

The University of Akron
Minutes of Graduate Council
January 27, 2020

The Graduate Council met on Monday, January 27, 2020, in Student Union, Room 310. Acting Dean Marnie Saunders presided. Present were Dr. Wondimu Ahmed, Ms. Heather Blake, Dr. Amanda Booher, Dr. George Chase, Dr. Todd Gaffke, Dr. John Goodell, Dr. Christine Graor, Dr. Sadhan Jana, Dr. Alex Povitsky, Dr. Francesco Renna, Dr. Martha Santos, Dr. Andrea Snell, and Ms. Amanda Stefin.

GC Members Absent with Notice: Dr. Scott Palasik and Dr. Jina Sang

GC Members Absent: Dr. Travis Hreno and Dr. Adam Smith

Call to Order

Acting Dean Saunders called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m.

Roll Call

Heather Blake recorded the attendance of those present.

Approval of Minutes

Dr. Jana made a motion to approve the minutes of November 18, 2019. Dr. Chase seconded the motion. Minutes of November 18, 2019 were approved without dissent.

Remarks – Acting Dean Saunders

Acting Dean Saunders provided updates on the following:

Sesquicentennial

Acting Dean Saunders reminded Graduate Council members that April is the month assigned to the Graduate School as part of the Sesquicentennial. She indicated that it is necessary to get moving on the programming for this. Acting Dean Saunders said that she will provide the planning committee with details in the next few weeks. Dr. Matt Akers in the Office of the President has asked the mayor to declare April 6-10 as graduate student appreciation week in the City of Akron. Sarah Steidl in University Communications and Marketing is working with the Graduate School on ad for the Akron Beacon Journal. The tag line of the ad will be “Learn More, Earn More.” The ad will be aimed at self-paying graduate students. Acting Dean Saunders has received permission from the Interim Provost for the Graduate School to waive the graduate application fee during graduate student appreciation week. The Graduate School will provide giveaways to graduate students. Acting Dean Saunders offered the idea of having graduate faculty awards whereby a graduate faculty member in each college would receive an award. A nomination and review process will need to be established.

Dr. Jana stated that he liked the idea of waiving the graduate application fee; however, he questioned if doing so in April is too late.

Acting Dean Saunders responded that the target is self-paying graduate students. Also, the Graduate School has been extending the April 15 deadline for students to apply and be admitted for the fall semester.

Accelerated Degree Pathway

Acting Dean Saunders stated that the accelerated degree pathway was approved by Faculty Senate, and it should go before the Board of Trustees this month. She reported that President Miller is concerned because accelerated programs mean a loss of revenue. She said that the Interim Provost has approved a pilot study of the program. The college deans were asked to provide areas within their colleges where this accelerated degree pathway can generate revenue.

Recruitment

Acting Dean Saunders said that the Graduate School is represented on the enrollment working group, which continues to discuss efforts that can be undertaken to grow enrollment. The target is self-paying students. The committee is taking a grass roots approach to increasing enrollment (e.g. career fairs, etc.) and starting local with the intent to expand. Acting Dean Saunders stated that the Graduate School held information session with very little success. She shared that representatives from the Graduate School will be glad to attend any sessions held by the colleges. Representatives from the Graduate School are currently planning to speak with all Honors Colloquia.

Acting Dean Saunders shared that the Interim Provost has given to the Graduate School permission to give eight to ten tuition awards to self-paying graduate students. These awards would be designated as President's Strategic Awards. A committee will be determined to select graduate students for these awards, which must align with strategic initiatives. These awards are also intended to promote diversity. The awards would be guaranteed for one year.

Dr. Chase asked if these awards will be aimed at domestic or international students.

Acting Dean Saunders responded that the awards will be inclusive and open to all graduate students whether in-state or out-of-state.

Retention

Acting Dean Saunders stated that the Graduate School has begun sending email communications to returning graduate students as well as those who are graduating. She said that the Graduate School will work with departments to encourage graduate students within their timeframe for degree completion to return to complete their degree programs.

Graduate Student Leave Policy

Acting Dean Saunders distributed a handout summarizing what graduate student leave policies other institutions have in place. She asked Graduate Council members if they felt such a policy should be drafted for UA graduate students.

Dr. Chase stated that this is something that is needed; however, his biggest concern is that most students are externally funded. He will frequently have students ask for time off, and this is not a problem for a short duration, but students being away for a longer duration of time does create a problem. Their pay must be suspended during the leave time and resumed when the student returns. Dr. Chase suggested dividing the policy into three areas: 1) self-supported students, 2) University supported students, and 3) externally supported students. All points of a policy must be clearly outlined, so a student has all information when considering taking a leave.

Acting Dean Saunders said that we don't want a policy that tells a researcher what to do.

Dr. Jana stated that when the issue of leave is being discussed it is necessary to exclude use of the term vacation. There is no vacation permitted for graduate assistants.

Acting Dean Saunders responded that all leave requests must be clearly documented. If the appropriate documentation is not provided by the student, the leave request may not be approved.

Dr. Snell said this should be thought about at a program level and beyond as there are certain obligations and expectations that need to be met. The Graduate School should provide the minimum of what is and isn't allowable, and students need to be made aware of this.

Dr. Holliday questioned who will be keeping track of this. It is most important for the long term. He stated that he thinks three consecutive semesters is too long for graduate student leave. Dr. Holliday suggested that any more than one semester leave would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Dr. Booher suggested that the Office of Accessibility should be involved in discussions about rights and privileges.

Acting Dean Saunders said that she will put together a draft for Graduate Council members' review. The draft will be a high-level, course only, short-term teaching assistant policy.

Graduate School Advisory Board

Acting Dean Saunders stated that she discussed with the Interim Provost the possibility of establishing a Graduate School Advisory Board. He was supportive of the idea and asked that she look at different models.

New Business

Acting Dean Saunders asked Graduate Council members if they had any items of new business.

Ms. Stefin shared that Graduate Student Government had a meeting with the President and Interim Provost. Approximately 30 students attended. Graduate students expressed their concerns, and many of the questions were about policies, funding, and matters that need to be asked to the Graduate School. Students will submit those to Acting Dean Saunders.

Acting Dean Saunders stated that there has been some discussion at CCGS pertaining to military transfer of credit for graduate students. Such credit transfer is seen very infrequently. UA does not have a policy for graduate students, only for undergraduates. Youngstown State University has a policy to grant credit to a student during his/her military service. At the graduate-level the credit would have to be from courses that individuals completed. UA needs to develop a written policy.

Meeting adjourned at 10:23 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Martha Santos
Secretary