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University of Northern Iowa Graduate Council Minutes, February 11, 2016

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UNI Graduate Council Minutes #1053

UNI Graduate Council Minutes from February 11, 2016

Present: Beall, Berendzen, Calderon, Cutter, Deemer, Dhanwada, Fontana, Hanson, Juby, Ostapyuk, Pohl, Rod-Welch, Teske.

Absent: Amin, Brown, Kucuksari, Power, and Schwieger.

Chair Pohl called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.

Approval of Minutes from January 14, moved by Rod-Welch and seconded by Berendzen, minutes were approved.

Announcements:

Chair Pohl welcomed new Graduate Council member Dr. Olena Ostapyuk, Assistant Professor of Mathematics, to the group.

Dhanwada announced several dates for events sponsored in The Graduate College is participating in the **UNI Day at the Capitol on Monday, February 22**. Gayle Pohl, Melissa Beall, Barbara Cutter and Kavita Dhanwada will attend the event. A new flyer will be distributed at the event that describes the Graduate College and its programs.

She also announced some important events date organized by the Graduate College:

Graduate Coordinators' meetings are scheduled this month: **February 19** and on **February 23**.

On **April 1**, there will be a **Graduate Assessment Workshop**. The Graduate College is bringing in an outside speaker Dr. Douglas Eder. He will hold a workshop about the graduate program assessment. Two separate sessions are scheduled; one in the morning with Graduate Coordinators and another in the afternoon with the Graduate Council members.

The Graduate Student Symposium will be on **April 6, 2016**. Everyone is encouraged to discuss this opportunity with their departmental graduate students. Students should be informed of the professional value of the symposium and asked to attend the event even if they are not presenting a paper.

The Annual Graduate Faculty Meeting will be on **April 28, 2016**. More information forthcoming.

Hanson announced that the **Library Literacy Workshop for Graduate Students** is scheduled for **February 24**. Special sessions will be held from 10-11:30 a.m. and from 1

to 2:30 p.m. to discuss the resources the library has for research projects and other academic events.

Beall mentioned that there will be three Brown Bag Lectures in March and another upcoming open session format **Brown Bag Seminar** to discuss about the “Graduate Education at UNI “Who Are We”, which is this year’s theme for the Annual Meeting. Detailed schedule will be announced soon. Members of the Graduate College are encouraged to publicize the event.

Old Business:

Discussion occurred regarding the role of the Graduate College in graduate education at UNI. Fontana commented that there are graduate students who would like to have their graduate education be more practitioner and profession oriented. Some students find it problematic that UNI graduate programs are mostly research oriented. Some of these students complete their required classes, but never graduate because of the significant writing that is required to be completed. Fontana added that we should align graduate programs more to the need of the students as writing requirements for the graduate programs may be inhibiting the graduation of students who have completed all of the course requirements but not the writing. Dhanwada said that there is lack of data as to the nature of why students are not graduating. It could be due to many things. There are gaps in information with regard to students who are currently enrolled, on continuous registration or those who dropped out for a while before coming back. There are students who return many years later and want to finish the papers because they need the degree for a new job or other reasons.

If significant writing was an impediment for graduation, it was suggested that the program review requirements and think about non-thesis options as a way to help students to complete their degree. Discussions continued regarding the fact that there are thesis and non-thesis options in some graduate programs but that even the non-thesis option has some kind of writing requirement. Fontana raised the question of whether the writing requirements always help those students who don’t go to PhD programs. Some programs allow the completion of an internship with a written report to fulfill writing requirements rather than doing a research/thesis project. Again, the group suggested that it would be important for individual graduate programs to discuss other options for those to whom the thesis option does not seem to fit. Graduate Council members agreed that some students are good writers while others are not. Those who have poor writing skills can be at a disadvantage when trying to complete their degrees if there is significant writing involved. In this context, is writing critical for ALL graduate students?

Fontana brought up the notion that perhaps when we admit students who don’t have writing skills, are we being unfair because many end up dropping even when they complete all of their coursework. He suggested that to avoid this situation, the

application process should include writing samples. Dhanwada said that there are personal statement requirements as part of the admission process for many departments and that could perhaps serve as somewhat as a writing sample. Many Council members said that writing requirements could significantly vary from department to department and that determining a significant writing component eventually must be decided by the respective graduate programs. Another member suggested that we might need more support from the university to help students deal with the writing requirements, such as how to manage time and how to write effectively.

The members of the Graduate Council were in favor of a fact finding mission to see how the writing requirements are working out for individual graduate programs at UNI. The Graduate College should encourage departments to discuss this issue with their graduate faculty and perhaps explore alternatives to their writing requirements if needed. Meanwhile, the Graduate College should explore how many graduate programs have thesis options and how many have non-thesis options to make a possible recommendation on this issue.

Dhanwada suggested that the assessment portion of our graduate programs might be a good place to start because the writing requirement is an important indicator of a good program. One member mentioned that mentoring of students after acceptance into the program might be the best option for UNI graduate programs. Many international students don't get exposure to writing requirements in academic programs until they come to the United States. Many eventually gain writing skills from these graduate programs and do very well professionally.

Members of the Graduate Council are in agreement that they should go back and read the individual program requirements and determine what needs to be done and think about what we are really asking of the graduate students and what options we are presenting to achieve their academic goals.

New Business:

Discussion occurred regarding the Mission and Vision statements for the Graduate College Strategic Plan. Pohl said that at some point this year we have to start looking at these documents and start revising them. Copies of the current Graduate Education Strategic Plan were distributed among the members of the Graduate Council.

The latest developments in the Vision and Mission statement of the UNI Academic Master Plan were shared. Currently, there are two draft versions to consider. The Version 1 is similar to the Version 2, but it includes separate statement as to who we are. The Version 2 is the traditional one, which explains who we aspire to become and how we will get there. The members of the Graduate Council discussed various aspects of these documents to make sure they reflect UNI's education goals and objectives. Most members seemed to be comfortable with the Version 1.

For the next meeting, Chair Pohl asked the Graduate Council members to look at the mission, vision, goals and objectives listed in the current Graduate Education Strategic Plan and think how to revise them to match the UNI Vision and Mission statement.

Meeting adjourned. The next meeting will be on February 25, at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rubina Chowdhury

Secretary