

The University of Akron
Minutes of Graduate Council
January 23, 2017

The Graduate Council met on Monday, January 23, 2017, in the Student Union, Room 310. Dean Chand Midha presided. Present were Dr. Philip Allen, Associate Dean Charles Beneke, Heather Blake, Dr. Amanda Booher, Dr. Marcus Braga-Alves, Karen Caldwell, Dr. Gary Holliday, Dr. Ronald Otterstetter, Dr. Judit Puskas, Dr. Martha Santos, Dr. Shivakumar Sastry, Dr. John Senko, Dr. James Steiger, Dr. Harvey Sterns, Dr. Baffour Takyi, Dr. Margaret Tung, and Dr. Nicole Zacharia.

GC Members Absent with Notice: Dr. Qetler Jensrud

GC Members Absent: Dr. Andrew Thomas and Marina Pelemis

Call to Order

Dean Midha called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m.

Roll Call

Heather Blake recorded the attendance of those present.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the November 28, 2016 meeting of Graduate Council were unanimously approved.

Minutes from the December 12, 2016 meeting of Graduate Council were approved. Thirteen aye votes and one abstention.

Remarks – Dean Midha

Dean Midha stated that representatives from Ernst and Young are joining the meeting via conference call. Ms. Mary Krista, Ms. Elise Lang, Mr. Zak Elder and Mr. Jeremiah Peterson listened to the proceedings of the meeting.

Dean Midha addressed the extensive email communications that were exchanged between members especially regarding the level of graduate assistantships at UA with respect to other Ohio institutions. While thanking the participants for their interest to contribute, Dean Midha clarified that the issue was not whether the level of the assistantship was high or low. Rather, the focus must be on how many self-funded students our programs are able to attract and how the total expenditure for assistantships and tuition remission compares with that at other schools.

Dean Midha said that the Executive Committee of Graduate Council, Dr. Allen, Dr. Sastry, Dr. Sterns, Associate Dean Beneke, and himself, have met several times since the December 12 Graduate Council meeting to review the graduate school data that has been gathered distributed. Through these detailed and prolonged deliberations, the executive committee has prepared four suggestions for savings in the graduate school as directed by President Wilson and Provost Ramsier. Dean Midha noted that:

1. Any savings/cuts will have consequences and this process of preparing the recommendations has been painful,
2. The proposed recommendations will require a Cultural Change/Shift at UA,
3. The proposed recommendations have the least impact on Graduate Education at UA, and
4. The alternatives we are confronting are not good.

Ms. Karen Caldwell was introduced to the EY team. Dr. Puskas raised the issue that College of Engineering had marked their contracts “Wrong” and new contracts were being prepared. It was agreed that there was a need to look more closely into the situation and make sure such errors do not persist in the future. It was also discussed that the duties required for GRA, GTA, GIA and GAA must be more clearly specified and monitored for compliance.

Discussion of Graduate School Funding and University's Transformation Plan

Dr. Allen presented Graduate School Savings Focus Areas. Four focus areas for savings were identified:

1. Graduate Research Assistantships,
2. Tuition Charged to Grants,
3. Restricting Credit Hours to Degree Requirements, and
4. New Funding Model for Master's Students.

It was conveyed that UA currently spends \$1.4 Million each year in Graduate Research Assistantships. Members were advised that the students receiving these awards from Graduate School dollars do not contribute to the teaching mission of the university and are not involved in teaching classes or providing instructional support for undergraduate classes. The recommendation was to eliminate the Stipend for Graduate Research Assistantships. Each award also included a full tuition remission, in addition to the tuition. It was proposed to reduce the tuition remission for students receiving GRA awards from the Graduate School by \$1 Million. The remaining money, i.e., the difference between the current expenditure for tuition remission and \$1 Million would be held back in the Graduate School to support exceptional students on a case by case basis with tuition remission only.

Members of the Graduate Council were advised that current students who receive their stipend from a research grant or from a Community Industrial Graduate Assistantship (CIGA) receive full tuition remission. It is recommended that a flat rate of \$8000 be charged to each research grant for each student for each year. Since the CIGA awards are intended to help our students, the executive committee recommended that the same low rate (flat charge of \$8000) be offered to all CIGA recipients as well. Using an estimate of about 200 graduate students currently being supported on research grants and about 80 CIGA recipients, this recommendation will increase revenues by about \$2.2 Million while simultaneously reducing the tuition remission dollars significantly.

A question was raised about how charging tuition to grants will affect tuition remission. It was explained that the grant was only required to charge a flat rate of \$8000 per student per year. In case of an out of state student, the Graduate School would cover the difference between the \$8000 and the academic year tuition for each budgeted student. It was explained that the charge to the grant or the CIGA was considerable savings with respect to the current academic year fee the student would be required to pay without tuition remission.

The proposal to Restricting Credit Hours to Degree Requirements was proposed. The \$1 Million savings estimated is likely to be a low and the savings may in fact be higher. It was explained to the members that none of the students who are already in the pipeline will be affected by the new recommendations, i.e., the Graduate School is committed to helping these students graduate in a timely manner. It was explained that the students are currently registering for far more credits than what are required for their degree programs. This practice is no longer consistent with the changed model used by the State of Ohio for SSI distribution. Members were also advised that for doctoral students, course completion does not generate additional SSI. Increasing or decreasing the number of doctoral degree awards will not linearly change the SSI received from the State.

Dr. Zacharia raised a question whether restricting the number of credit hours will affect the number of students in each graduate class and how this fits with the request from the Provost office to teach more. She was advised that it is a different problem from the current focus of reducing the tuition remission expense at UA.

Dr. Puskas raised the question why post doc fringe benefits were close to 50%. She was advised that this is a different problem and would be addressed in a different forum.

The New Funding Model for Master's students was also explained to the members of the Graduate Council by Dr. Allen. It was explained that the current expense of \$12 Million would be reduced to \$3.5 Million. It was also explained that at UA, we currently fund Master's students just like doctoral students are funded in many programs. It was explained that going forward the expectation is that there would be different funding models for differently trained/qualified Master's students. Since the Graduate School allocates total \$\$ to the Colleges, the College Deans and Chairs are free to allocate full stipend and tuition remission to outstanding Master's students, as is the common practice now. It was explained that the intent was to ensure that current students in the pipeline are not affected as long as they remain academically eligible to receive stipends and tuition remission. It was explained that the expectation is that going forward; the full stipend and tuition remission would not be offered to every student. Some students may receive only a stipend. Some may receive only tuition. Some may receive only partial stipend or partial tuition. The intent is to offer more number of awards to students to encourage them to complete their degrees on time and graduate.

A question was raised why we charge out of state tuition to students. It was explained that students funded by research grants or CIGA awards essentially get a waiver since \$8000 is accepted in lieu of their out of state tuition.

Dr. Santos suggested that the decisions based on these recommendations must consider the specific needs of units before determining how the changes would be implemented in those units. This suggestion was supported by others and everyone agreed that this is a good suggestion. Dean Midha clarified that the new funding model should not be applied uniformly to all units and that the decisions should be driven by market needs.

Graduate Council members agreed that they need more time to review the proposed focus areas before rendering any approval and it was agreed that the Graduate Council would meet on 30 January 2017 to vote on the recommendations.

Meeting adjourned at 10:32 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Shivakumar Sastry
Secretary