The February 28, 2014, meeting of the Graduate Council of Mississippi State University was called to order by Chair Juan Silva at 1:34 PM in Room 611 of Allen Hall.

Russell Carr’s motion to approve the minutes of the January 31, 2014, meeting was seconded by Steve Elder. The minutes were approved with one correction (Mike Cox, graduate coordinator of Plant and Soil Sciences in place of Mike Phillips, department head of Plant and Soil Sciences).

Report from University Committee on Courses and Curricula (UCCC): Kirk Swortzel, Chair

No report

Graduate Student Association (GSA): Vemitra White, President

In the absence of White, Silva gave the following GSA report. GSA held its second meeting of the semester with 45 attendance; Alex Washington from Financial Aid was the guest speaker. The group is participating in a 5K run this weekend and they are planning and working on the Graduate Student Symposium and the GSA banquet. The Symposium will be held March 22 from 8 AM until 2PM in McCool. GSA needs faculty volunteers to serve as judges, and they are asking deans, department heads, and graduate coordinators to encourage students to participate. The first prize is $300, and second prize is $150. The next meeting will be held March 20 at 5:15 PM in McCool.

Frances Coleman, Dean of Mitchell Memorial Library, distributed brochures created by the Library for graduate students to assist them throughout their academic careers at MSU. The Library has a committee that focuses solely on graduate students and meets monthly with representatives of the Graduate School to develop and improve programs and services. She encouraged Council members to become familiar with and encourage their departments and students to take advantage of the services and especially to encourage PhD and thesis-option master’s students to seek Library assistance as they begin their research and writing. The Graduate Student Information Portal is accessed at http://guides.library.msstate.edu/grads.

Old Business:

- Silva recognized David Morse, chair of the committee studying MS/PhD requirements. Committee members include Russell Carr, PC Cinnella, Lara Dodds, and Dan Reynolds. He directed Council’s attention to the recommendation on MSU PhD Programs on the second page of the meeting agenda. Morse moved Council consider the recommendation and Carr seconded.

  The current bulletin states “To meet all the course requirements (non-research) for a Ph.D., three academic years beyond the bachelor’s degree as a full-time student are generally needed. The total number of course credit hours will vary, depending on the specific doctoral program, the student’s needs, and the student’s academic history. Program of study courses must be approved by the student’s

The committee recommended the following modification: “Completion of a Ph.D. requires substantial academic work in the field or program of interest beyond the bachelor’s level, and includes both formal course work and research (dissertation hours). Mississippi State University requires that all students earn at least 53 hours of graduate credit beyond the bachelor’s level, which includes a required 20 hours of dissertation credits. Of the 53 hours, at least 33 must be from course work (excluding dissertation credit research), and at least 20 must be dissertation research credits. Individual programs may require additional hours, including dissertation credit hours, as well as permit previous graduate degree course work in the field to contribute to that total. Program of study courses must be approved by the student’s committee. A student....”

Morse stated that the committee searched the bulletin and found that 33 was the lowest number of hours required by a program. He also stated that the committee found several common “weasel” words such as “generally,” “typically,” and “approximately” applied to coursework requirements. The recommendation would respond to Dean Bruce’s request for a more definite base requirement for Ph.D. programs at MSU. Several questions were raised. Would internships count toward the 53-hour requirement? Is there a minimum 8000-hour requirement, since the master’s degree requires a minimum of 12? Must all 53 credit hours be GPA-graded hours? Is 53 credit hours enough?

Following discussion, Morse amended his motion to the following: “Completion of a Ph.D. requires substantial academic work in the field or program of interest beyond the bachelor’s level, and includes both formal course work and research (dissertation hours). Mississippi State University requires that all students earn at least 53 hours of graduate credit beyond the bachelor’s level, which includes a required 20 hours of dissertation credits. Of the 53 hours, at least 33 must be from GPA-graded course work with a minimum of 12 credit hours at the 8000 level (excluding dissertation credit research), and at least 20 must be dissertation research credits. Individual programs may require additional hours, including dissertation credit hours, as well as permit previous graduate degree course work in the field to contribute to that total. Program of study courses must be approved by the student’s committee. A student....” A vote was taken and the recommendation passed unanimously.

Silva thanked Morse and committee for their research and hard work in developing the recommendation.

- Silva updated Council on the previously discussed issue of graduate students taking a 6000-level course after taking it at the 4000 level. He said Faculty Senate has recommended revising AOP 11.04 to say that a student who takes a course at the 4000 level cannot take it again at the 6000 level except in special circumstances with explicit permission from the department offering the course. The recommendation is currently in the review process; therefore, Graduate Council can take no action at this time.

**New Business:**

- Silva recognized Steve Elder who stated that the College of Engineering graduate coordinators have discussed developing a policy or practice regarding the use of plagiarism software such as Turnitin but do not want to complete its development if the University is going to pass a similar policy. The college has used this software to spot-check theses and dissertations in the past and want to continue the practice. Discussion followed about the need for such a practice, and most Council members agreed that its use is good. A member asked about intellectual property issues and the possible loss of ownership of the work by using such software. Other members stated that the document can be submitted to Turnitin without being entered into the Turnitin database. A member asked if the Graduate School is interested in doing a sample study to see if we are ignoring a problem and this raised the issue of actually discovering past academic misconduct. Peter Ryan said awarded degrees have been revoked when academic misconduct was discovered after a student’s graduation and the University is bound to take such action. Members...
stated that using the software while the paper is still in process is a good idea. Ryan said the University is not moving toward adoption of a policy but that departments can. Coats said she would encourage this to be done as a practice, not a policy. Elder stated that Engineering requires the student to attach a Turnitin report with the thesis or dissertation when submitting to the academic dean for approval. Members acknowledged that training is required to learn how to handle settings when submitting a document and that we should investigate ownership of submitted intellectual material. No action was taken.

- Silva recognized Morse who asked if the group would be favorably disposed toward amending the requirement of 20 dissertation/research hours since this is an MSU policy and not IHL’s. Morse said his department has recently developed a course, currently in the approval process, for students who need a kickstart to begin writing or for those languishing in ABD land. His question is if the 20-hour research requirement could also include this course. The course is not mandatory and not everyone would take it but it should be beneficial for those who need the assistance. The students would be helped financially if they could include the hours in the 20-hour dissertation credits. A Council member asked if there would be a limit on the number of times the student could take this course and count it toward the dissertation hours. Another member asked if a bad grade in this course could be grounds for dismissal. A member stated that the course could be taken after a student receives a U grade in research. Members agreed that in most cases students take far more than the required 20 hours but allowing this course to count toward the research requirement would expand the definition of dissertation/research credits. A member asked if approval of the proposal would change the policy just passed on Ph.D. requirements and members agreed it would not. Members also agreed that the course must be given a 9000-level number. Graduate Council will not approve the course but must approve the policy to allow use of the course toward the dissertation/research requirements. Morse will return to Graduate Council with a proposal.

- Silva recognized Karen Coats for consideration of the C grade agenda item. Coats reminded members of the history of this issue and that Dean Bruce has asked for Council to clarify the policy. The current (2013-2014) Bulletin of the Graduate School does not record the same policy as the previous bulletin (2012-13). The current policy reads as follows: “A graduate student cannot graduate with … 3) more than 6 credit hours of C or lower grades earned for all courses since admission into the program, including a course that is retaken and those courses outside the program of study.” For discussion purposes, this is Option 1. The policy in the previous (2012-2013) bulletin (Option 2) reads as follows: “A graduate student cannot graduate with … 3) more than 6 credit hours of C or lower grades earned for all courses since admission to the program, including those outside the program of study…Note: C grades for a course that is retaken and in which the student earns a grades of B or higher will not be included in the 6 total hours. However, the original grade is included as part of the calculation of the GPA.” Council members recall that the stricter version (Option 1) was approved in March 2011. Coats moved the adoption of Option 1 to clarify the policy for the record. Jim Adams seconded the motion. There was lengthy discussion about the two options with some members stating that graduate programs must demonstrate more academic stringency than undergraduate programs, while other members favored a more lenient approach. Tim Chamblee pointed out that the corresponding undergraduate policy specifies two courses not to exceed 8 hours. Coats amended the motion to state two courses not to exceed 8 credit hours, and Adams seconded. Silva asked for a vote to adopt Option 1, reaffirming the March 2011 vote. The motion failed. Silva asked if Council should entertain a vote today on Option 2. Morse moved to approve Option 2 with the wording modified to state “two courses not to exceed 8 hours.” The proposed policy would read “A graduate student cannot graduate with … 3) more than two courses not exceeding 8 credit hours of C or lower grades earned for all courses since admission to the program, including those outside the program of study…Note: C grades for a course that is retaken and in which the student earns a grades of B or higher will not be included in the 8 total hours. However, the original grade is included as part of the calculation of the GPA.” Following discussion the proposal was modified to read as follows: “A graduate student cannot graduate with … 3) more than two courses not
exceeding 8 credit hours **below a B** or lower grades earned for all courses since admission to the program, including those outside the program of study...Note: C grades for a course that is retaken and in which the student earns a grades of B or higher will not be included in the 8 total hours. However, the original grade is included as part of the calculation of the GPA.” Lara Dodds seconded the motion. Council was reminded that programs can be more rigorous than the approved policy. The vote was taken and the motion to accept the amended Option 2 passed unanimously.

**Graduate Dean’s Report: Lori Bruce, Dean**

Dean Bruce encourage Council to review the Dean’s Report and she noted several items.

- **Survey of graduate students and their responses regarding their graduate programs and how they became aware of the program to which they applied.** She pointed out the importance of internet and websites, both the Graduate School’s and departments’, stating that even among MSU alums 14 percent learned about their program from the internet. She encouraged members to share these results with faculty in their departments. She also pointed out the importance of semantics in the students’ responses, saying that, for example, although the department may have recruited them, the students might not have perceived that they were recruited and thus responded with “word of mouth” instead.

- **Counts of applications.** Bruce discussed the different ways to count applications: each single application or the number of individuals who apply, maybe to multiple programs. The first way affects the admissions workload, and the second way counts the number of unique individuals who apply to MSU graduate school.

- **Health subsidy.** Bruce said that the Affordable Health Care Act is a hot topic among graduate school deans. MSU gives a low insurance subsidy, 31%, compared to our peers, although some departments/programs pay the difference. The funds come from the same pot of money that covers graduate assistant stipends.

- **She noted Graduate Student Appreciation week is March 31-April 4 and encouraged departments to plan a celebration of their graduate students.**

- **Bruce stated that Josh Winter gave a flawless presentation at the regional 3MT competition held February 23 at the Council of Southern Graduate School conference in San Antonio and that all the presentations were excellent.**

With no other business for consideration, at 3:03 PM Roberts moved the meeting be adjourned and Carr seconded. The next meeting will be held on March 28, 2014, at 1:30 PM in Allen 611.