Chair Prabhudev Konana called the second meeting of the Graduate Assembly for the 2016-17 academic year to order on Wednesday, November 9, 2016, at 1:30 p.m. in the Harry Ransom Center, Tom Lea Room, 3.206

Faculty Members Present: Alper, Balhoff, Castelli, Chen, Cox, Frazier, Harrison, Hasenbein, Juenger, Kim, Konana, Mackert, Matouschek, Pollak, Radhakrishnan, Rascati, Schallert, Srinivasan, Trace, Weaver, Worthy

Faculty Members Absent: Alu, Brustad, Cole, Deigh, Gershoff, Murray, Strong, Thompson, Wilson

Student Members Present: Mostafa

Ex Officio Members Present: None

Representatives from the Office of Graduate Studies Present: Broadway, Dalton, Ellison, Hackert, Neikirk, Rhodes, Riley, Sylvia

Visitors: Bray, Melecki

Before beginning the official business of the meeting, Dr. Konana welcomed special guest Provost Maurie McInnis. Dean Hackert then provided a brief introduction of Dr. McInnis, noting that her areas of academic expertise include Art History, American Studies, and Slave America. He further noted that he believes Provost McInnis is the first outside person hired to serve in that position at UT since William Lee Hays was hired to serve as Vice-President for Academic Affairs in 1977.

Provost McInnis greeted the Graduate Assembly. She commented on the positive reputation of the work of the Graduate Assembly and discussed the need for UT Austin to focus on graduate education at both the individual program level and strategically at the institutional level.

Provost McInnis acknowledged that graduate stipends are an issue. She reported that she recently swept $20 million in balances that will be repurposed and redirected to graduate student stipends. She has asked the deans to submit proposals to use these funds to support terminal degree programs at both the master's and doctoral level. She noted that the more the deans are willing to contribute from their own funds to enhance student support, the more kindly their proposals are likely to be reviewed. Additionally, she noted the need to consider the proper role of non-PhD programs -- specifically, master's education -- at UT Austin, stating that we must be mindful of the shifting demographics of students and what they want out of a University.
The majority of packages will likely be in the form of $5000 top-offs for four years. The goal will be to stretch these funds over four cohorts. In four years, we will look at the impact of higher stipends on recruitment so that we can begin making data-informed decisions and thinking strategically across all graduate programs.

Provost McInnis noted that an active search for a permanent Graduate Dean has been launched, and she described the expanded role that she envisions for this position that will carry the title “Graduate Dean and Vice Provost for Academic Affairs.” She noted that the change in title was intended to signal very strongly that the Dean of the Graduate School would be a part of the group of deans and their leadership team and, also, a part of the leadership team in the Provost’s Office. She encouraged faculty to submit nominations for internal and external nominees.

Provost McInnis noted that a majority of our graduates are not going into academy and suggested that we need to think of career training and curriculum targeted to students who are interested in non-academic careers.

Prabhudev Konana noted that a major metric for evaluating PhD programs used to be graduates’ placement at specific institutions, and he asked the Provost if that metric is likely to change.

Provost McInnis noted that this is already changing nationally, that leading institutions are doing this already. She further noted that we will fall behind our peers if we don’t consider the needs of our students and graduates.

Prabhudev Konana then changed the topic of discussion to option III (self-funded) degree programs, noting that some programs have a better market potential for delivering this type of program than others and that this can lead to friction. He asked if the development of option III programs should be set by the market or held back due to these inequities.

Provost McInnis acknowledged the lack of balance and the need to have a strategic institutional conversation about the ideal balance of programs -- formula-funded, self-funded, master’s and doctoral. She noted that it’s logical that we and other universities are turning to these self-funded programs because so few new streams of revenue are available. She further noted that, unlike UT Austin, most universities don’t have to make such complicated boundaries and rules regarding state funds and faculty time. We need to be thoughtful about how many of these programs we have, where we do them, and overall institutional funding so we don’t end up with the have’s and the have-not’s. She concluded by confirming that she doesn’t have a specific answer at this time, but wants to lead a campus conversation on this subject.

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Having confirmed that there were no additional questions, Dr. Konana thanked Provost McInnis for addressing the Assembly; and Provost McInnis excused herself from the meeting.

Order of Business

I. Approval of minutes from September 21, 2016, postponed to February 1, 2017.

II. Report of the Graduate Dean (Marvin Hackert)

Interim Dean Hackert introduced a new Graduate School brochure that summarizes the activities of the Graduate School and is available online. It should also be useful in the dean search.

Dean Hackert presented information on the ConTex agreement, noting that UT System signed agreement with Conacyt in Mexico in June to promote the collaboration and exchange of scholars. There are several parts of the agreement: graduate student support, post-doc, faculty research leave, and research grants. Conacyt will support students with stipend for four years -- $1100 per month for 12 months for 4 years -- and UT system will provide fifth year of support. In addition, the award will include in-state tuition and international insurance. There is more information on the Graduate School website. The Graduate School and GIAC are working to identify eligible enrolled students and applicants. Students have to be admitted to a UT graduate degree program before they apply for Conacyt funding from ConTex.

Dean Hackert discussed the 3-Minute Thesis competition that will take place on Feb 3. There have been recent announcements, and the Graduate School is offering related workshops. There are cash prizes and awards for students. In this competition, students get 3 minutes and one slide to present the importance of their work/research. The Graduate School will send the UT Austin winner to compete in a regional meeting.

Next, Dean Hackert announced that the Co-op awards banquet will be different this year. There will be one banquet this year, instead of two. Undergraduate and graduate awards will be given during one ceremony. John Dalton confirmed that the professional awards are currently open for nominations; student awards will open in late January.

Dean Hackert noted that hopefully the last paper request for updating the signature page has been sent out. In the future, this will probably be called the “GSC Program Administrative Roster.” The Graduate School is making progress on moving this and the GSC-update process to an online platform. They plan to have electronic processes in place next year.
Diane Schallert requested clarification of which signature page was being referred to – the one associated with administrative roles or the one associated with a student’s dissertation.

Dean Hackert confirmed that this discussion is related to the form that defines various administrative roles – the Graduate Adviser, GSC Chair, etc. – and it goes hand-in-hand with updating the GSC lists, but that these are two different programming projects.

Wonsook Kim asked if the increase in stipends would be initiated in the next academic year or how soon, noting its importance for recruiting.

Dean Hackert responded that proposals are being developed and submitted by the deans. Therefore, decisions about allocations will happen after Dec 1.

Jim Cox requested clarification of the meaning of a $5000 top-off over four years.

Dean Hackert confirmed that the intent was for a bump of $5000 per year but noted that details are not yet set and could vary by college.

III. There was no report from the Chair of the Graduate Assembly.

IV. Academic Committee (Hal Alper)

A. Proposal to add an option III track to the existing Master of Science in Nutritional Sciences (MSNS) degree program

Hal Alper reported that the Academic Committee voted unanimously to approve this program.

Molly Bray, the Chair of the Department in Nutritional Sciences, introduced the proposal, noting that master’s level training will be required for all Registered Dieticians by 2024. She noted that 29 existing programs in US currently provide this training. Other audiences for the online program might include clinical professionals and medical professionals. The online program is designed to maintain the same rigor found in the existing residential program. Admissions standards for the online program will be same as the residential program, and the curriculum content will be very similar.

Hal Alper noted that the program has been designed with the assumption that most students will complete a coursework-based master’s but that there is an option to complete a thesis for those who are interested.

Karen Rascati asked if students would come to campus to meet each other or if the program would be delivered completely online.
Molly Bray confirmed that, initially, the program will be offered completely online. In the future, they may develop some in-residence training opportunities.

Prabhudev Konana asked how the cost of course development -- which can range from $30,000 to $300,000 per course -- is being covered. Specifically, he asked how much UT System is contributing in this area.

Molly Bray explained that the department is working with the Institute for Transformational Learning (ITL), a UT System-level entity that develops innovative online education. She explained that ITL will provide a grant for course development and that cost recovery for the grant occurs in the operating part of program.

Dr. Bray further noted that ITL is currently developing an MOU with UT Austin and that Nutritional Sciences will be the first UT Austin program to work with them. ITL has provided a lot of guidance in the development of an online agreement. For example, UT Austin will maintain ownership of the course content, a detail that ITL acknowledges is important on our campus.

Molly Bray discussed the department's goals with respect to use of revenue from the option III program, noting that those funds will be reinvested into the existing graduate program where it will create a stable resource for graduate student support and new faculty recruitment.

Prabhudev Konana requested clarification on the timeline for implementation, noting the time needed for online course development.

Molly Bray explained that the option III program would initially be offered as a two-year program so the department will be able to prioritize the development of courses over time. At the end of two years, they may be in a position to develop fast-track courses that will allow students to complete the program in one year, rather than two.

- The proposal to add an option III track to the existing Master of Science in Nutritional Sciences degree program was unanimously approved by the Assembly, and it was deemed minor legislation.

V. Administrative Committee (Jim Cox)

A. Proposal to change the grading symbol for theses, reports, dissertation, treatise, and recital courses from "*" (asterisk) to CR/NC.

Jim Cox reported that this policy had been reviewed at the request of the Graduate Dean and that the proposal had been unanimously approved by the committee.
• The proposal to change the grading symbol for theses, reports, dissertation, treatise, and recital courses from "**" (asterisk) to CR/NC was unanimously approved and deemed minor legislation.

Diane Schallert asked when the new grading policy would go into effect.

Dean Neikirk responded that there was no related programming to do and that this is not a catalog issue. He stated that it's too late to implement this fall and is, therefore, more likely to go into effect in spring 2017.

Maria Juenger asked if the "**" would continue to be offered as a grading option, noting that this would likely lead to confusion.

Dean Neikirk noted that the "**" would still continue to be a valid symbol for other courses.

Michelle Broadway stated that grading options for these courses could likely be restricted to CR/NC without requiring programming from the Registrar.

Allison Frasier stated that she had served on the Administrative Committee and noted that the committee had discussed what it means for students to earn a lot of NC's and the importance of having an option to request a change in a previously assigned "NC" based upon the instructor having received information that was not available at the time of grade reporting.

Marvin Hackert noted that there have been increasing discussions about clarifying the process for terminating students.

Jim Cox stated that there had been one objection on the committee from John Deigh who was concerned that the sole reason for the proposed change in grade status was to make it easier to terminate a student.

Karen Rascati asked how this information would be distributed to students and faculty.

Dean Hackert responded that we would likely start with the Graduate Coordinator Network (GCN).

B. Report of policy review: Graduate student deadline for changing the grading status in a course from letter grade to CR/NC and vice versa.

Jim Cox reported that the committee unanimously agreed that the deadline should be changed to a date close to the end of the semester. He noted that this is not a catalog issue and does not require Assembly legislation. He reported that
the committee found the November 1 deadline to be arbitrary. Graduate Coordinators who were asked support this change. They hope it will reduce anxiety and confusion for students.

Diane Schallert asked for clarification on the proposed deadline.

Jim Cox noted that it may change from one semester to the next but that it will be as late as they can make it before the grade sheets come out.

Dean Neikirk noted that we can likely extend the deadline to the Monday of the last full week of classes. After that time, the staff in the Graduate School are working on final submissions. He confirmed that although the earlier deadline is in effect this fall, he will accept petitions for later updates.

Kate Weaver expressed surprise and concern that a more specific date or timeline had not been defined. She asked if it would be specifically defined and published for students.

Dean Neikirk confirmed that the deadline would be published in the academic calendar each year.

David Harrison asked how many late requests are processed each semester.

Dean Neikirk responded that the number was in the hundreds.

David Harrison noted that there’s a trade-off; namely, if we move the deadline to a later date, there’s a greater degree of unpredictability in all requests. It also means students are doing much less planning than they are end-of-semester cleanup, and the program faculty and staff have to process a larger volume in a shorter period of time.

Dean Neikirk responded that there is nothing to prevent a program from establishing an earlier deadline and that we are trying to provide flexibility.

Graduate student representative Mostafa noted that there’s a limit on the number of CR/NC courses that a graduate student can count towards their degree.

Karen Rascati confirmed that the College of Pharmacy sets their own limits on CR/NC coursework.

Jim Cox noted that the committee had discussed whether students would “game the system” and had decided it wasn’t a major concern because the faculty member can still assign a grade.

John Hassenbein confirmed that the Graduate School has a restriction of no more than 20% of CR/NC coursework counted towards the degree.
David Harrison noted that the benefit is flexibility to the student; the cost is the lack of predictability of flow and lack of time to process for the faculty and staff.

Dean Neikirk noted that there are usually only a handful of late requests per program in a given semester, but that this quantity across graduate programs adds up.

Alison Frasier noted that the committee discussion started from observing that a previous dean had a moral position on students making late requests in order to "game the system." The Administrative Committee didn't feel as compelled by this moral claim.

Prabhudev Konana asked if the dynamic of group projects had been discussed by the committee.

Jim Cox responded that this issue had not been discussed but noted that the conversation stops with the faculty member who can say no.

Prabhudev Konana noted that this issue was being brought before the Assembly in the form of a report and confirmed that a vote was not required.

VI. Admissions and Enrollment Committee (Diane Schallert)

A. Proposal to waive GRE/GMAT requirement for applicants to dual-degree programs to be administered by the Dell Medical School

Chair Schallert reported that the proposal was unanimously approved by the Admissions and Enrollment Committee.

Kate Weaver asked if the request for waiver would apply to all dual-degree arrangements with the Dell Medical School.

Diane Schallert responded that a program could choose to require the GRE, but that the precedent established through this legislation might complicate matters.

Dean Hackert explained that we are expecting several dual-degree proposals and that Dell Medical School is seeking a blanket waiver for those programs.

Hal Alper asked if a dual-degree program wanted to have a GRE requirement if they choose. He pointed out that the current motion says "all programs" and suggested that a friendly amendment to the motion might alleviate this concern. Members of the Assembly discussed the friendly amendment, noting that the legislated waiver of admissions test scores would apply to all medical students in dual-degree programs that themselves have asked for a waiver. Members of the Assembly noted the need to confirm Dell Medical School's agreement with the revised motion.
• The Proposal to waive the GRE/GMAT requirement for all medical students participating in dual-degree programs that have sought a waiver of the GRE/GMAT was unanimously approved by the Assembly, and it was deemed minor legislation.

VII. Graduate Student Assembly (Kareem Mostafa): No report.

VIII. Adjournment at 3:00 p.m.

Charlotte Canning, Secretary