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University of Northern Iowa Graduate Council Minutes, September 24, 1992

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UNI Graduate Council Minutes #809

September 24, 1992

Present: Durham, Fahmy, Gaies, V. Jackson, MacArthur, Maier, R. Martin, Simet, S. Smaldino, Somervill, Walker, P. Wilkinson (for Safford), Yohe

Absent: Clayson, Lew

Visitors: Nancy Marlin (Vice President and Provost); Robert Leestamper, Virginia Hash, Kevin Curry (International Program); Philip Patton (Registrar); Bruce Chamberlain (Music); Susann Doody (College of Education); John Fecik (Industrial Technology)

Minutes #808 were approved as published.

Walker distributed guidelines for the 1993 Midwestern Association of Graduate Schools (MAGS) Distinguished Thesis Award. He indicated that works submitted in lieu of a thesis have traditionally not been accepted for consideration. Somervill indicated that an award of comparable worth for such "projects" would be in order. He suggested that a committee be established to discuss the matter and then make recommendations to the Graduate Council. After some discussion it was decided that the Selection Committee for the Distinguished Master's Thesis Award would, in consultation with the Art, Music, and Theatre departments, be asked to accomplish this.

Somervill gave a brief overview of the Graduate College proposal for the establishment of an institutional policy on TOEFL scores. He indicated that the policy being proposed is a lenient one which involves some screening of International students to insure that they have the skills needed to succeed. Currently, there is no UNI policy regarding the minimum score required for admission. Traditionally, the University has required a minimum score of 550. Under the policy being proposed by the Graduate College, the minimum TOEFL score required for admission would be 500. Departments would be encouraged to establish higher scores depending on the demands of their program. Somervill indicated that TOEFL scores should not be the sole criteria for excluding students from a program. He indicated that under the Graduate College proposal, International students who scored below 500 could be reconsidered for admission if they: a) retook the TOEFL, or b) participated in the Culturally Intensive English Program (CIEP), achieving competency at level seven and/or received the recommendation of staff in the program.

Maier made a motion to establish 500 as the minimum TOEFL score required for admission. Departments could establish a higher score. International students would have access to the options as described above. The motion was seconded.

There was a lengthy discussion regarding the predictive value of TOEFL scores, institutional data from ETS and others, the TOEFL required for undergraduate students,

the need for students to be informed of their admission status as unambiguously as possible, and the need to separate academic competency from language proficiency requirements.

Patton indicated that any application received should be evaluated by the International Studies Program and then sent to the department for an academic decision. Applicants should not be denied admission without this. Depending on a student's TOEFL scores, restrictions could be placed on their enrollment. He felt that it would make sense to raise the TOEFL score to 550 given this fact and the fact that the mean score for our students is 536. If a student scored 550 there would be no restrictions placed on enrollment and no remedial work required. If lower, some judgement would need to be made as to whether English proficiency was an alternative, in association with a lower academic load.

Somervill cautioned against reducing academic loads, especially for students who are receiving graduate assistantships. He expressed the need for a great deal of thought and debate regarding this issue.

MacArthur indicated he supported the motion. He indicated that he felt that all steps should be taken by the department and others before the student is informed of what hurdles may or may not need to be overcome.

Gaies stated that this is an important issue. In fairness to the student, we need to be very clear in stating whether or not they have been accepted in a graduate program. Departments should be notified and aware of these students before they arrive on campus.

There was some discussion of the mechanics and or problems associated with admitting students provisionally. Patton indicated there might be a mechanical problem with provisional admission. It might be difficult to get the various programs to act in concert (e.g. make admission decisions at the end of each semester).

Fecik indicated that a major problem last year was the fact that departments did not even have access to the student's material. Thus they did not have an opportunity to evaluate students.

Maier's motion was amended to include the statement that "all completed applications should (with appropriate evaluations from the International Studies Program) be forwarded to the appropriate graduate program/department for an admission decision regardless of TOEFL score."

Gaies indicated that he would like to see a more demanding score. However, departments will be able to test the viability of the 500 TOEFL score. They will probably want to raise the score required as they experience problems. He stated that he was more concerned about departments being inflexible as they used these scores than whether the required minimum was 500 or 550. He expressed a hope that departments

would judge each applicant on his/her own merit. Finally, he stated that it was important that students be proficient in English for academic reasons and so that they could function well as part of the University community.

Patton indicated that it would be critical for each graduate program/department to set their standards and communicate these clearly to International students.

The amended motion was seconded and passed.

All other agenda items were tabled for the next meeting.

Motion was made to adjourn. Motion was seconded and passed. Meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Vivian Jackson
Secretary Pro Tem

Next meeting will be October 8, 1992 at 3:30 p.m. in Gilchrist Board Room