Graduate Council  
Mississippi State University

Number: 2  
Date: September 22, 2006


Guests: Dr. Bill Kibler, Ms. June Schmidt

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

2. Dr. Spencer briefly introduced the guests present.

3. Dr. Spencer asked for any revisions to the minutes (August 25, 2006).

   Motion was made by Dr. Ronald Taylor and seconded by Dr. John Boyle to accept the minutes.

   Minutes were approved.

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

   a) Dr. Timothy Chamblee gave the following report:

   1. UCCC was approached by Dr. Mark Binkley, Director of Division of Academic Outreach and Continuing Education (AOCE), to take a look at the programs and degrees offered through Continuing Education and Distance Learning, going back about a year or two. Two programs had come to UCCC for approval (MS. in Broadcast Meteorology and MS in Engineering). The other programs were never approved through the formal approval process and then were just set up within AOCE.

   2. UCCC, in cooperation with Dr. Binkley, has identified all the programs and courses in AOCE and a process was set in motion to formally review and approve these programs and courses retroactively. This action will produce proper documentation and hopefully prevent any problems with the Distance Education programs and courses in the future. After a graduate program has passed the UCCC review, Graduate Council will review and approve the
program as part of the process. Graduate Council will only review graduate programs, not graduate courses.

3. The first meeting of UCCC dealing with these issues will be in December 2006. Specific deadline dates for turning in graduate programs and courses for UCCC review were announced to the colleges. Program modifications must be approved by Spring 2008.

Discussion followed regarding the fee structure of continuing education courses.

b) Program Modification: Doctor of Philosophy degree in Instructional Systems and Workforce Development

1. Dr. Jerry Gilbert stated that he explained this issue during the August 25 meeting; the modification is basically a name change. IHL approval was obtained in July to have the name changed from Doctor of Philosophy in Technology Teacher Education/Industrial Arts Teacher Education (TIAE) to Doctor in Philosophy in Instructional Systems and Workforce Development.

2. Ms. Rita Burrell noted that corrections are needed in the abbreviation of the degree. Instead of DPISWD, it should read Ph.D. in ISWD. The description of the graduate committee requirements should read:

“The graduate committee will be composed of a minimum of four members, five members if the student has a minor....”

“...: the remainder of the committee will be comprised of three other members of the graduate faculty, four other members if the student has a minor.”

Motion was made by Dr. Taylor and seconded by Dr. John Boyle to accept the program modification.

Program Modification (name change) was approved.

5. Report from Graduate Studies

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 official graduate enrollment is expected to be 3,310 this academic year, an increase of 21 students or .64%.

b. Fifteen (15) proposals for Recruitment Assistance Grants (RAG) have been received from five (5) of the eight (8) colleges. Many of the proposals indicate an intent to utilize both departmental and pledged funds from the academic dean’s
office to support their recruitment initiatives. Overall funds requested from the Office of Graduate Studies total $9,370.

c. Ms. Burrell has tendered her resignation in the Office of Graduate Studies, effective September 30, 2006, to accept the position of Manager of Distance Education Programs in the Bagley College of Engineering. The Office of Graduate Studies is very appreciative of Rita’s outstanding service since August 2002.

d. The Office of Graduate Studies is participating in Graduate and Professional Day Fairs at Mississippi Valley State University and Tougaloo College the week of September 18, 2006. Information will be sent to department heads regarding our contacts within the next few days.

e. Level I and Level I-A graduate faculty members who need to be reviewed for reappointment have been identified and the names will be sent to the academic deans for distribution to the appropriate departments next week.

Graduate Council members expressed their appreciation for Ms. Burrell’s contributions to graduate studies and her hard work.

Motion was made by Dr. Taylor and seconded by Dr. Connie Forde to thank Ms. Burrell officially from the Graduate Council.

The Graduate Council officially thanked Ms. Burrell.

It was noted that the Provost’s Office has not received anything from Dr. Person regarding the hiring of a replacement for Ms. Burrell.

6. Report from Graduate Student Association (GSA)

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

The first GSA meeting was held September 21, 2006.

7. Old Business

a) Streamlining the dissertation/thesis process (Handout)

Dr. Spencer stated that the Graduate Council subcommittee for the development of the review and streamlining for dissertations and thesis guidelines met on September 18, 2006. She disseminated the minutes of this meeting and asked Ms. June Schmidt, Associate Dean of Mitchell Memorial Library, to speak regarding the process.
Ms. Schmidt stated that while the subcommittee has only met once, another group consisting of Ms. Burrell, Ms. Pam Sullivan, Ms. Ginger Williams, and herself had been meeting regarding this process over many months. This group has identified a number of areas that are problematic for graduate students. In some cases, the group is recommending simplification of language; in others, they recommend better examples or added clarification. Some areas have been identified as being unnecessarily complicated. All of the changes have been incorporated into a recommended revision that has been submitted to the subcommittee. It will take a while for the subcommittee to review the revisions.

Dr. Spencer stated that Dr. Scott Willard will give a full report of the subcommittee at a future meeting. She encouraged Graduate Council members to contact the people listed on the handout and give them any feedback they may have regarding the revisions.

8. New Business

a. Proposed 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.

1) Dr. Kibler distributed the proposed Mississippi State Honor Code (25 pages) and a one-page summary used to present an overview of the larger document.

2) Dr. Kibler stated that about one year ago, he was formally asked by the Faculty Senate and the Provost to form a committee for taking a comprehensive look at academic misconduct at Mississippi State, the current policies to deal with this issue on campus, and to determine the opinions about the issue. Students and faculty are of the opinion that Mississippi State University has a history of being too lenient and inconsistent in the sanctions against students who engage in academic dishonesty. The Academic Integrity Assessment Committee also looked at data on this topic at the national level and at models that other universities, comparable to MSU, have in place to deal with this issue. The committee spent a considerable amount of time looking at current MSU policy before developing the current draft proposal.

3) Dr. Kibler began his overview by addressing the proposed Mississippi State Code of Honor which states:

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.
If approved, this honor code will be placed on the admission application, so students will be made aware of this honor code even before they become students and they will be continuously reminded of it until they graduate.

4) The target date for having the new Honor Code in place is Fall 2007. Faculty/Student Honor Council selections will be made during Spring 2007.

5) Dr. Kibler presented an overview of the Honor Code proposal. He stressed the promotion of honor and integrity by saying that at least as much, or even more, energy needs to be spent promoting academic integrity than is spent addressing academic dishonesty.

6) Dr. Kibler explained the make-up of the proposed Honor Council. The Honor Council will have 42 members, comprised of two faculty from each college and the library, as well as two undergraduate students (for CVM, professional students), and one graduate student from each college.

7) The Honor Council will be charged with the responsibility of promoting the Honor Code, training, education, record keeping, assessment and dishonesty cases.

8) Enforcement of the proposed Honor Code will include the following:
   - Increased prevention measures (new resources, like plagiarism detection software)
   - Due process system gives faculty members a choice of dealing with first offense violations themselves or turning the case over to the Honor Council.
   - There is only one level of appeal.
   - First offenses will result in “Dishonesty F” (XF) on transcripts. The X may be removed only by completing Intervention Program. The F is permanent.
   - A student who has a “XF” grade on the transcript will automatically be on probation.
   - Second offense will result in suspension from Mississippi State University.

9) Students who wish to remove the X from their transcript must participate in an intervention program that focuses on understanding dishonest behavior, the expectations of the University, and enhancement of academic skills, and ethical decision making. Students who complete the program will have the dishonesty notation removed from their transcript and will be able to retake the course.
However, the F is permanent, will be included in the final calculation of GPA, and cannot be removed through the academic forgiveness policy.

10) Dr. Kibler quickly moved through the long proposal document, highlighting some of the items.

- On page 4, the definitions of academic misconduct are given. Dr. Kibler stressed that these definitions are not set in stone and that the university reserves the right to include behavior that is not included here specifically but deemed dishonest.

- On page 5, Dr. Kibler called attention to a policy that is not in place on most campuses regarding multiple submissions. Students will not be allowed to submit the same paper for two different courses without obtaining permission from both instructors first.

- On page 7, the authority of a faculty member to assign a “XF” grade is spelled out.

Dr. Gilbert asked whether the faculty member has the option of something less severe than a “XF” on the student’s transcript.

Dr. Kibler answered that the option does exist but that the language in the proposed Honor Code is such that this should only be used in extraordinary circumstances. Otherwise, there will be far too much discretion and we will be right back where we started. The University needs to take a very strong stand that academic dishonesty here results in severe consequences.

Mr. Thomas asked how the term faculty member relates to graduate teaching assistants. After some discussion, it was determined that the Honor Code proposal should say “Instructor of Record” instead of “Faculty Member.”

- On page 8, Dr. Kibler pointed out a new policy for the university to revoke a degree if a former student is proven to have engaged in academic dishonesty. The policy statement specifically says that Mississippi State University has the authority to revoke a degree after it has been awarded. The process gives the provost the authority to revoke the degree if the former student is found ineligible to receive the degree after receiving an Honor Council sanction following an investigation. There have only been two cases like this in the past at MSU. In one case, the degree was revoked.
Discussion followed regarding dishonesty on graduate applications. It was determined that falsifying applications should be handled through the University Disciplinary Process.

Discussion followed whether academic dishonesty outside the classroom is covered by the Honor Code. Dr. Kibler referred to page 4 of the Honor Code proposal where it is stated that the University reserves the right to include behavior that is not specifically listed but deemed dishonest at any time.

Discussion followed regarding the intervention program. Dr. Lynne Cossman asked whether students would have to pay tuition for these classes. Dr. Kibler answered that this is just a program that students have to successfully complete, not any courses for credit. If students do not complete the intervention program, not only will the “XF” remain on their transcripts, but the students will also remain on probation. A student cannot graduate while on probation, so there is added incentive to complete the intervention program.

11) Dr. Kibler handed out a one-page flowchart that details the process for alleged incidents of academic dishonesty.

12) Dr. Kibler stated that the Honor Code will only have one level of appeal. This is a departure from the current process which is not expeditious because it allows students to pursue several venues of appeal, causing the case to string out far too long. The appeal will go through the Honor Council, effectively cutting out multiple appeals to single administrators.

13) Dr. Kibler stated that the proposed Honor Code Office will have functions of record-keeping, coordination of training on academic integrity/academic dishonesty and all relevant communication, and serve as a central location to oversee all activities of the Honor Council. For example, the office will be responsible to train proctors who faculty could call upon to help administer examinations.

Dr. Kibler ended his presentation with a call for questions. Dr. Taylor congratulated the Academic Integrity Assessment Committee on a stellar job. He asked whether there would be confusion of the title Honor Code with the honor’s program.

Discussion followed. Dr. Kibler stated that the name confusion had been taken into account by the Academic Assessment Committee but it was determined that the term is so universally recognized that the meaning of the term is very clear. The honors program at MSU has a distinctive name and is known as the Shackouls Honors College.
Discussion followed regarding the make-up of the Honor Council when the case involves a graduate student. It was determined that a graduate coordinator will be acceptable in graduate cases in place of a department head.

Discussion followed regarding the impact of an “XF” for graduate students, especially if they are international. Several questions were raised:

- What happens to a graduate student while the appeal is pending?
- What happens to a graduate student when the “XF” is removed but the “F” remains?
- What happens if the case cannot be resolved within the timeframe an international student has to complete the degree program? Dr. Stephen Cottrell stated that international students would not be able to convince the Department of Homeland Security that this situation was beyond their control and would have to leave the country.

Graduate Council determined that the stakes are much higher for graduate students who choose to engage in academic dishonesty.

Dr. Chamblee stated that clarification is needed in the proposal document regarding the selection of graduate students on the Honor Council.

Dr. Kibler explained that making a decision to dismiss a student from a program still rests with a department. However, if that dismissal involves academic dishonesty, the burden will be shifted to the Honor Council.

Dr. Spencer asked whether a decision by a faculty member can be overridden by the Honor Council. Dr. Kibler stated that a faculty member cannot be overridden unless there is an appeal. If a faculty member reports an incident and recommends a less severe sanction than an “XF” on the transcript, the faculty member can justify the reason (exceptional circumstances) to the Honor Council.

Discussion followed regarding faculty members not reporting incidents. Dr. Kibler stated that if a faculty member chooses not to report an incident to the Honor Council and that faculty member is later challenged in court, the legal liability rests solely on the faculty member.

Dr. Kibler explained that if a faculty member does not want to be responsible for making a decision regarding to academic dishonesty that may end a student’s academic career, the faculty member can refer the case to the Honor Council and leave the decision-making up to them.

Dr. Kibler stated that the proposed Honor Code is intended to apply to all students at MSU, undergraduate, graduate, and professional.

Dr. Taylor asked what is expected from the Graduate Council at this time.
Dr. Kibler said that the document is still a draft. However, he was ultimately looking for an endorsement of the Honor Code from the Graduate Council and he wants to move very quickly. He noted three modifications that need to be made to the proposed Honor Code document as a result of today’s meeting and proposed to send a revised draft with the modifications electronically to Dr. Spencer for dissemination prior to the next Graduate Council meeting.

b. Mission of the Graduate Council
Dr. Spencer removed the item from the agenda.

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

The next Graduate Council meeting will be held on October 27, 2006, at 1:30 p.m., in the Templeton Conference Room - 4th floor Mitchell Memorial Library.