Graduate Council
Mississippi State University

Number: 1
Date: September 26, 2008


Absent: H. Bailey, W. Batchelor, M. Binkley, L. Cossman, N. Ponder (excused), K. Schulz,

Guests: J. Goodin, C. Hill, K. Lee, S. Minchew, L. Morse, S. Morris, F. Sparks, B. Stokes, P. Sullivan, J. To

1. Dr. Dwayne Wise called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. in 611 Allen Hall. He asked Graduate Council members to introduce themselves.

2. Dr. Wise asked for any revisions to the minutes (April 25, 2008).

   Motion was made by Dr. Larry Barrow to accept the minutes. Dr. Nick Younan seconded the motion.

   Minutes were approved by acclamation.

   Dr. Wise stated that Ms. Sharon Nobles, Associate Registrar, requested to make comments about applying for graduation in December. Ms. Nobles said that a problem was encountered with four graduate students that had not occurred before. These students missed the first deadline to apply for graduation online for a fee of $50 because they were told by their respective departments to wait until their comprehensive results had been received. Consequently, these students had to come to the Registrar’s Office in person to apply for graduation and they had to pay a late fee.

   Ms. Nobles urged Graduate Council members tell their respective departments that students should go ahead and apply. However, if a professor has concerns about a particular student, he/she should contact Ms. Nobles and she will ensure that the Registrar’s Office will work with the student in the situation.

3. University Committee on Courses and Curricula (UCCC)

   No Report.

4. Report from the Office of the Graduate School (OGS)

   Dr. Louis D’Abramo presented the following report:
a) In Summer 2008, a total of 363 degrees were awarded, broken down to 308 master’s, 22 educational specialists, 32 Doctor of Philosophy and one Doctor of Education. Since a total of 401 students applied for graduation and 363 degrees were awarded, these numbers represent a graduation rate of 91%. By comparison, in Summer 2007, 345 degrees were awarded, 28 of those were doctoral students.

b) In terms of Graduate School admission, the number of applicants for spring 2009 up to September 25 is 349. Last year, that number was 313. Summer and fall 2009 total 360, compared to 331 last year which shows a slight increase for this year.

Dr. D’Abramo deferred to Dr. William Person for additional information from the Graduate School.

c) Dr. Person thanked Dr. Daniel Reynolds (Chair), Dr. Nicole Ponder-Lueg, and Dr. William Batchelor for their service as a subcommittee to review an academic dismissal appeal. He mentioned that there are two more dismissal appeals pending and asked for volunteers to serve on those committees.

d) The Graduate School received an award of approximately $174,000 this summer for the third and final year of the Pre-Academic Program for international Fulbright Scholars. Thirty-eight students from 27 countries participated in this program. Everyone involved did an outstanding job to make this program a success.

e) Six students participated in the AGEM Summer Graduate Bridge Program. The program is designed for new master’s and doctoral students from underrepresented groups in the STEM areas and was well coordinated by Ms. Shlynn Morris, the AGEM coordinator at Mississippi State University.

f) To date, 1,077 students are currently on graduate assistantships. That breaks down to 332 Graduate Teaching Assistants, 609 Graduate Research Assistants, and 136 Graduate Service Assistants.

g) The official report has not been released yet but the official graduate enrollment for fall 2008 is expected to be 3,538. If this number proves correct, it would mean a slight decrease from last year, 12 students less. However, it should still be noted as the second largest enrollment ever of graduate students at Mississippi State University.

Dr. D’Abramo added that the results and numbers from the Teaching Assistant Workshops and the Graduate Student Orientation will be available at the next Graduate Council meeting.

5. Report from Graduate Student Association (GSA)

Mr. Terrance West, GSA president, presented the following report:
Mr. West stated that he was excited to be a member of the Graduate Council. He said that the first meeting of the GSA is scheduled for Tuesday, September 30, at 5:30 p.m. in Allen 21.

Mr. West said that one of the goals is to bring speakers to GSA meetings, starting with Dr. D’Abramo, the new Dean of the Graduate School. Other scheduled speakers include representatives from the library and professors who will make presentations about opportunities for graduate students.

6. Old Business

a) Graduate Faculty Ethics Statement (Handout)

Dr. Wise reminded Graduate Council members that Dr. Peter Ryan had raised concerns regarding issues of questionable treatment of graduate students by their major professors during a previous Graduate Council meeting. At that time, Dr. Ryan pointed out that clear guidelines regarding the expectations for students at Mississippi State University are set forth in the Honor Code. However, no clear guidelines exist as to what a graduate student should expect from his major professor in terms of mentoring. A subcommittee (Dr. Wise, Dr. Ryan, Dr. Person, Dr. Ratnasingham Shivaji, GSA Representative, Ms. Morris, Ms. Karin Lee) was formed to review the issue.

Dr. Wise distributed a draft of a policy for Graduate Student Appeal of Faculty Misconduct. He explained that during a subcommittee meeting, it was determined that a policy should be in place to allow graduate students a clear process to complain when unethical treatment by the major professor or advisory committee member is perceived by the student.

Dr. Wise stated that there are really two issues. First, he asked whether Graduate Council should lay out in writing the expectation of ethical conduct for graduate faculty. Secondly, he inquired whether Graduate Council supports the implementation of an appeal process as laid out in the draft.

Discussion followed. Dr. Peter Rabideau stated that a mechanism to address issues involving graduate student complaints already exists. In this process, students may file a complaint at the departmental level; if the issue is not resolved, the appeal comes before the academic dean, and then to the Office of the Provost. Dr. Rabideau stated that in light of this, the question is whether the current process works and whether there is enough awareness of the process.

Dr. Jerry Gilbert pointed out the word “unethical” may not be the best choice since it may be interpreted in a very narrow sense. Dr. Wise stated that he modeled his policy draft after the termination appeal in the Graduate Bulletin (page 49).

Dr. D’Abramo stated that the process for grievance seems to be working fine. However, there is a lack of awareness as to what expectations graduate students have toward
graduate faculty, especially regarding mentorship. The Faculty Handbook somewhat addresses this issue for faculty but there is nothing written for graduate students. It was decided that mentorship will be addressed in the Graduate Bulletin and on the Graduate School website, along with the grievance process that is already in place.

b) 4+1 Proposal Subcommittee Report (Handout)

Dr. Gilbert gave the following report:

At the April 25, 2008 Graduate Council meeting, we were tasked to develop guidelines and minimal requirements for combined undergraduate/graduate programs (a more appropriate name since some programs may take longer than 4 years) which departments could then use for a proposal to UCCC. Dr. Gilbert presented the guidelines the subcommittee developed after research of similar programs at peer institutions.

Dr. Rabideau stated that before proceeding any further with this project, Mississippi State University should find out whether permission from IHL is required to count classes for dual credit. Dr. Gilbert agreed to ask IHL this specific question. He pointed out that the appeal of these programs is the fact that the total number of hours required for both degrees is reduced by 9, thereby significantly shortening the time.

Discussion followed. Would these programs also be available to transfer students? This issue was not discussed but can be looked at as part of a proposal a department may put forward. Dr. Rabideau pointed out that these programs must be available to transfer students or MSU’s relationship with community colleges will be jeopardized.

What impact, if any, would participation in one of these programs have for international students? It was determined that international students would not be impacted. If they are in such a program, they simply get another I-20 reflecting the higher level after they complete the undergraduate degree program.

What if a student drops below a 3.5 GPA after admission to the program? How would this be different from students taking graduate course while still in undergraduate status? Undergraduates now doing that have to have a certain GPA, and if they don’t, additional signatures are required (Provost signature). Dr. D’Abramo pointed out that there is a difference – combined undergraduate/graduate program participants have to declare themselves as part of the program early on. Furthermore, most students allowed into such programs are exceptional and often start their master’s thesis research during their sophomore year.

Students can only be counted once as far as enrollment goes; student status drives how a student will be counted.

Dr. Nick Younan made a motion to adopt the document presented by Dr. Gilbert as a general guideline for submitting combined graduate/undergraduate programs to UCCC. Dr. Shivaji seconded the motion.
The motion carried by acclamation.
Before moving on to new business, Dr. Wise announced that the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) has now been officially adopted as an alternative to the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Equivalency scores will be posted on the OGS website and are included the next edition of the Graduate Bulletin.

7. New Business

a) Composition of Graduate Council (Handout)

Dr. Wise disseminated a list of Graduate Council members that identifies all voting members and all ex-officio members.

b) OGS Website

Dr. D’Abramo asked Ms. Julie Goodin to present an outline of the new OGS website. Ms. Goodin stated that the main goal of the new website is to improve user-friendliness and ease of navigation. The changes incorporated reflect the suggestions of the Graduate Council OGS Website Subcommittee.

Dr. D’Abramo estimated that the new website will be operational by the end of October 2008.

c) Ethics course for Graduate Students

Dr. Wise asked Dr. D’Abramo to inform Graduate Council about an ethics course (Philosophy 8101- Case Studies & Scientific Research Ethics) offered by the Department of Philosophy and Religion in the spring 2009 semester. Dr. D’Abramo stated that the course will be taught in three sections, limited to 15 students each. The course is designed to provide students with analytical material resources for identifying, understanding, and addressing the ethical problems that arise in their work.

Dr. D’Abramo stated that this course is not obligatory in any way; he merely wanted to pass on the information. Dr. Harry LLull stated Mitchell Memorial Library also offers an extensive array of workshops for graduate students. Delivery of some of these courses is more and more moving toward pod casting which is very attractive to graduate students. However, the library is very much willing to accommodate departments with their scheduling needs. The point of contact for setting up workshops is Dr. Deborah Lee.

d) Reapplication to process change in program/major (Handout)

Dr. Wise asked Dr. D’Abramo to speak about this topic. Dr. D’Abramo deferred to Ms. Forest Sparks, the Admission Manager in the Graduate School.
Ms. Sparks explained that Dr. Ryan brought this topic to the forefront last March during a Graduate Council Meeting when he stated that the process to change concentrations within a department is too cumbersome for students and faculty alike. At that time, concentrations were treated like majors in relation to admissions, meaning that statement of purpose, letters of recommendation, and an application were required if a student wanted to change concentrations.

In response, OGS created the form you have before you which will make this process a lot easier. This form is much simpler to use. When students complete this form, applications are no longer necessary, no application fee is charged and no other documents are required. The information collected is very basic data that allows us to process the change within the student record in the BANNER system. Since such a change should be student-driven, this form will include a signature line for the student. However, the form will also require the signatures of the student’s current major advisor, the current graduate coordinator, the future graduate coordinator, as well as the department head, and in some cases, the dean. This form is not intended for changing campus or for changing majors, even if it is within the same college.

Dr. Younan made a motion to accept the use of the Request for Change of Degree or Concentration form. Dr. Burnette Hamil seconded the motion.

The motion passed by acclamation.

Dr. Wise moved the two remaining agenda items (●Increase in application fee/late fee and ●Statistics Course) to the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 2: p.m.

The date for the next Graduate Council meeting has been set for 1:30 p.m. on October 24, 2008, at 611 Allen Hall.