MINUTES OF THE GRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING  
Friday, September 18, 2020 – 3:00 PM  
Virtual Zoom Meeting

Chair – Godfrey Gibbison, Interim Dean of the Graduate School

Members Present: Emily Beck (LALE/ESOL), Vince Benigni (COMM/HSS), Karen Chandler (ARCM), Roger Daniels (ACCY), Mark Del Mastro (AA), Grant Gilmore (CPAD), Gerald Gordon (URBP), Melissa Hughes (BIOL/SSM), Alex Kasman (MASC), Kate Keeney (ARTM/SOTA), Brian Lanahan (EDEL), Mike Lee (MCOM), Jiexiang Li (MATH), Ron Magnuson (MBA), Judy Millesen (MPA), Antonio Pérez-Núñez (HISP/LCWA), John Peters (SMFT), Craig Plante (MBIO), Emily Rosko (CREW), Susan Simonian (MSCL), Emily Skinner (MTLA), Sandy Slater (CGE), Jacob Steere-Williams (HIST), Rafael Teixeira (SCIM/SOB), Laura Turner (EDPA), Anton Vander Zee (ENGL), William Veal (EDMG), Annette Watson (ENSS), Kelley White (EDEC)

Guests Present: Mary Bergstrom (RO), Divya Bhati (OIE), Seaton Brown (MBA), Lucy Davis (ENSS), Gibbs Knotts (HSS), Nancy Muller (LGC), Sebastian van Delden (SSM), Elizabeth Wilkins (Northern Illinois University)

GSO Staff Present: Laura Everett (Recruitment & Marketing), Jon Hakkila (Associate Dean), Susan Hallatt (Admissions), Robyn Olejniczak (Student Records), Erica Shirley (Admissions & Support Services)

I. Welcome – the meeting was called to order at 3:00pm. Everyone present also introduced themselves.

II. Approval of the Minutes April 24, 2020 Meeting – unanimous approval

III. Graduate Career Preparation for the Job Market – Elizabeth Wilkins, Northern Illinois University

Elizabeth Wilkins (NIU) presented to the group about her university’s career preparation for graduate students. This prep is driven by labor market data so that advising and curriculum are adapting in real time. NIU did about a year of information gathering around its graduate programs and conducted alumni surveys to get a sense of what was being offered at the program level. Wilkins (NIU) found that not much was happening and there was an opportunity for the Graduate School to do more. The Graduate School used Burning Glass data to develop a career pathways dashboard for students to navigate on their own; the data reflect skills, salaries, employers across different industries and locations. Wilkins (NIU) found graduate students began asking if their courses were in alignment with the labor market data they were finding on the dashboard. This prompted the Graduate School to develop two professional development courses, UNIV 601 and 602. Ron Magnuson (MBA) asked if these courses were required for graduate students. Wilkins (NIU) responded no, but programs find value in them so they strongly encourage their students to enroll. Higher education has been disrupted by third-party providers like Coursera, EdX, and LinkedIn Learning so there is a strong motivation to demonstrate the value of graduate education.

Gibbison (GSO) asked program directors if they would find this type of programming and data analysis useful to their students. Several responded that they are interested and already find their students asking for career information and advising earlier in their graduate careers.

IV. Lowcountry Graduate Center Opportunity Funds – Nancy Muller, Director

Nancy Muller (LGC) gave her annual presentation of the funding available through the Lowcountry Graduate Center. She provided an overview of the LGC, its member and partner institutions, and the Center’s strategic priorities. These priorities include manufacturing, engineering services,
software/IT development, k-12 education and leadership, and healthcare management and community wellness. Proposals for these funds should be for new programs or substantial change to existing programs that focus on workforce development.

V. Moratorium on Standardized Test Scores – Godfrey Gibbison, Graduate School

Gibbison (GSO) shared the language developed by the Graduate School to communicate the temporary waiver of standardized test scores that was discussed during the program directors retreat in August. This waiver would apply to the spring 2021, summer 2021, and fall 2021 admission terms. A test score would still be required for nominating applicants for Graduate School Fellowships; the Old Glebe scholarship does not require a test score. A few program directors asked that the test score be removed as a requirement for the Graduate School fellowships, but that was not agreed to by the Graduate School. Gibbison (GSO) continued that programs should consider other ways they could reach an admissions decision without a test score. He asked that programs share with the Graduate School the additional items that could be requested from an applicant that are not currently listed as an admission requirement. Programs could also have an option of requesting scores from an applicant they feel to be borderline. Application files will be considered complete if they are only missing a test score. Seaton Brown (MBA) asked if clarifying language will be added to the online application; Susan Hallatt (GSO) responded yes. She also reminded program directors that they have access to all admissions documents in TargetX and SharePoint. Jon Hakkila (GSO) closed by emphasizing that holistic admissions means that the applicant evaluation is based on multiple data points; the test score should not be removed as a data point without replacing it with another requirement.

VI. Combined Bachelor’s/Master’s Programs – Godfrey Gibbison, Graduate School

Gibbison (GSO) reported that the Graduate School has created some uniform guidelines and requirements for graduate programs that seek to develop a combined bachelor’s and master’s option. These programs, sometimes referred to as 4+1 or accelerated programs, offer current undergraduates the option to begin taking graduate courses and applying the credit towards their bachelor’s degree as well as their master’s degree. The task force worked from the spring semester through early in the fall researching peer institution practices, as well as the requirements for the two existing programs on campus. The task force established a minimum GPA requirement of a 3.2, 90 earned hours, and only 12 credit hours may be double-counted towards the undergraduate and graduate degrees. Students must earn at least 150 hours between both levels, with 30 hours at the graduate level. Programs that develop this combined option may establish their own criteria, such as desired undergraduate major, a GPA that exceeds the Graduate School’s minimum, and a major GPA minimum. Gibbison (GSO) continued that this option is more of a change to admissions requirements than a new, distinct program offering requiring full curricular review. These programs are meant to attract top performing undergraduates and provide a fluid path to pursuing a graduate degree at the College. William Veal (EDMG) noted that there could be consequences if a student was approved for this option, enrolled in and then failed the graduate course. Gibbison (GSO) responded that that would be true even if they were not pursuing a combined program option. These guidelines and minimum requirements were approved.

VII. Academic Dismissal Policy – Godfrey Gibbison, Graduate School

Gibbison (GSO) reported that the Graduate School proposed a small edit to the Appeal section of the Academic Dismissal policy. This new language will prevent students from accessing the Grievance Policy if they are appealing academic dismissal. If a student seeks additional review of their appeal, the final decision will rest with the Provost. This change was approved.
VIII. Graduate Student Association – Godfrey Gibbison, Graduate School

Gibbison (GSO) reported that the Graduate School is taking a more proactive role in the organization this year because the GSA has struggled for several years under their student leadership. Student Affairs committed to funding the executive leadership compensation so those funds do not come directly out of the GSA’s budget. All executive leadership positions are up for election, which is currently underway. The Graduate School hopes to have good engagement this year, even though their abilities will be limited due to the pandemic.

IX. Announcements, Updates and Reminders – GSO Staff

A. Update on dean search

Gibbison (GSO) reported that there will not be a search for a permanent dean of the Graduate School this academic year. This decision was made by the Provost, as she wants to get to know current academic leaders. This decision was also financial due to the severe constraints on the budget due to the pandemic. He continued that all campus entities had to make permanent budget cuts; the Graduate School was asked to cut approximately $17,000 from its operating budget.

B. Hakkila (GSO) asked for volunteers for the assessment committee.

X. For the Good of the Order

Annette Watson (ENSS) asked if the Graduate School would be extending the deadline for thesis submissions for fall graduates as they did during the spring semester.

Judy Millesen (MPA) asked about the status of the inquiry regarding adding minus grades to the graduate grading scale.

XI. Adjournment – the meeting adjourned at 5:10pm