MINUTES
UNIVERSITY GRADUATE COMMITTEE

September 24, 2014

Members Present: Mike Amundson (History), Karen Applequist (Educational Specialties), Nadine Barlow (Physics & Astronomy), Steve Brown (Music), Amanda Butkiewicz (Graduate Student Government), Colleen Byron (Administration), Angelina Castagno (Educational Leadership), Joe Collentine (Modern Languages), Michael Costelloe (Criminology and Criminal Justice), William Crawford (English), Evie Garcia (Educational Psychology), Ann Huffman (Psychological Sciences), Tom Kolb (Forestry), Alan Lew (Geography, Planning and Recreation), Kooros Mahmoudi (Sociology), John Masserini (Ex-officio: Associate Dean), Gretchen McAllister (Chair, Teaching & Learning), Ramona Mellott (Ex-officio: Dean), Marcia Metcalf (Business), Stephen Nuño (Politics & International Affairs), Patricia Peterson (Faculty Senate Representative), Jim Sample (School of Earth Sciences and Environmental Sustainability), Cathy Small (Anthropology), Anna Sosa (Communication Sciences & Disorders), Barbara Tomlinson (School of Nursing), Niranjan Venkatraman (Engineering), and Meghan Warren (Physical Therapy).

Members Absent: Emily Babcock (Physician Assistant Studies), April Brown Judd (Mathematics & Statistics), Patrick Deegan (Ex-officio: Extended Campuses), Steve Hempleman (Biological Sciences), Amy Hughes (Ex-Officio: Cline Library), Fred Hurst (Ex-officio: Extended Campuses), Stephanie Hurst (Chemistry & Biochemistry), Luis Fernandez (Sustainable Communities), and Brant Short (School of Communication).

Guests: Scott Galland (Curriculum and Assessment), Jenny Scott (Extended Campuses), Lisa Williams (Registrar), and Lisa Wischmeier (Extended Campuses)

Graduate College: Megan Ruiz, Kirsten Slaughter-Rice

The meeting was called to order at 3:01 pm by Gretchen McAllister.

I. Welcome, Announcements, and Brief Reports
   A. Approval of the Minutes from of the August 27, 2014, Meeting

The minutes were approved by all present, pending the addition of Michael Amundson to the Scholarships and Awards Subcommittee.

B. Graduate Student Government Report – Amanda Butkiewicz

Amanda Butkiewicz reported that the Graduate Student Government met this semester and is continuing to fill the representative positions. They are in need of applicants to fill one CEFNS
representative position. She asked the members to encourage any interested students to apply. GSG also discussed their priorities and initiatives for the year at the first meeting.

There was a question about the representative from the W.A. Franke College of Business, and Ms. Butkiewicz requested that the GSG receive notification as to who won the election for the W.A. Franke College of Business representative position.

C. Associate Dean’s Remarks – John Masserini

Dr. Masserini explained the decision to allow more time for vetting policy changes, and that the two Action Items would actually be Discussion Items. Policies will be discussed, and then members will have the next month to vet the policies throughout their departments and send any feedback to Dr. Masserini. Then policies could be voted on at the next meeting, unless an additional month of discussion and vetting is requested.

Dr. Masserini discussed the Change of Grade form and how it affects the graduation status of students. The student’s work must be completed before the last day of the term, which is when the degree is posted. When the form is received by the Graduate College, it is assumed that the requirements have been completed by the last day of the term. If the student has not completed their work by the last day of the term, the Graduate College requests that departments wait an additional month after the end of term before submitting the Change of Grade form. The degree will then be posted the following semester. If the Graduate College were audited, any instances where the degree posted before the course was completed would be problematic. If the student needs proof of their degree for employment or other purposes, the Graduate College can issue a letter of verification, stating that the student has completed the degree requirements.

D. Dean’s Remarks – Ramona Mellott

Dr. Mellott did not make any remarks at this meeting.

II. Curricular Changes – Consent Items

There were no Consent Items at this time.

III. Action Items

These items were moved to “Discussion Items.”

A. Academic Appeals Policy Clean Version

Dr. McAllister asked the members for any feedback regarding the Academic Appeals Policy.
One member requested that the second point of Step 3 (page 2), “a description of the action or actions the student considers arbitrary, capricious, or contrary to university policy,” change to “description and evidence.” By including evidence, the description will not merely be an opinion. Dr. Mellott suggested changing it to include “…and supporting evidence or information, if any,” because there are cases where evidence is not necessary or available.

Another member asked if a student could make a request for an appeal of a decision if their situation does not apply to one of the choices of “arbitrary, capricious, or contrary.” Dr. Mellott responded that students must make the case that their situation is arbitrary, capricious, or contrary in some way. If standard procedures or policies were not used, that is arbitrary to university policy. If a student fails comprehensive exams because they did not know the content, then there is no case to be made because that situation is not arbitrary, capricious, or contrary to university policy. Students can only file an appeal if the action was arbitrary or out of the ordinary in same way.

A third member asked if there could be a claim of discrimination from underrepresented students, giving the example of part-time students who were unfairly represented by full-time students. Dr. Mellott remarked that this case would be an issue brought up under a different University Policy.

Another member noted that overall the wording is currently more inclusive rather than exclusive and thus covers a gamut of possibilities.

Dr. Masserini provided background information regarding the revision of this policy. While researching the academic appeals processes and policies at our peer institutions, he found that our process was twice as long as other processes. Under the current process, the Associate Dean of the Graduate College can overturn a decision by a Dean, or a Dean could overturn a decision made by another Dean. With the changes to the policy, the hearing panel, which was already established in the current policy, is included earlier in the process, and the Associate Dean becomes the chair of the hearing panel. The panel reviews the information and determines whether it should go to a hearing. The Dean of the Graduate College makes the final decision. The revision to the policy mirrors other appeal processes on campus, like the Grade Appeal Policy.

A member asked if the Grade Appeals Policy stays as is, and Dr. Masserini responded affirmatively. The first paragraph of the policy actually outlines what the policy does and does not do. Dr. Mellott added that the revision changes the steps within the policy.

Dr. McAllister asked the members to take this information to their constituents and send any feedback to Dr. Masserini. The policy will also be sent to the deans, associate deans, department chairs, and the Graduate Student Government. Representatives from the Graduate Student Government worked with Dr. Masserini on this policy revision during the summer, so there was direct student involvement.
Dr. McAllister opened the discussion by noting that the Co-Convene Standards are not a policy, but a “best practices” document. Programs often co-convene 400- and 500-level courses, and there is a need to distinguish the graduate learning and assessment expectations from those of the undergraduates. As we move forward with learning outcomes, Dr. Masserini expressed the need to determine what student learning outcomes really look like at the graduate level. The document incorporates the language that the Office of Curriculum, Learning Design, and Academic Assessment established, and the second page has a table of student learning outcomes.

Current co-convene requests often have the same learning outcomes for both undergraduates and graduates. Graduate learning outcomes need to reflect higher expectations to ensure the graduate students receive a true graduate experience. Another common problem is the amount of work required of graduate students, which should be 30% greater than that of their undergraduate counterparts.

A member asked if the 30% requirement for additional coursework should be explicitly expressed in the standards to avoid any confusion. Dr. Masserini responded that he used the language of “higher in quality and quantity,” but asked the members if the standards should reflect the 30% criteria.

Another member suggested including other examples from the Arts and Letters and Social Sciences disciplines in the learning outcome example chart. A third member suggested rewording or removing the first line of the document. Graduate level work should be better, but that is not always the case. The course should be more challenging for the graduate students, and the standards should include wording about the challenge of or difference between the graduate experience.

Dr. McAllister asked the members what graduate students bring to a co-convened course and what is the difference between what should be expected of graduate students in comparison to undergraduates. Members responded that the requirements and expectations depends on the course and the level of graduate work, whether master’s or doctoral. Other suggestions included that graduate students bring a greater body of knowledge and experience, are expected to put more time in the courses, and should have the ability to synthesize at a higher level. Another member noted that assignments and learning activities should hit towards the top of Bloom’s Taxonomy.

One member requested clarification about the second point under the “Syllabus” section regarding more learning outcomes. More learning outcomes are not always better; they should capture a higher quality of work and requirements. “More” learning outcomes are not always an indicator of higher quality. Other members suggested the learning outcomes should reflect what they expect to do after class and how the ideas will be expanded upon, as well as a higher level of responsibility than the undergraduates.

Dr. McAllister asked the members to take this information to their constituents and send any feedback to Dr. Masserini.

IV. Information Items
A. September 24, 2014, FAST TRACK Report

Dr. Mellott noted that several of the items listed on the FastTrack Report are actually non-curricular changes, which are submitted on the Non-Curricular Change Form to the Academic Catalog throughout the year. The Graduate College requested non-curricular changes from departments over the summer and submitted the requests to the Academic Catalog. The non-curricular changes will be moved to the correct form and sent to the department chair for approval. Signatures from the academic deans are not required on this form. Dr. Mellott, as the Graduate College Dean, then reviews the changes to ensure that current applicants are not adversely affected and current policies are not violated. The Non-Curricular Change Form is available on the Graduate College website.

B. College of Health and Human Services
   1. Science Teaching
      a. Athletic Training and M.A. Teaching Sciences; Accelerated Bachelor and Master, Fall 2014 – Deactivate Plan

Item was reviewed with no comment by the members.

C. W.A. Franke College of Business
   1. Accounting
      a. Master of Business Administration-Accounting Accelerated; M.B.A./B.S.ACCY, Fall 2015 – New Plan

Item was reviewed with no comment by the members. Dr. Masserini noted that the curriculum already exists, and that the accelerated option is merely combining the courses.

V. Discussion Items
   A. Transfer Credit Policy  Clean Version

Dr. Mellott opened the discussion by providing background to the revision of the Transfer Credit Policy. About 2-3 years ago, Karen Pugliesi, in her Vice Provost position, suggested broadening the definition of what would be accepted as transfer credit. This suggestion was brought before the UGC, but nothing was resolved after the discussion. At the July Council of Graduate Schools meeting, Dr. Mellott asked the President of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) what their view on transfer credits was. The president of CHEA responded that courses up for consideration for transfer credits should be evaluated to see if learning objectives, content, and rigor match the standards of the institution, department, and program evaluating the course. Some institutions are accredited under a different accrediting body (other than the standard regional accreditation); therefore, transfer credit requests coming from institutions with any type of accreditation other than regional will be automatically denied under our current policy.
The main revision to the policy is removing the blanket statement about credits being from regionally-accredited institutions. Transfer courses should be reviewed to see if the completed course meets the rigors, standards, and learning outcomes for the current required course. Transfer credits are requests for an exception and are not automatically approved. Each department will still decide whether or not to accept the course.

One member expressed concern that this change will open up more possibilities for courses to be accepted and, in turn, may affect the Graduate Dean in an adverse way. It was also asked if this change makes accreditation less valuable. Dr. Mellott noted that this change does not affect the value of accreditation. If an instructor denies the petition, the chair will likely support that decision. The policy change puts the choice and responsibility on the faculty to make the decision based on reviewing the content of the transfer course. The Graduate College then reviews the petition to see if the request meets our accreditation standard and is not merely a blanket signature from the faculty. The member asked at what point will we have to start accepting life experience. Dr. Mellott indicated that it is up to the department as to what they will accept for transfer credit. Departments have the choice to accept or deny transfer credit petitions and can choose to make a statement in their handbook that transfer credits are “rarely” accepted in that particular program.

There was a question about the 25% of allowable degree credits for transfer and whether it includes thesis and dissertation credits. Dr. Mellott stated that the 25% does include thesis credits, but it does not apply to doctoral programs. Doctoral programs individually decide how many transfer credits are allowable. In response to a question, Dr. Mellott noted that transfer credits do not have to be from a degree-seeking program; non-degree credits taken at another university are allowable if the department approves them. Undergraduate credits are non-transferable.

A member suggested adding a sentence under the “Doctoral Degrees” section specifying that transfer credits into doctoral programs are specific to the program, and students should consult their program handbook for specific guidelines.

VI. Agenda Items for Next UGC Meeting

Dr. McAllister asked the members if any additional topics should be discussed this year.

A member asked if there was any solution to the issue of students receiving a Financial Aid hold because of “In Progress” credits. Dr. Mellott indicated the she has discussed this issue with Financial Aid, and it is only partially resolved. Federal guidelines are specific regarding “In Progress” credits; however, some universities do not include “In Progress” credits in their determination of Satisfactory Academic Progress. She suggested advising students to sign up for research credits, instead of dissertation credits, if they are only researching their topic. Other problematic issues include students with other graduate degrees and students who are within 150% of their degree. With other graduate degrees, especially if they were earned at NAU, the credits can be zeroed out, so the doctoral clock starts out at zero. “In
Progress” credits cannot be changed to Pass/Fail. Dr. Mellott requested that departments contact her directly with these issues, so she can check for patterns and address them directly with Financial Aid.

Dr. Masserini announced an upcoming “brown bag lunch” on Graduate Handbooks in late October. The announcement will be circulated to the members, graduate coordinators, and chairs, and a Meet-Me line will be available for those at a distance. He will discuss what to include in handbooks to ensure everything is covered and the general evolution of these handbooks.

Dr. McAllister requested additional suggestions be sent to her.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:18 pm.