Hall.

2. Dr. Spencer asked for any revisions to the minutes (November 17, 2006).

   It was determined that minor corrections were needed in numbering, attendance and wording on page 3. Motion was made by Dr. Scott Willard and seconded by Mr. Curtis Matherne to accept the minutes with revisions.

   Minutes were approved with revisions.

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

   Dr. Timothy Chamblee gave the following report:

   Everything is moving along well with the AOCE approvals and more programs are expected to join the bandwagon and participate in distance learning. The distance learning course proposals from the College of Business and Industry were all approved. The next big round of program proposals is anticipated in March. Correspondence/independent study courses were included in the AOCE approvals.

   It was determined that modifications in master’s and doctoral programs in Physics had been approved by electronic vote in Summer 2005. Acknowledgement of the approval should have been an old business item in the August 2005 Graduate Council Minutes. Unfortunately, the relevant paperwork was lost when the UCCC Office was damaged during a tornado spawned by Hurricane Rita.

   For the record – The changes included a modification to the M.S. degree to include a non-thesis option. The Ph.D. modification changed the major from Engineering with an emphasis in Engineering Physics to Engineering with a concentration in Applied Physics; making it more embedded with the M.S. degree in Physics.
4. Report from Graduate Studies (OGS)

Dr. William Person was not present. In his absence, Dr. Spencer distributed a written report submitted by Dr. Person with the following information:

a) A total of 217 master’s, 8 educational specialist, and 40 doctoral students graduated this fall. 60 degree applicants (38 master’s, 4 educational specialist, and 18 doctoral) were redlined. We need a minimum of 43 doctoral graduates in May 2007 to have a total of 100.

b) Graduate enrollment for spring 2007 is up by 34 students, which is a total of 3,203 or a 1% increase from spring 2006.

c) In December 2006, we launched our electronic letters of recommendation which has been very successful with few minor technical problems. At this time, the online application process involves all phases in electronic format except the transcripts.

d) A SunGard consultant was on campus January 16-18 to work with the Office of Graduate Studies and ITS staff to complete the development of workflows for electronic application and admissions process. At this point the workflow process is approximately 95% complete, and we expect to go live after March 1st using the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering and the College of Business and Industry to test the system before implementing it campus wide. In addition, the Office of Graduate Studies has purchased a high speed scanner to be used with the processing of graduate applications. When fully implemented, we firmly believe that this will significantly improve our efficiency in the processing of applications and admissions decisions.

e) A proposal for participation for the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program is being finalized for submission to the US Department of Education by January 31, 2007. If fully funded, this program would provide a summer research experience for 18 undergraduate students in their junior and senior years and 25 such students during the academic year at Mississippi State University and selected collaborating institutions in Mississippi (Belhaven College, Delta State University, Mississippi University for Women, and Mississippi Valley State University). The ultimate goal of this program is to encourage McNair Scholars to complete doctoral degrees for future faculty positions.

5. Report from Graduate Student Association (GSA)

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

During their first meeting this semester on January 25, 2007, the upcoming Research Symposium scheduled for Friday, March 30, 2007, at the Wise Center was discussed.
GSA is encouraging as many graduate students as possible to participate. Abstracts for the Symposium are due on March 2, 2007, by 5:00 p.m.; they can be submitted electronically.

Mr. Matherne distributed brightly colored flyers for the event to Graduate Council members and asked for their support in promoting the event and in soliciting participation from graduate students.

4. Old Business

a) New University Academic Honesty Policy under development
(3 handouts)

Dr. Spencer asked Dr. Bill Kibler, Vice President for Student Affairs, to speak regarding the process.

Dr. Kibler distributed the proposed Mississippi State Honor Code (25 pages), recent revisions, and a one-page summary overview. The revisions are based on feedback received from various entities, including Graduate Council.

Dr. Kibler gave a brief overview of the proposed Mississippi State Honor Code which he had presented to Graduate Council on September 22, 2006.

Dr. Kibler briefly discussed the revisions listed on the handout:

- The wording of the Honor Code statement was changed.

  From:  
  As a Mississippi State University student I will not lie, cheat or steal in my academic endeavors, nor will I accept the actions of those who do. I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times.

  To:  
  As a Mississippi State University student, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do.

- Deleted wording related to an annual requirement for confirmation of compliance with the Honor Code on page 3.

- Changed wording on page 5 related to the Multiple Submission violation to only requiring the student to obtain the permission from the instructor to whom he/she is submitting the work, rather than “all” instructors.

- Revised grade sanction wording on page 7 to add “other grade sanction.”
Changed wording on page 7 in the Sanctioning Guidelines section to include specific language for a lowered course grade sanction in cases where the assignment involved is a minor part of the final course grade. Also added wording that the probation and intervention program are required for all grade sanctions.

Dr. Kibler addressed the question of whether the Honor Council could impose a more severe penalty than the faculty had. In the Honor Code process, there is no opportunity to second-guess because a case is either heard by a faculty member or the Honors Council. On appeal, the fundamental principles of due process come into effect, meaning that a case cannot result in a stiffer penalty then was required in the original process.

Dr. Kibler also pointed out that the Honor Code proposal is intended to correct holes and deviations to legally accepted due process practices in the MSU system. In addition, the Honor Code will eliminate multiple levels of appeal that serve no one well. If four appeals are offered, students will appeal four times. If one appeal is offered, students will appeal once. The Honor Code will offer a proper, fair, and unbiased appeals process.

On pages 10 through 16, descriptions of the steps of the Honor Code and Faculty processes were shortened and simplified, and the flow charts were reformatted and simplified as well.

The make-up of the hearing panels changed to three faculty members and two students, page 11.

The wording on page 18 on the Honor Code Violation Report Form changed to reflect the “lowered course grade” option.

On page 9, “template wording” was added for the syllabus statement regarding academic integrity and the Honor Code.

Dr. Kibler pointed out that the Student Senate and the Faculty Senate endorsed this Honor Code Proposal. Dr. Spencer solicited questions, comments, and concerns from Graduate Council.

- Some courses are taught by graduate students, yet the language refers to faculty member. How will this be handled?

  Dr. Kibler answered that the word “instructor” is intended to replace “faculty member” and will be used throughout the document.

- There is concern that some academic dishonesty occurs outside the classroom. Is this concern addressed in the Honor Code Proposal?
Dr. Kibler explained that additional clarification was made in the language (especially on page 4) to make clear that any kind of academic work is covered under the Honor Code Proposal.

➢ Are there any more thoughts how international students may be affected or has it been decided that they just have a higher stake?

Dr. Kibler stated that nothing specific to international students is articulated in the Honor Code Proposal, as it is impossible to cover everything that may ever be done in one proposal. However, he reiterated that the Honors Council and MSU as a whole need to be mindful of their obligation for education and training of international students who come here. International students should understand very clearly what the expectations are, not only in this country but at this institution. Setting different standards for international students is not the way to go. However, we must increase our understanding of cultural differences in interpreting concepts such as plagiarism and, since international students are such an important subgroup at MSU, we should spend more time with those students to purposely educate them on our expectations for academic conduct. Presently, almost nothing is done institutionally on a large scale to address academic honesty expectations, especially when it comes to students from different cultures.

Dr. Spencer commended the effort of developing an Honor Code for the University and bringing consistency to MSU policies. She asked whether Dr. Kibler was seeking endorsement for the Honor Code Proposal from the Graduate Council.

Dr. Kibler stated that President Foglesong is looking for actions taken at various levels, such as the Student Senate, the Faculty Senate and the Graduate Council. He will have the final approval, but he wants to have reactions from the three bodies mentioned before he makes a decision.

Dr. Larry Barrow made a motion for Graduate Council endorsement of the latest revision of the Proposed Honor Code for Mississippi State University. Dr. Nick Younan seconded the motion.

Dr. Tom Hosie asked if there is any conflict between professor and committee jurisdiction.

Dr. Kibler explained that the proposed Honor Code does not cover every unique nuance a department may have. The bottom line is that each department determines how they handle academic dishonesty of graduate students within their department, whether it automatically becomes an issue for a student’s graduate committee, or whether the issue is handled through the instructor. However,
consistency in departmental policy is vital; students should always know what to expect if an allegation comes forward.

Discussion followed. It was determined that policy should not get into too much detail; the policy can always be tweaked, if needed. Dr. Kibler added that such issues were precisely the reason why the term “may” is used, instead of the more final “will.”

Dr. Roger King asked for clarification of the term “graduate committee” for cases involving graduate students. Does the term refer to a department’s graduate committee or the graduate committee of an individual student? Dr. Kibler replied that the proposed Honor Code refers to the student’s graduate committee.

Discussion followed. It was determined that the term will be clarified on top of page 14 in the proposed Honor Code. The text in the box shall read: “…In all steps a student’s graduate committee may function as the equivalent of a faculty member.”

Dr. Scott Willard asked whether dismissal from the University for academic dishonesty will be reflected on the transcript. If a graduate student participates in academic misconduct associated with research on his or her dissertation/thesis, would that academic misconduct be reflected with a grade of XU? What about cheating on comprehensive exams? We can fail the student, but would the transcript show that the student failed due to academic misconduct?

Discussion ensued regarding what actually shows up on the transcript now. Dr. Younan stated that dismissal from a degree program is not reflected on the transcript now. Dr. Kibler said that there are limits as to what can be put on a transcript. However, appropriate coding and notations in regard to academic misconduct will be worked out with the Registrar’s Office, including U grades for academic misconduct in research for graduate students.

Dr. Spencer reminded Graduate Council that a motion was made and seconded to endorse the latest revision of the Proposed Honor Code for Mississippi State University.

Graduate Council endorsed the January 8, 2007, revision of the Proposed Honor Code for Mississippi State University.

Before moving on to the next two items under Old Business, Dr. Spencer briefly talked about the search for the Graduate Dean (not listed on agenda).

- Deadline for applying is February 1, 2007.

- The next meeting of the search committee is scheduled for February 9, 2007; final application review will start during that meeting.
• Approximately 4 applications have been received to date; several people have been nominated but have not submitted applications yet.

b) Electronic Application Process Review

Dr. Spencer mentioned that she and Dr. Younan had participated in meetings all week and that the University is rapidly moving toward encouraging all graduate students to apply electronically.

Dr. Spencer noted that the degree programs in the application screens the student would see when applying online were not at all like the degree programs described by departments. The reason for this discrepancy is that the electronic application is based on BANNER rules. The only way to ensure that each degree program is correct in the online application is to go and test the application from a student’s view.

A survey will be distributed to all colleges that will list what students will see when they apply to a program. A test site will be available where representatives from each department can go in and “test” the online application for their particular programs.

Dr. Spencer urged Graduate Council members to ensure that attention is paid to the survey and online application testing. She warned that prospective graduate students would have problems otherwise.

c) Streamlining the dissertation/thesis process – microfilming and templates

Dr. Willard pointed out that Graduate Council had not voted on the revised 2006 (5th Edition) “Standards for Preparing Theses and Dissertations” though the motion to make electronic submission of thesis and dissertations a requirement with the start of the Spring 2007 semester was approved during the November 17, 2006 meeting. Information regarding the electronic submission of thesis and dissertations will be forthcoming from the Office of Graduate Studies. Library representatives agreed that the Library will be flexible throughout this semester and accept both paper and electronic submissions to allow enough time to inform everyone about the new requirement.

When Graduate Council voted on the electronic submission requirement, one initial paper copy was still required for editorial purposes by the library. Ms. June Schmidt stated that the Library is no longer requiring that one paper copy, allowing for thesis and dissertation submissions to be fully digital.

Dr. Spencer asked whether Graduate Council members had a chance to review the revised 2006 (5th Edition) “Standards for Preparing Theses and Dissertations” she had disseminated electronically.
Dr. Willard made motion to approve the revised 2006 (5th Edition) “Standards for Preparing Theses and Dissertations.” Dr. Hosie seconded the motion.

Motion was accepted. Library representatives and Graduate Council agreed that the Library will be flexible throughout this semester and accept theses and dissertations prepared under the previous guidelines for preparing to allow enough time to inform everyone about the revised 2006 (5th Edition) “Standards for Preparing Theses and Dissertations.”

Ms. Schmidt provided Graduate Council with a handout regarding the issue of MSU participation in the ProQuest Dissertation Service, particularly microfilming. The handout explained that microfilming is the “gold standard” for preservation of theses and dissertations because it has proven to be a format that is archivally sound over an extended period, can be reproduced at very reasonable cost, and is easily maintained. Graduate Council agreed that continued participation of MSU in the ProQuest Dissertation Service is a vital service for our graduate students.

Dr. Willard from the Graduate Council Subcommittee for Streamlining the Dissertation/Thesis Process explained the issue of templates. It was determined that already existing templates from various departments should be made more readily available to students by linking them to the Library and Office of Graduate Studies websites.

Graduate Council formally thanked the Graduate Council Subcommittee for Streamlining the Dissertation/Thesis Process for their hard work in revising the “Standards for Preparing Theses and Dissertations.”

5. New Business

- “U” grades on dissertation hours
  (handout – pg. 51 of 2006-2007 Graduate Bulletin)

Dr. Spencer raised the question of why a graduate student cannot graduate with a “U” grade.

Discussion followed regarding the feasibility of the current policy for “U” grades.

Motion was made by Dr. Barrow to strike the sentence “A student cannot graduate with a grade of U.” from page 51, Paragraph 13, of the 2006-2007 Graduate Bulletin. Dr. Hosie and Dr. Willard seconded the motion.

Graduate Council determined that a graduate student should be allowed to graduate with a “U” grade.
Motion was accepted.

- Transferring graduate credits from other universities
  (Handout – Letter from Graduate Student)

Dr. Spencer explained that she received a registered letter from a graduate student who is dissatisfied with the way credits are transferred in from other institutions.

Mr. Matherne explained that the student spoke at the last meeting of the Graduate Student Association. The student’s grievance is that students are not being told beforehand at which level (6000 or 8000/9000 level) a transfer course will be counted after the course is transferred in.

Discussion followed. It was determined that transcripts from other universities usually list the level of a course. Graduate Coordinators can determine from the transcript at which level the course will be counted at MSU and indicate that on the Transfer Approval Form.

Dr. King stated that Ms. Rita Burrell provided extensive background information on the subject. To her knowledge, no student has ever been redlined, i.e. not be allowed to graduate, for transfer work not being accepted at the appropriate level.

Graduate Council agreed that this is a non-issue. Dr. Spencer asked Dr. King to email a draft response to her so she can respond to the letter.

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

The next Graduate Council meeting will be held on February 23, 2007, at 1:30 p.m., in the Conference Room at 611 Allen Hall.