MINUTES OF THE GRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING
Friday, September 22 – 3:00 PM
Robert Scott Small – Room 235

Chair – Brian McGee, Dean of the Graduate School

Members and Guests Present: Divya Bhati (OIEP), Vince Benigni (COMM/HSS), Timothy Buttram (GSA), Annalisa Calini (MATH), Angela Cozart (MAT), Mike Duvall (ENGL), Christine Finnan (MTLA), Grant Gilmore (CPAD), Martin Jones (MATH), Phil Jos (MPA), Bret Lott (MFA), Bill Olejniczak (HIST), Aspen Olmsted (CSIS), John Peters (SMFT), Craig Plante (MBIO), Silvia Rodriguez Sabater (LALE), student representing Susan Simonian (MSCL), Allan Strand (BIOL/SSM), Laura Turner (EDPA)

GSO Staff Present: Jon Hakkila (Associate Dean), Cicely McCray (Recruitment, Marketing, Communications), and Robyn Olejniczak (Student Records)

I. Welcome – the meeting was called to order at 3:03pm

Brian McGee (GSO/AA) thanked everyone for their work before and after Hurricane Irma. He discussed changes to the academic calendar and make-up days for the fall semester. He mentioned the clock-to-credit requirement as well as the credit hour policy as they relate to the make-up days.

Vince Benigni (COMM/HSS) asked if faculty trained in distance education are allowed to use online options during the make-up days.

Christine Finnan (MTLA) stated that the bigger issue is that there is an expectation that faculty hold classes during every scheduled class day.

Brian McGee (GSO/AA) replied that the College had make-up days before distance education was in effect, and also that Academic Affairs does not intend to micromanage faculty attendance. However, the integrity of courses and their content must be maintained. Other state schools have some more flexibility in their policies that the College may look towards adopting.

Phil Jos (MPA) suggested that the College consider only cancelling undergraduate courses since they may need the extra time for dorms to be reopened. Or the College could consider starting graduate courses back sooner than undergraduate courses.

Brian McGee (GSO/AA) said this may be a possibility, but Physical Plant still needs to assess overall facilities before classes can resume.

McGee also mentioned that fall enrollments would be shared at the next Graduate Council meeting. He also noted that many campus budgets were reduced due to missing the undergraduate enrollment target for the fall, but that the Graduate School’s operating budget was among those.

II. Approval of the Minutes, April 12, 2017 Meeting – unanimous approval

III. Update from the Graduate Student Association – Timothy Buttram, President

Timothy Buttram introduced himself as the new GSA president and reported that he is working to fill the remaining executive board positions (vice president and treasurer) by their October meeting.
Some of the issues the GSA hopes to address this year are parking and library needs for graduate students. Timothy also reported that the GSA spent their remaining 16-17 funds on purchasing extra regalia for students to rent for the fall and spring commencement ceremonies.

IV. New Business

A. Scholarships and Assistantships
   i. Brian McGee (GSO/AA) opened the discussion by referencing the reoccurring patterns in how the Graduate School spends money to support graduate students and how it is necessary to recognize inflation and cost of living when considering the financial support that is offered. The last infusion of money to the Graduate School for this purpose was in 2010-2011. There will be a budget request in the 2017-2018 cycle to increase Graduate School monies, and the final proposal will be a result of discussion in Graduate Council.

   Referring to the documents provided, McGee discussed the environmental scan of peer institutions and their funding support. It was clear that CoC assistantships rates are average or above average, but that most of these peers offer tuition waivers. McGee also referenced the allocation of assistantships across programs and said this is most likely the first time this information has been shared with program directors. McGee stated that this allocation was the product of ad hoc decision making and does not reflect the strategic plan of the College.

   The conversation then moved to discuss the operational and strategic processes of offering and awarding funding. It appears that most of the funding is awarded after students have already committed to a graduate program. The intent of the discussion is to start reconsidering how the Graduate School’s funding can be used for effective recruiting. Retention is important and second-year students will be considered throughout the conversation, but funding needs to be shifted to focus on recruitment.

   McGee then presented an overview of proposed changes including new terminology and a new timeline for offering and awarding funding. McGee wants to begin using the term fellowship since it would carry prestige and larger award amounts. The new timeline would consist of three offer rounds: round 1 deadline would be April 15, round 2 deadline would be April 30, and round 3 deadline would be May 15. Beginning May 16, all unfilled or unoffered awards/assistantships could be swept and their use be determined by the Graduate School. The intent is to make offers early and aggressively.

   McGee emphasized that while Graduate Council is working on this new recruitment strategy, continuing student funding need to remain in the conversation. Shifting this funding will most have an impact on the availability of funds for that student population. It is also necessary to update and enforce current assistantship policies. Some programs have continuously awarded assistantships to under-enrolled third- and fourth-year students. New eligibility requirements would include students must be enrolled full time (6 hours) to hold an assistantship and can only receive funding for four academic semesters. These institutional policies may have different impacts on different programs, as well as summer enrollments.
Several members of Graduate Council provided feedback and asked questions about the draft proposal and funding more generally. Several program directors wanted to implement some form of pool or flexible assistantships and funding that could be requested after round 3 for late applicants. Phil Jos (MPA) said that he would favor an increase to the assistantship allotment over the assistantship pay rate. Laura Turner (EDPA) inquired about the assistantships that are outside of the academic departments and how best to use those for recruiting. John Peters (SMFT) said that due to his student population, assistantships are not as useful – his students would benefit more from scholarships. Bret Lott (MFA) claimed there is not enough funding even for his best applicants that would receive round 1 offers. Phil Jos (MPA) continued that he is interested in pursuing on-campus internship opportunities for his students in addition to assistantships.

McGee concluded the discussion by stating that there will be continued conversation and there has been no final decision. The topic will likely remain on the agenda for subsequent Graduate Council meetings.

V. Announcements, Updates, and Reminders

Grant Gilmore (CPAD) asked the group how many pursued scholarships supported by foundation funding.

Robyn Olejniczak (GSO) reminded the group that the 3MT competition is taking place on November 1 and applications are due to the Graduate School by October 27.

Jon Hakkila (GSO) reminded that group that the 16-17 assessment cycle is ending and a preliminary report will be forthcoming from the assessment committee.

Brian McGee (GSO/AA) reminded the group to maintain a current link to the graduate catalog on their websites.

VI. Adjournment – the meeting adjourned at 4:37pm