Bond called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

Approval of Minutes

Polansky moved approval of the April 3, 2017, minutes; Barbe seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Committee Reports

Graduate Colloquium Committee: Osorio reported on the April 20, 2017, meeting. The committee met to review 40 proposals for Fall 2017. Although a few proposals required some revisions, all were approved for funding.

Graduate Council Curriculum Committee: Howell reviewed the minutes of the April 10, 2017, electronic meeting for approval. He informed members that there was nothing substantial to report on other than the deletion of a few certificate of graduate study programs. Donna Smith noted that the bulk of the items were previously approved by the committee and now have final approval by the BOT or IBHE for inclusion in the catalog. Mantzke moved approval of the minutes; Kortegast seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. (Curriculum Committee minutes and catalog changes are available at: http://www.niu.edu/u_council/committees/minutes/gccc/index.shtml.)

Graduate Council Standards Committee: Bond reported on APPM changes that were approved electronically by the committee in April. The policy revisions reflect recent changes implemented by Human Resource Services to pay staff assistants an hourly rate as opposed to a stipend. Arado asked if there was a set hourly rate. Bond indicated there was not since the minimum stipend had already been set for AY 18. He stated that HRS has provided a formula for calculating the hourly rate for staff assistants. However, Bond suggested that departments should take into account the periods when these graduate assistants may not be expected to work, such as during winter break or spring break. He stated that calculating the hourly pay rate should be based on the amount of funds budgeted for the position and the prospective period of work, not the total number of weeks or hours during the contract period.
Kortegast expressed concern about the change to hourly pay for staff assistants. She stated that many graduate students in the counseling and the adult and higher education programs work as staff assistants in Housing and Residential Services and other areas within Student Affairs. She questioned the effects of this change with regard to pay inequities, hierarchy issues, and recruitment. Kortegast stated that it is not standard practice in the field with competing programs to pay graduate assistants in these paraprofessional positions an hourly wage instead of a stipend. She commented that staff assistants should be compensated fairly and not be penalized by not receiving the benefits of a stipend during break periods, especially since they are also taxed on the tuition waiver, unlike other graduate assistants. Kortegast stated that she is really concerned about the impact on their students and the programs’ ability to recruit.

Bond addressed the tax issue for staff assistants. He stated that an IRS statute, dating back to the early 1990s, explicitly states that the tuition waiver benefit is exempt from taxation for individuals who are conducting research or teaching. Bond explained that staff assistants are taxed on the tuition waiver benefit once the amount reaches $5,250 in a year. He stated that a staff assistant who takes a total of 18 hours in the fall and spring semesters has an extra tax burden of approximately $1,200. If a student enrolls in more than 9 hours each semester or takes summer classes, that amount will increase. Bond noted that, several years ago, graduate assistants and fellows were given an alternative tuition rate equivalent to in-state. The rules were changed because out-of-state staff assistants were getting hit hard with the tax penalty. The change immediately decreased the tax burden for those students. Bond stated that the university has dealt with the tax issue for staff assistants as best as it can. Nonetheless, there are existing differences between the way teaching/research assistants and staff assistants are treated by federal tax code.

Bond stated that the University of Illinois system has staff assistants who have been paid hourly for many years now and that he was told NIU is the only public institution in Illinois that currently does not pay staff assistants on an hourly basis. He said he could not confirm that because he had not researched all the institutions. He also stated that he was uncertain about the effects on competitiveness, which would have to be looked at down the road. Bond indicated that he appreciated the concerns.

Barbe moved approval of the revisions to Section IV, “Graduate Assistantship Policies and Procedures,” of the APPM; Osorio seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. (See attached document.)

**Honorary Degree Committee:** Bond informed members that the committee met on November 7, 2016, and forwarded two honorary degree nominations to the President and Board of Trustees for approval. He announced that the nominations were approved and both nominees have accepted. Mr. Clifford Alexis, Co-Founder of the NIU Steelpan Program and School of Music Retiree, will be honored at the May graduate commencement ceremony. Beyer commented that the NIU steelpan program is special and unique. He said the College of Visual and Performing Arts held an event to honor Alexis on April 30 at the Concert Hall, which was standing room only. Beyer stated that guests included alumni from 20-25 years past, as well as the Trinibagonian diplomat to the United States, who flew in just for the event. Bond stated that Cliff Alexis and the NIU steelpan program are internationally renowned, and he believes Alexis is the first NIU retiree to receive an honorary degree from this institution.
Dr. Vullnet Ameti, Rector of the State University of Tetovo in Macedonia, will be honored at the December graduate commencement ceremony.

Announcements

University Libraries Collections and Services for Graduate Students: Cordell presented information to the Graduate Council about resources and services available to graduate students. She stated there are approximately 2.5 million print items in Founders with another billion online items and hundreds of webpages available on the library website. Cordell indicated there are various types of employment opportunities for graduate students within the library. One of the online services available to graduate students is the Voyager Catalog, where students can access print and online resources at NIU and 86 other academic and research libraries in Illinois. Students can submit requests for materials, check due dates, and renew checked-out materials online.

Cordell outlined other services available to graduate students/assistants:

- Information Delivery Services - access to books, articles, media, and other resources from libraries worldwide;
- Curricular Support Services - reserves materials, online access for classes in Blackboard, instruction sections with customized training;
- Individual Research Support - reference desk, chat, text, email, phone, individual research appointments, online research guides (LibGuides), UNIV 105 (Introduction to Library and Information Research, 1 credit hour course, online/in-person);
- Other Services - Writing Center, Tutoring Center, Accessibility Resources Room, Digital Convergence Lab, Study Rooms, Scholars’ Den;
- Opportunities for Collaboration - creation of graduate-level information literacy course, digital assignments, embedded Librarian in existing courses, curriculum expansion activities, Huskie Commons Institutional Repository (contact Jaime Schumacher).

University Libraries contacts:
Nestor Osorio, Library Faculty and Graduate Council Representative, nosorio@niu.edu
Wendell Johnson, Department Head, Reference and Research, wjohnso1@niu.edu

Graduate Council Membership: Bond thanked members for their service on the Graduate Council and various subcommittees this year. He highlighted the two graduate students who were present at the meeting: Jeanine Clark Bremer, who has served as the graduate student representative for the College of Education for the past two years; and Alexander Weier, who has served as the graduate student representative for the College of Business this academic year.

The following faculty members and graduate students have completed their term on the Graduate Council: Katharina Barbe, Jeanine Clark Bremer, Prisca Collins, Tejasvi Diccar, Beatrix Hoffman, Kevin Luginbill, Aashish Nimbekar, Tania Silver, Alexander Weier.

The following members have been reappointed to the Graduate Council for an additional term: Carrie Kortegast, Kate Mantzke, Nestor Osorio, Federico Sciammarella, Thomas Smith.

Meeting adjourned at 10:43 a.m.
Policies Pertaining to Graduate Assistantships

Section IV. Item 1.

Northern Illinois University employs graduate assistants in order to provide them enriched learning experiences. Through their graduate assistantships, students receive intensive mentoring, which contributes to the development of the knowledge, skills, and abilities they need to become the next generation of innovators and scholar-experts in their fields of study.

As mentored researchers and teachers, graduate assistants help the university achieve its mission. They educate undergraduates and the public, and they contribute to the achievement of the university’s mission to provide significant service to the institution and the region.

Despite the important contributions that graduate assistants make to the institutional mission, the university primarily invests in graduate assistant stipends and any tuition waiver associated with assistantships in order to enhance the education and training of graduate students.

Appointment of a Graduate Assistant

7. Each year the Graduate Council will determine the minimum monthly assistantship stipends or hourly rate for the following year (August 16 - August 15).

Legal Declarations

33. The Federal Tax Reform Act and relevant state laws dictate the University’s treatment of stipends or hourly pay and tuition waivers. Graduate assistantship payments, whether paid by stipend or hourly wage, are considered wages and hence must be taxed and reported as taxable income. A portion of the tuition waiver awarded a staff assistant may be subject to taxation. Prior to accepting a graduate assistantship, prospective students are urged to consult an independent tax professional about their potential tax liability.
Tuition-Waivers Associated with Graduate Assistantships

Section IV. Item 7.

After the Personnel Action Form (PAF) has been approved, information pertaining to the value of tuition waiver and stipend level pay rate (either hourly or salaried) are processed by Human Resource Services and submitted to the Bursar's Office where the waiver is entered into the computerized billing system. Tuition waivers are authorized only after the PAF has been fully approved.

Graduate Assistantship Payroll Distribution

Section IV. Item 8.

By University policy, all pay for employees is made by electronic direct deposit. Payroll's distribution for employees is semi-monthly with distributions on the fifteenth (or prior business day) and the last business day of each month. An authorized (signed) agreement for automatic payments, which is included on the Personal Data Form, must be completed to initiate this process.

Human Resource Services has firm deadlines for employment processing; if the information is not received, the stipend payments may be delayed. Departments are expected to adhere to processing deadlines.