

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY SENATE  
GRADUATE STUDIES COUNCIL  
Minutes of 27 May 2010

**Members present:** Said AbuBakr, Michele Behr, Gary Bischof, Christine Byrd-Jacobs, Amy Curtis, Leigh Ford, Louann Bierlein Palmer, Brandi Pritchett, Lewis Pyenson, William Rantz, Joel Raveloharimisy, David Reinhold, David Smith, Mark Wheeler. **Member absent:** Bruce Ferrin. **Also present:** Peter Krawutschke, Faculty Senate president; Janice Anderson, Faculty Senate Office; Osama Abudayyeh and Edmund Tsang, associate deans, College of Engineering and Applied Sciences; Judah Ari-Gur, Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineering; Donald Nelson, chair, Computer Science; Michelle McWilliams, Graduate Student Advisory Committee; Virginia Bowlby, Marianne DiPierro, Julie Nemire, Graduate College.

Council Chair Mark Wheeler called the meeting to order at 3 p.m.

### Procedural Items

#### *Welcome and Introduction of New Members*

Krawutschke thanked members for their service on the council and new members introduced themselves.

#### *Acceptance of the Agenda*

Raveloharimisy moved to accept the agenda, Rantz seconded. The agenda was approved.

#### *Approval of the Minutes of 22 April*

Raveloharimisy moved to approve the minutes, AbuBakr seconded. The minutes were approved.

### Discussion/Action Items

#### *Election of Council Officers for 2010-11*

Wheeler nominated Bierlein Palmer for council chair, AbuBakr seconded. Bierlein Palmer was elected as chair. Ford nominated Curtis for council vice chair, Rantz seconded. Curtis was elected as vice chair. Curtis nominated Bischof as secretary, Pritchett seconded. Bischof was elected as council secretary.

*Curriculum Proposal: Deletion of M.S.E. in Materials Science and Engineering [CEAS-10-30-CEAS revised] – Edmund Tsang, Associate Dean, College of Engineering and Applied Sciences*

Tsang presented the proposal to delete the MS program in Materials Science and Engineering. Admissions were suspended in 2005. The one remaining student in the program is expected to graduate in December of 2011. AbuBakr moved to accept the proposal, Rantz seconded. The motion was approved.

*Curriculum Proposal: Creation of Accelerated Bachelors/Masters Program in Computer Science [CEAS-10-03-CS revised] – Donald Nelson, Chair, Department of Computer Science*

Nelson presented the curriculum proposal and said the format was based on other accelerated programs in the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences which have already been approved. Nemire recommended the following changes / clarifications:

- Students need to apply for the undergraduate degree at the same time that they apply for ABM
- The name of the International Student Office has changed (section 3.1.4)
- Courses taken as 500 level earn undergraduate credit, but they count as part of the requirements for the graduate program. This needs to be clarified in sections 4.2 and 4.6.

Pritchett moved to accept the proposal, Ford seconded. The motion passed.

*Curriculum Proposal: New degree and curriculum, Doctor of Philosophy in Engineering and Applied Sciences [CEAS-10-24-CEAS] – Osama Abudayyeh, Associate Dean, College of Engineering and Applied Sciences*

The new Ph.D. program is being proposed at the college level rather than department level to accommodate emerging research areas that do not fit into one area, i.e energy research, medical related research. There are no new courses being proposed. One third of faculty in the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences do not have access to Ph.D. students because they do not have a Ph.D. in their area, therefore having this new program would be a good recruiting tool for faculty. There was a question about the advantage of the program for students. Abudayyeh responded that this program would allow students a mechanism for a custom designed curriculum and gives them flexibility to do this within constraints of the University. The student needs to design the course of study within the first year and this becomes like a contract. One department within the college does not support this new program. Judah Ari-Gur spoke on behalf of the Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineering department which does not endorse this proposal. The Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineering Department already has a Ph.D. program and they feel the requirements for the new program are less stringent than the requirements that are currently in place for their departmental program; they fear there may be erosion from their program. In order to avoid this problem, council members suggested that there be a requirement that no more than 75% of classes can come from one department. It was suggested that materials include the following language: "The program is not intended to substitute for the discipline specific Ph.D. programs that already exist." Council members expressed concern that the proposal lacks evidence of student demand for this program. There was also a question of how students would be funded. Abudayyeh responded that some will not be funded, and some will likely be funded through their government. Bierlein Palmer moved to accept the proposal with addition of the suggested language to the catalog copy, as well as more market analysis added. Ford made a friendly amendment to add more rationale for the program from the student perspective. Pritchett added a friendly amendment asking for the proposal to address funding of students, Bischof seconded. The motion was approved. Two members abstained.

## Reports

### *Report of the Graduate Dean*

Pyenson reported that we are on track to award 111 doctorates in this academic year. This is the third year in a row that we have had 100 doctorates awarded in a year.

### *Report of the Provost*

No report.

### *Report of the Council Chair*

Wheeler reported on an update on the Memorandum Of Action for doctoral residency. The Provost's Office has asked for change in supporting rationale, which GSC members supported. The MOA now has an effective date of fall 2011.

### *Report of the Graduate Student Advisory Committee*

Pritchett reported that she appreciates that graduate students have a voice on GSC. The spring issue of *The Hilltop Review* is being prepared and should be out shortly. GSAC is continuing to work on advocacy efforts for graduate students including more printing and increased hours at the Recreation Center for graduate students. Pritchett introduced Michelle McWilliams, the new vice chair of GSAC, and Joel Raveloharimisy, the incoming chair.

## Discussion/Informational Items

### *Discussion of the Graduate Student Teaching Awards*

Bierlein Palmer is developing a new set of criteria based on committee members rationale. She will share a draft with committee members and gather feedback. She would like to turn criteria into a rubric that would go out to applicants. She will work on recommendations as any changes would need to be finalized by December for the next award cycle.

### *Discussion of Graduate Student Research Awards*

Behr reported that application requirements need to be made clearer based on criteria that have emerged in judging the applications, i.e. order of authorship of publications, rate of acceptance of publications or conferences. Also there needs to be a clarification that we only consider what has been produced at WMU, and not research activities that were done prior to coming to WMU. It would be helpful to have further clarification on research versus creative activity and to have better language for what is considered creative activity. Behr will work with Nemire on the process for making these changes in the requirements.

### *Remarks of the Graduate Dean*

The full text of the Dr. Pyenson's remarks are appended to the end of minutes.

## Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:10 p.m.

Michele Behr, Secretary

Please allow me to begin by thanking the chair for this opportunity to address the Graduate Studies Council as I near the end of a four-year term as Graduate Dean. I should like to extend my thanks, publicly, to the dedicated staff of the Graduate College: Julie Nemire, Marianne DiPierro, Tony Dennis, Jennifer Wendling Holm, Linda Comrie, James Kison, Virginia Bowlby, and Carson Leftwich; to the students and officers of the Graduate Student Advisory Committee and the Graduate Students of Color; to the student assistants whose energy powers the College office; to the Graduate Advisors at Western Michigan University; to the chairs of dissertation and thesis committees and to the members of the committees; and to the advisors of the college and the members of our evaluation committees. This list could be extended considerably. Even in its present, lacunary form, it indicates that a large portion of the university community is dedicated to the graduate-studies enterprise.

What is that enterprise? A recent joint report by the Council of Graduate Schools and the Educational Testing Service cites one economist: "If graduate educators cannot fulfill their economic mission to help grow the economy and help youths and adults become successful workers, they also will fail in their cultural and political missions to create good neighbors, good citizens and lifelong learners." [Cathy Wendler, et al., *The Path Forward: The Future of Graduate Education in the United States* (Washington: Council of Graduate Schools; Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 2010), p. 13]. Well, yes, for nearly a thousand years universities have turned out people for the some of the high-class guilds and, eventually, the practical trades, but the formulation just cited really seems like what we expect from elementary schools. Universities are both more and less than a congeries of training institutes. We know this because universities do not educate students for some of the most demanding trades: field marshal, senator, air-traffic controller, and long-haul driver. Our *universitas* is selective about what it teaches. One way to reconsider what we should and do teach is to reflect on our origins in America. Historically, European secondary schools emerged to channel students into pre-existing universities, whereas US universities came into being as extensions of pre-existing schools and academies. The number of US college diplomas equaled the number of high-school diplomas in the nineteenth century. We are, in our roots, fundamentally remedial, a fact emphasized in a recent email from the president of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU), who announced a program to raise secondary standards in English and mathematics with the hope of "reducing the need for remediation and boosting collegiate graduate rates." This program concerns the lowest of our programs of study, the bachelor's degree, but we should note well: The APLU has explicitly identified languages and the exact sciences as fundamental. That is to say, undergraduate education, in the view of the APLU, is about acquiring the habits of thought that lead, later, to intensive specialization.

In universities, notwithstanding undergraduate "majors," specialization comes in advanced degrees. We call the process graduate studies. The name and the separation from undergraduate studies was intentional. It signaled, at the end of the nineteenth century in the US, courses of study leading to advanced professional standing (for example, a pedagogical master's degree) or substantial engagement in pushing out the frontiers of knowledge itself (the research doctorate), for by that time the research ethos had spread here from Germany. As

the previous examples suggest, graduate studies divided then and continue to be divided now into two parts: truth-seeking curricula and truth-applying curricula.

It is important to emphasize that the two parts are, today, unequal, as is suggested in the report of the APLU. The truth-seeking function, anchored in the teachings of Socrates, has priority over the function of practical expediency, represented by the Sophists. One way to see this separation clearly is to recall the long list of stand-alone professional schools in law, medicine, dentistry, social work, engineering, business, art, and music, on the one hand, and the comparative dearth of such stand-alone schools in English, physics, mathematics, and history. A great university recognizes the priority of truth-seeking and supports it preferentially. It makes this choice because its fundamental mission is not merely the certification of learning by students (something done well by 18-wheeler academies and colleges of cosmetology), but rather the *advancement of learning*.

The prestige carried by the advancement of learning is the envy of the guilds and trades. Until recently, a bachelor's degree sufficed for architects, pharmacists, nurses, accountants, and engineers; lawyers and even physicians could practice with a bachelor's degree. But in our democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville might have noted, everyone can obtain a doctorate. We have been on this track for a long time. Nearly one hundred years ago, the great sociologist Max Weber was struck by the fact that one could obtain a doctorate in America for a dissertation about a new flavor for ice cream. What would he say about many of the dissertations that are defended today?

This preamble carries implications for the life of our academic community:

1. Everything in graduate education depends on the acuity and scholarly eminence of thesis or dissertation advisors, a record that may be read directly from the dispassionate statistics (normalized for a particular discipline) in the Web of Science. At the university, we should and do pay relatively little attention to the things that signal popularity in the rough-and-tumble world—couture, complexion, costume, conversational small-talk. We must continue to hire only the very best creators of new knowledge and new sensibilities. Accomplishment in that area is proof of the qualities that we require for instructors who stand in front of a classroom: originality, honesty, attention to precedent, a certain regularity of habits, the ability to bring a project to a successful conclusion. The time has long passed when appropriate qualities included worshipping in the right church and wearing trousers.
2. Professional degree programs, which respond directly to the demands of the agora, do not need special care or attention in the academy. Students enroll in them to do both good and well in life; if they complete their course of study, they shall achieve this end. Accrediting agencies make sure that students in professional programs are trained to pass state licensing examinations (certified public accountant, board-certified brain surgeon).
3. All extra resources at the university, then, should go to support the humanities and the natural sciences, for, without them, the university cannot advance learning. To act in this way is to step off the road to mediocrity and set forth on the path to greatness.

There are also implications for the Graduate Studies Council:

4. The line must be held on scholarly credentials for membership in the Graduate Faculty. That is to say, we must insist on a terminal research degree in addition to timely and significant research publications for Full Membership, which carries the privilege and the burden of directing theses and dissertations. We owe it to our acolytes that the people who supervise labor ending in an original and significant contribution to learning themselves demonstrate that they can do what they are charged with directing.

5. The Graduate Studies Council must take the responsibility of reading theses and dissertations produced by the diverse programs in the university. This study, undertaken with probity and sympathy, will result in recommendations to suspend lame programs. Not every path in life requires a research doctorate. I am confident that the present body can identify and weed out programs that fail to honor our high ideals.

6. The Graduate Studies Council should take the lead in marginalizing current attention directed toward “learning innovation.” Graduate students do not need gadgets and whim-whams, clickers and videos. They need time to ponder great works and to think. They want to see how brilliant minds wrestle with ideas, before their very eyes. Regretfully, much of the present focus on strategies of teaching and learning is little more than window dressing for external inquisitors. It is highly significant that this focus is largely absent from some of the most intellectually demanding of our graduate programs—Medieval studies and nuclear physics. If we wish to continue a pedagogical emphasis at Western Michigan University on the graduate level, then by all means let us have students study the great educators of the past. What could be more relevant to the public schools today than a deep reassessment of Pestalozzi, Herbart, and Montessori? That, of course, will require knowledge of languages and history.

7. Physical exercise and participatory sports, for everyone, should be the norm, at the university and in the world at large. I know of no reputable study, however, demonstrating the benefits for scholarship of elite team sports; on the contrary, there have been credible publications about the health hazards of hard-knock football. Intercollegiate sports, at our university and at the vast majority of universities in the US, feed into a colossal maelstrom that sucks away our energies. I leave it for you to imagine if truth is of much concern in the locker-room or on the gridiron. The Graduate Studies Council should take the lead in proposing that intercollegiate-athletics funds be diverted to the academic mission of the university. Such a diversion would reap much favorable, national attention—more favorable attention than our intercollegiate sports teams generate in their games.

The graduate enterprise at Western Michigan University, over the past four years, has found its bearings. Graduate studies are what distinguish us from our competitors, making us *primus inter pares* among our peers. There is consistent and growing demand for our offerings. We produce more than one hundred doctorates yearly. It is time to take the university to the next intellectual level. In this, the Graduate Studies Council has a key role to play.

Finally, to the most vital matter in academic life, as in life generally: courage. In my experience, courage is tested when one is asked to pass over and implement or participate in an action or a policy that is wrong. Courage is not tested, for the most part, when crossing a river on horseback under fire, although one can be shot down just the same for strength of conscience. Please join me in affirming this: If, in times to come, people ask how it was that Western Michigan University faced the present assault on intellectual life, ask what its faculty thought about defending the great Socratic tradition against Sophistical detractors and mean magistrates, ask how, then, despite everything, great works of enduring value continued to issue from learned hands in Kalamazoo; if, as they will, future generations probe the historical record and ask these questions, let us act now to ensure that our descendants will say, This was their finest hour.