Council of Graduate Students  
Meeting Minutes  
Tuesday, February 9th, 2010  
(Presidents Room, Coffman Memorial Union)

Prior to the meeting, cellist David Huckaby of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO) performed the Bach Suite in G Major. Mr. Huckaby’s appeared to help promote SPCO’s Club 2030. David’s biography is available on the SPCO Web site <http://www.thespco.org/bios/dhuckaby.html>, as is information about Club 2030: <http://www.thespco.org/load_screen.asp?screen=club2030>.

1. Call to Order

President Mandy Stahre called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Approximately 63 people were present, including COGS representatives and guests.

Ms. Stahre thanked Mr. Huckaby for his performance. She also announced that she is working with the SPCO to reserve a block of seats for graduate students at a concert in April.

2. Resolution on Amending University Policy on Excused Absences

A resolution was discussed that urges the University to amend its policy on Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences to include “sickness of minor dependents” as a legitimate reason for absence. The current policy is available at: <http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/MAKEUPWORK.html>.

It was noted that, according to the COGS Biennial Graduate Student Survey, over 20% of graduate students are parents.

A question was raised as to whether graduate student parents are having problems with excused absences. Kelvin Choi said that some students have had problems in courses that have attendance requirements, where the instructor hasn’t been willing to be flexible.

Charlie Billington noted that Student Affairs has a person who assists undergraduate students with this issue. He suggested that, if this resolution passes, Student Affairs may be able to free up this person to do other things.

Someone questioned why only minor dependents were listed. Mr. Choi said that the resolution could be expanded. However, while 22% of graduate students are parents, he had no information about how many students are responsible for non-minor dependents.

The resolution passed with 55 votes in favor, none opposed, and no abstentions.
3. Graduate Education Work Group Reports

Members of the Provost’s Academic Issues Work Group and the Student Administrative Processes Work Group discussed the work and recommendations of the Work Groups. Representing the Work Groups were:

- Christina Brakken-Thal, Member of Academic Issues Work Group; GAPSA Vice President and Student Representative to the Board of Regents
- John Finnegan, Chair of the Academic Issues Work Group; Dean, School of Public Health; and Assistant Vice President for Public Health
- Katherine Himes, Staff to the Work Groups; and Assistant to the Provost, Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost
- Mary L. Nichols, Chair of the Administrative Processes Work Group; Dean, College of Continuing Education; and Professor, Carlson School of Management
- Henning Schroeder, Member of Administrative Processes Work Group; Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Education; and Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies, Pharmacy

Several of the guests made introductory remarks.

Dean Finnegan solicited feedback from graduate students and said that the recommendations will be revised before they become final.

Dean Nichols noted that the Work Group members attended the November COGS General Assembly meeting. She said that her Work Group examined administrative and student services with the objective of determining which tasks are best performed in a centralized organization, and which are best done by the colleges. She referenced a spreadsheet at the back of her Work Group’s report that suggests where various tasks ought to be performed.

Dean Finnegan said that an external review of graduate education is performed every ten years. He sees greater participation of graduate students in the next review.

Dean Nichols said that it is important to have input from graduate students beyond those that are members of the Work Groups.

Ms. Himes noted that she was previously a full-time Ph.D. student. She said that both Work Groups met with numerous constituencies as they developed their recommendations, and that they are now going back to those constituencies to receive feedback on the recommendations.

Mandy Stahre asked about how Master’s programs will be administered in the future. She understood that all Master’s programs are going to be administered by the colleges, although many tasks are still going to be centrally administered, such as some services for international students. Dean Schroeder emphasized that all Master’s degrees are still going to be University of Minnesota degrees, and that the Graduate School will set standards for Master’s degrees. He also said that some functions will remain centralized; for example, it doesn’t make sense to have
150 admissions organizations. Ms. Himes said that from the perspective of students, this change should be seamless.

Caroline Hilk asked about master’s programs that lead into Ph.D. programs. Dean Schroeder said that he believed that the report takes care of this. Dean Nichols said that there are two separate spreadsheets at the end of her Work Group’s report, one for Master’s programs and one for Ph.D. programs, and that there are few differences. Dean Schroeder said that there would be a new committee, the Graduate Education Council, that would review applications for new Ph.D. programs, and that proposals for new master’s programs would go directly to the Provost. Dean Nichols said that this approach would permit colleges to act more quickly.

One student was glad to see that advising was included in the report. The student asked how this will affect faculty, both pre- and post-tenure. Dean Finnegan observed that today some advising is good and some advising is bad, and that both the faculty and students have obligations in the advisor/advisee relationship. He said that responsibility for the quality of advising will now be with the colleges. Dean Schroeder said that more resources and much more training should be applied to improve the quality of advising. He also referenced a 2008 report on quality in teaching and noted that the report includes many important comments about advising. Dean Finnegan suggested that the Directors of Graduate Studies should also play a role in ensuring the quality of advising.

One student said that the Graduate School is much smaller and more personal than some large colleges, such as CLA. Dean Finnegan suggested that college deans will want to offer the best graduate education that they can. He also said that if the University wants to be the number three public research university, we need to focus on graduate education.

Pamela Weisenhorn said that it was good to hold the college deans accountable. But, she wondered how, after responsibility for some funds is moved to the college deans, we can be sure that it is spent on graduate education. She is concerned about moving money for graduate education to the colleges, including fellowship funds. Dean Finnegan said that the changes were not “transferring money to colleges”. Currently, colleges pay $20 million annually to support graduate education. The recommendations leave some of that money in the colleges. He also noted that only $14 million of that money goes back to the colleges. Why not, he asked, leave these resources in the colleges and let them allocate it locally? He also said that expenditures by the colleges on graduate education will be monitored. Dean Finnegan also said that he had heard from graduate students that support for students ought to be better. Dean Schroeder commented that the difficulties that IT and CBS had in creating a new graduate program highlighted some of the problems with the current system. Dean Finnegan said that the colleges must put a lot more money into supporting graduate students, specifically funds from grants. Ms. Himes said that the report contains specific language that prohibits transferring fellowship money to funding for TAs. Ms. Brakken-Thal said that the current restriction against transferring graduate fellowships within a program is causing problems. Ms. Himes suggested that more resources are needed to help graduate students pursue external funding. Dean Finnegan said that there are a lot more details about support for graduate students that aren’t in the report. He also reminded the Assembly that the University is going to face less funding, including significantly less funding from the state.
Kelvin Choi asked how the challenges faced by international graduate students and graduate student parents will be addressed. Dean Finnegan responded that the report doesn’t address this directly. He also said that the college deans and the vice provost must play a role in addressing abusive advising. Dean Schroeder said that there are other groups within the University that have responsibilities in this area. Dean Finnegan noted that international graduate students are perhaps more vulnerable to bad advising, particularly when the first get here. He also expressed a personal opinion that at some point faculty may have mandatory training on advising, just as they now have mandatory training concerning the responsible conduct of research.

A student said that the expectations of timely progress and time-to-degree aren’t reasonable, given the other demands placed on graduate students, such as teaching. Dean Finnegan talked about outcomes and metrics. Programs need to have time-to-degree and graduation rates in their review process, he said. He had also heard that some TAs had half-time appointments, but were working 40 hours a week. He said that the faculty knows that this is an abuse. The student asked how research was going to be balanced against other demands. Dean Finnegan said that the college deans will discuss this with the Provost in the compact process.

A vigorous discussion followed about the requirement that Ph.D. students include 12 credits outside of their department in their degree plans. It was not clear that all of the administrators present fully understood the issue.

Ms. Stahre reminded everyone that they could submit comments during the 30-day comment period.

4. GAPSA Fees Request

Ms. Stahre provided an update on the GAPSA student fee request. The GAPSA student fee request includes funds for COGS and the other councils, as well as for GAPSA. GAPSA failed to submit their request by the deadline. As a result, the Student Fees Committee refused to consider GAPSA’s student fee request. This issue is being worked from several angles, but the outcome is not clear. A discussion ensued about the GAPSA student fees request, the lateness of the request, the Student Fees Committee, and the option of bypassing the Committee.

The meeting adjourned at 7:28 p.m.

Respectively submitted, Tim Salo
Updated 3/2/10