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

   Dr. Spencer asked for a moment of silence in memory of Drs. Joseph Chromiak and Thomas Hosie, both voting members of the Graduate Council who had passed away since the last meeting in January.

2. Dr. Spencer asked for any revisions to the minutes (January 18, 2008).

   Dr. Dwayne Wise asked that “attached you will find a report” be deleted from item g on page four.

   Motion was made by Dr. Scott Willard and seconded by Dr. Nick Younan to accept the minutes with the correction.

   Minutes were approved.

3. University Committee on Courses and Curricula (UCCC)

   A new certificate program and two modifications to master’s programs were presented to the Graduate Council.

   a) Addition of the distance Diversity Certificate Program

   This certificate program is geared toward teaching workplace success by providing the multicultural knowledge and skills necessary to navigate among a diverse workforce. Students must complete at least one of two courses from each of four distinct fields: History, Sociology, Gender Studies and African American Studies. This program is offered via distance education.
Dr. Alan Marcus from the History Department, Dr. Stephen Middleton from African American Studies, Dr. Susan Rensing from Gender Studies, and Dr. Peter Wood from Sociology voiced their support of the Diversity Certificate Program.

Dr. Wise made a motion to accept the addition of the distance Diversity Certificate Program. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mark Thomas.

Graduate Council voted and the motion carried by acclamation.

b) Modification to the Master of Science in Agriculture with a concentration in Agricultural Economics and the Master of Agribusiness Management

Dr. Stan Spurlock from the Agricultural Economics department presented the following overview:

The modification to both master’s degree programs involves curriculum changes adding and replacing required courses. For the Master in Agribusiness Management, the addition of a two-tract program is also proposed. Adding another tract will reduce course redundancy for students with an agribusiness or business degree background while the traditional tract will serve the needs of non-business background students.

Dr. Willard made a motion to accept the program modifications to the Master of Science in Agriculture with a concentration in Agricultural Economics and the Master of Agribusiness Management degree program. Dr. Younan seconded the motion.

Graduate Council voted and the motion carried by acclamation.

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

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

a) The 2008 Alliance for Graduate Education in Mississippi (AGEM) Winter Scholar Symposium, hosted on our campus January 24 through January 26, 2008 was a great success. Approximately 300 participants, including over 200 students, from institutions throughout Mississippi and the contiguous states were in attendance.

b) IMPETUS-PGE (Increasing Momentum to Provide Empowerment to Talented Undergraduate Students to Pursue Graduate Education) Super Recruitment Weekend is scheduled for Friday, April 18 through Saturday, April 19, 2008. We are inviting approximately 50 students from Mississippi and its contiguous states.

c) Important Dates for Graduate Students- Spring 2008:

- March 7, 2008: last day to apply online for May 2008 graduation via OnCampus, $50 fee applies
- April 14, 2008: last day to apply for May 2008 graduation and have name appear in program book. Must apply in person at the Registrar’s office and pay account balance before application is accepted, $100 fee applies

- April 25, 2008: Last day to submit Library-approved thesis/dissertation to the Library for May graduation

- May 1, 2008: last day to apply for May 2008 graduation. Must apply in person at the Registrar’s office and pay account balance before application is accepted, $250 fee applies

- May 2, 2008: commencement at 7 p.m. for Bagley College of Engineering, College of Veterinary Medicine, College of Agriculture and Life Science, School of Human Sciences, College of Forest Resources, and College of Education

- May 3, 2008: commencement at 10 a.m. for College of Arts and Science, College of Architecture, Art, and Design, College of Business and Industry, Adkerson School of Accounting

d) A report compiled by Karin Lee regarding U grade policies from selected peer institutions was disseminated with the OGS Report.

Dr. Spencer asked whether there had been any new developments regarding the Dean of the Graduate School search. Dr. Wise stated that a nationwide search is underway and that an announcement has been posted in the Chronicle of Higher Education.

5. Report from Graduate Student Association (GSA)

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

Since the next meeting of the Graduate Student Association is scheduled for the following week, there is not much to report. However, GSA treasurer Ms. Beth Rauhaus attended a meeting with Mr. Robert Cadenhead, Director of the Student Health Center, regarding Student Health Insurance 2009. Mr. Bill Broyles, Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs, and representatives from the Student Health Center and the Student Association also attended the meeting. Details of the meeting will be discussed at the next Graduate Council meeting.

On behalf of the Graduate Student Association, Mr. Thomas formally thanked the Graduate Council for their work and support.

6. Old Business

a) Office of the Graduate School Website (Handout)
Dr. Larry Barrow handed out a preliminary report on assessment of the OGS website and gave a brief overview of the findings to date.

The research so far was based on a survey completed by ten graduate students from Electrical and Computer Engineering (E&CE) and 19 respondents from the College of Architecture, Art & Design (A, A&D). Students rated the OGS website and a range of peer institution websites on a scale from 1 (good) to 5 (poor). The OGS website ranking was not significantly higher or lower than the ranking of the comparison websites. The only problem mentioned consistently by the AA&D students was their difficulty to pay for the application fee online. However, none of the ten E&CE students surveyed made note of such a problem.

Dr. Barrow stated that Ms. Julie Goodin from OSG also sent out the survey to an unknown number of graduate students. She reported a low response rate; however, the responses she did receive mirror the website rankings of the E&CE and A, A&D respondents.

Dr. Barrow indicated that the subcommittee plans to conduct a larger sampling and incorporate responses from the OGS staff. The findings will be presented at the next meeting.

b) ESL Issues (Handout)

Dr. Spencer reminded the Graduate Council that the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Exam was accepted as an approved alternative method for the graduate admission of international students to Mississippi State University during the previous Graduate Council meeting. She asked Dr. Cottrell to introduce yet another method of testing language proficiency that may be used for admission of international students to MSU.

Dr. Stephen Cottrell disseminated a handout regarding the consideration of the successful completion of the MSU ESL Professional Mastery of English Program as one of the approved methods for demonstrating English proficiency for international graduate admissions. He asked Ms. Molly Watkins, Manager of International Education in the Division of Academic Outreach and Continuing Education, to speak to this issue.

Ms. Watkins presented the following overview:

This program is already in place and we currently have 131 students enrolled. Usually, students who are enrolling in the Mastery programs are already here; some of them as ESL students in their own right and some of them as spouses of students or staff. If these students are interested in pursuing graduate study at MSU, they may have difficulty in getting admission due to the TOEFL testing dates. If the ESL Professional Mastery of English Program exam (tougher than the TOEFL) is accepted as one of the approved methods for demonstrating English proficiency, these potential students could be admitted. Some students may be very good graduate applicant candidates but they lack
the necessary TOEFL or IELTS testing. With the ESL Professional Mastery of English Program, a student could potentially take our placement test and pass it which would demonstrate English proficiency, and then gain admission. As before, the final admission decision will be left up to the department; departments also decide which method of proving English language proficiency will accepted.

Discussion followed. It was determined that no international graduate students are currently admitted with the TOEFL (or equivalent) test. Dr. Wise asked how many students are currently required to take ESL courses due to substandard TOEFL scores. Ms. Pam Sullivan stated that usually 12 to 15 students per semester are required to take an ESL class.

Mr. Thomas made a motion to accept the ESL Professional Mastery of English Program exam as another alternative to the TOEFL and IELTS tests for admission to graduate programs at Mississippi State University. Dr. Younan seconded the motion.

The Graduate Council voted. Dr. Wise voted against the motion but the majority of the voting members voted to approve. The motion carried by majority vote.

c) Policy on accepting U Grades (Handout)

At the January 26, 2007, meeting, the Graduate Council determined that a graduate student should be allowed to graduate with a U grade and approved a change in graduate policy in the Graduate Bulletin. However, that policy had not been approved by the Provost and at the last meeting, Dr. Rabideau asked the Graduate Council to reconsider the motion.

Discussion followed. The Graduate Council acknowledged that Drs. Jerry Gilbert and Peter Rabideau were not present. It was determined that the U-grade policy at selected peer institutions supports the previous change in policy. Individual departments should clearly state in the Graduate Bulletin how many U grades they will allow before a student is dismissed.

Dr. Wise made a motion to state that the previous decision regarding the U grade policy change was reconsidered and the Graduate Council found the previous decision to be sound and corroborated by the U-grade policy at selected peer institutions. Dr. Younan seconded the motion.

The Graduate Council voted and the motion passed by acclamation.

8. New Business

a) Election of Academic Review Board Representative and Alternate
Dr. Spencer asked that this item be discussed during the next meeting and that Dr. Person provide more information regarding this election. The previous elected members (Tor Schultz and Richard Harkess) were not part of the Graduate Council.

Meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

The next Graduate Council meeting will be held at 1:30 p.m. on March 28, 2008, at 611 Allen Hall.