Graduate Council Minutes 2013-02-04

Northern Illinois University

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Sunderlin, Assistant Chair of the Graduate Council, called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. He informed members that Bond was out of town.

Approval of Minutes

Abdel-Motaleb moved approval of the December 3, 2012 minutes; Rossetti seconded the motion. Abdel-Motaleb asked if the issue of C- grades and academic dismissal was open for discussion. Sunderlin stated that discussions should pertain to the minutes and that any other issues could be addressed under new business. The Graduate Council unanimously approved the minutes.

Committee Reports

Sunderlin noted that there were no committee reports on the agenda and asked if there were any walk-ons. There were no reports.

New Business

Sunderlin opened the floor for new business.

**C- Grade and Academic Dismissal:** Abdel-Motaleb stated that students must receive a C or better in coursework and suggested that the C- grade should be removed. Sims commented that there was a long discussion about it at the December meeting and members voted that a C- grade was deficient. Abdel-Motaleb asked if Graduate Council could vote on removing the C- grade from the plus/minus grading system altogether. Sunderlin stated that the Graduate Council had already voted and approved the deficient grade. He suggested that the issue might be worth revisiting after the new grading system has been in place for a year. Sunderlin referred to the data Bond provided last month reflecting distribution of grades for Fall 2012. He stated that there were about 10,000 grades assigned, of which 15 were C- grades. Bennardo commented that instructors can use the grading scale as they wish, with or without plus/minus grades.
**Tuition Waivers:** Schraufnagel asked if the new policy on tuition waivers would be discussed. He stated that Bond sent out an email last week with an update that was intuitive about the system, but that his concerns were with regard to the criteria that would be used by reviewers to judge tuition waiver applications and with flexibility for departments regarding recruitment tuition waivers, in particular. He also expressed concern about the early deadlines and dealing with late admits and recruitment during the summer months. Sims shared his concerns about the timing, but added that Bond initially stated that there would be a series of two deadlines, although there was only one deadline mentioned in the information that was distributed last week. Abdel-Motaleb commented that having one centralized process for all departments was going to be a problem because departments do things differently. Umoren stated that the one piece of information missing from Bond’s memorandum was the evaluation criteria to determine who gets a tuition waiver and who does not. Chown commented that the early deadlines will benefit departments with popular, highly-ranked students by being able to offer them tuition waivers early. He stated that his concern was for those equally great students who come in late June or July. L’Allier suggested that departments be given a budget and made accountable for their own tuition waiver process. There was an extensive discussion.

Abdel-Motaleb moved approval of the following statement, seconded by Sims: The Graduate Council strongly encourages the Graduate School and the University to reconsider the new centralized process for the awarding of tuition waivers. Graduate Council supports departmental control, departmental input, and flexibility in timing and, therefore, recommends that the Graduate School and the University allow departments to be accountable for the tuition waiver process. The motion was approved unanimously.

**Old Business**

**Assistantship Stipend Limits for AY 2013-14:** Sunderlin referred to the data distributed by Bond on January 3. He noted that the College of Business has the majority of the minimum stipends and that the graduate student representative, John Bruce, who was ill and unable to attend the meeting, sent an email indicating that he had some information he would like to discuss with Graduate Council before any decision is made with regard to stipends.

Sunderlin stated that the issue for Graduate Council was to decide whether to increase the minimum stipend by 2.5% according to the Consumer Price Index, which would be $212.50 semi-monthly for a half-time appointment ($425 for full-time), or to raise the half-time minimum even more to $250 semi-monthly ($500 for full-time) as discussed at the December meeting. Sunderlin stated that there might be some departments that would be in trouble and have to offer fewer assistantships with the larger increase. Abdel-Motaleb expressed concern about departmental budgets. Sunderlin agreed and suggested that Graduate Council might want to just approve the minimum increase. Umoren stated that her department would definitely be in trouble with the higher increase and would like to keep the lower-level stipend to support as many students as possible.

Sims stated that the fundamental issue was that graduate assistant budgets come from the individual colleges, not the Graduate School. He added that his college has a very finite
pool of funds and is doing its best to fund graduate assistantships. Sims commented that, whether or not it was a good system, it was the system, and he did not want to strap the college.

Abdel-Motaleb moved approval of the memorandum reflecting a 2.5% increase in graduate assistantship stipends for AY 14. Umoren seconded the motion. Sunderlin commented that the low wage does come with a tuition waiver. The motion was approved unanimously.

Van Wienen stated that, if the institution is committed to improving the quality of graduate programs, he would like to see a stronger commitment from the university to increase the pools of money available for graduate assistants. Sunderlin agreed and stated that everyone would like to see more money for graduate assistants. He added that there are currently about 120 students on-campus who are paid the minimum stipend. Most departments pay more than the minimum.

Chown commented that the university puts a lot of pressure on faculties and departments to do assessment on what is done in the classroom and so forth. He stated that he would like to see an assessment of the graduate assistant population. How many of them take out student loans while they are on full-time assistantships? How many are on food stamps? How many are working outside the university on weekends and during the summer to survive on these wages? Chown stated that he would like to see the hard and fast numbers to know exactly what is going on with the graduate assistant population. Van Wienen added the question of how many are donating blood plasma.

Anekwe asked if there was a graduate student union on-campus. Sunderlin replied that there is not. Anekwe stated that he did his undergraduate work at the University of Illinois and they have a Graduate Employees’ Organization, which helps to represent graduate students. Sims commented that there is not even a coherent graduate student association at NIU.

Meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.