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University of Northern Iowa Graduate Council Minutes, October 14, 1999

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UNI Graduate Council Minutes #889

October 14, 1999

Present: Bankston, Coulter, Durham, Hanson, Jackson, Reineke, S. Smaldino, Somervill, Spencer, Vajpeyi, Utz, Walker, Wallingford, M. Wartick; Visitor: Pam McKay

Absent: Bozylinsky

Minutes #888 was approved as published.

Jackson asked that the non-academic probation and dismissal policy be added to the next agenda so the Graduate Council can look at it and come to a decision on whether to approve it and move forward. Jackson would like the Council to review the materials distributed at the last meeting. Somervill will redistribute the proposed policy statement for new members to review and add it to the next agenda.

Somervill stated that the strategic planning committee involved the Graduate College as well as the Grants and Contracts Office. Jackson, Walker, and Somervill will meet with members of the Council asked to serve on this committee. The development of goals is the primary focus. The University Strategic Planning Committee is also meeting at this time and it is important that the Graduate College Strategic Plan be consistent with the University plan. Bankston said that the University Committee had already met twice. Hanson said that he would be on the Graduate Council Strategic Planning Committee. Vajpeyi nominated Wallingford to be on the committee, he accepted.

Vajpeyi spoke with Mohammed Fahmy (Indus Tech) to see if he would continue serving as the Graduate Council representative to the University Curriculum Committee. Fahmy said he would upon Council approval, it was granted. Jackson asked the Council to provide Fahmy with some directions as to what they are expecting of him.

Council took up the issue of administrators serving on the Graduate Curriculum committee. Currently there is no policy statement thus it is assumed any member of the graduate faculty can serve. Several members expressed concern that curriculum is a faculty issue and that administrators, while providing valuable input, might not represent a faculty perspective. Coulter indicated that graduate faculty in the Rod Library are almost all administrators. Jackson indicated that the committee is composed of eight members, one from each of the five colleges plus three ex-officio, nonvoting members. Concern was raised about an ex-officio member breaking a tie vote if all five voting members were not present. Utz said that Robert's Rules provided for exceptions when ex-officio members can vote to break a tie. Wallingford moved, Smaldino seconded that voting members of the Graduate Curriculum Committee be limited to non-administration graduate faculty. There should be no restriction on ex-officio members. Passed.

Somervill read an email from Phil Patton. He paraphrased it by saying that Patton could

not support a minimum TOEFL score below 550 because he felt a lower score would reduce the chance that students would be successful.

The Graduate Council needs to decide if a higher score than 500 on the TOEFL needs to be set, or should it be left up to the individual department. Hanson said that members were expressing concern about turning away students who could make it responsibly but have a low TOEFL score. Utz stated that he did not believe that there should be a decision between two extreme sides. He said that other Universities have other successful plans. Students need to know upon arrival what is expected of them, both academically and financially. This includes the possibility of taking additional classes if necessary.

Utz asked the question if the Graduate College accepted the 550 score, does that mean that a department could not accept a lower score. Somervill replied that there is always a potential waiver. Utz stated that he has never seen a person turned away based solely on the TOEFL, meaning that other indications of the student are more important. Somervill said that the Intensive English Program (CIEP) is expensive for most students, and if it is required for students who do not have the minimum TOEFL it must be known that resources are limited to them and they may need extra financial help. Somervill stated that if a higher score is set, a waiver can be attained, and exceptions made, talent could be more of a consideration in some departments, such as art and music.

Hanson brought to the Council's attention that a waiver will only apply if students decide to apply even though their TOEFL scores are below the minimum requirement. He believed that most students would simply not apply if their scores did not exceed the minimum. Utz said that a higher score may signal that a school has high standards which will have more appeal to the strongest or best prepared students who apply.

Reineke would like to look at policy and the point of impact. She felt that departments should be free to set a higher minimum score but that the 500 minimum set by the Graduate College should not change. Vajpeyi asked why the undergraduate minimum for the TOEFL is 550, when it is 500 for graduate program. Somervill stated that in past years 550 was used in practice, but there was no Graduate Council policy. There is no direct reason for uniformity for both. For undergraduate work, there is a wide range of studies, whereas in graduate work there is a focus on a particular discipline.

Spencer wondered as a new member why the issue was being raised. If the score is set at 550, it can be set higher, but not lower, by individual departments. If the score remains at 500, what is the penalty for that? It would give more power to the individual departments. How many students would a change like this affect?

Somervill said that data could possibly be obtained but it may be difficult. Vajpeyi said that setting the TOEFL requirement at 550 would harm those students who have potential but are not good test takers, this solution will not solve the problem completely. Bankston stated that some departments have set the score from 550 to 600. The

problem could be solved at the departmental level and that decision needs to remain there. Utz stated that English is now taught and courses given in English are much more common in overseas schools than ever before. There should now be higher English language skills than in past years. Somervill requested that the Council invite Patton to the next meeting to seek additional information and input before voting. Wartick would like more information because being new to the Council, she is unaware of certain issues concerning the topic. Pam McKay brought to the Council's attention a packet of information concerning the requirements of the other two Regent universities in Iowa, and what their standards are concerning the TOEFL score and additional steps that need to take place if the score is not up to standard. Somervill said that it must be kept in mind the number of applicants that U of I and ISU receive each year is much higher than at UNI. This tends to result in more stringent admission requirements.

The meeting adjourned at 4:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anne Dunlap
Secretary