

Graduate Council Meeting Minutes
September 14, 2016

Present: Michael Cunningham, Briana Shay Mohan, Jennifer O'Brien, Nathan Wendte, Chris Rodning, Casius Pealer, Gilbert Morris, Gustavo Didier, Kate Elfer

Absent: Alan Childress, Mark Vail

M. Cunningham calls the meeting to order at 8:33 AM.

1. Approval of May's Meeting Minutes.

Rodning moves to approve; Mohan seconds the motion. All approve.

2. Announcements

October meeting will be October 19, 2016

3. FLSA and postdocs

M. Cunningham presented: Federal law that talks about the minimum standard to be exempt \$47,400. Most post-docs are above, but a fair number aren't. Mike and Deans and Provost met with WFMO about this. About 80% of postdocs will be at the threshold. Those that aren't, will be non-exempt and thus eligible for overtime. Mike has been trying to encourage departments to raise salaries as possible. Trying to solidify role of postdocs – neither faculty nor staff now but classified as postdocs. Postdocs can only stay for 5 years. If they want to stay past that, they can become staff research scientists. It does have opportunities for advancement. All postdocs should have an Individual development plan since they are trainees. If they are non-exempt then they need to make sure that they are clocking 37.5-40 hours of work to receive full time pay. Non-exempt postdocs will need to start this on 11/25. WFMO has resources online for postdocs transitioning from exempt to non-exempt.

Question: Do postdocs ever teach?

Cunningham: Some do, most teaching postdocs are now POPs. Even if their main duty teaching they would be exempt.

Morris: What about salaries for research scientists?

Cunningham: Set by funding agencies, NIH, etc, mostly based on how many years out from PhD.

4. NLRB ruling

M. Cunningham: Grad students at private institutions can unionize. We don't know if Tulane students want to, but it's a possibility. Ruling has gone back and forth. Has implications for undergrads as well, particularly athletes. If grad students unionize, it will be all or nothing, and there may be groups that benefit or have problems with it.

Elfer: GAPSA is doing an information and fact finding survey right now about this, determining who might be interested, what the majority thinks. When GAPSA next meets, they will form a committee to do further analysis which will then make a recommendation.

Didier: Why does it have to be everyone?

Cunningham: That's how the US works

Mohan: I've heard that in right to work states you do have the choice

Elfer: In a right to work state, it is an opt-in situation where you don't have to pay in. People on federal grants may not be eligible to participate regardless. When Nick Fears gets a conclusion from the committee is when action might be taken.

5. Intellectual property/patents

Cunningham: Theses and dissertations have to be published, but some students whose work may be patented who have been reluctant to do so. There are ways to delay the publication for up to five years so that you can take advantage of opportunities to patent. The compromise is to publish an abstract so that we have some kind of record – important for accreditation and outcomes.

6. Preparations for 5th year interim accreditation

Cunningham: It is actually our sixth year. Katie Busby has left her position, someone else has taken over for institutional assessment. We have to show that we assess outcomes and measure them especially with an eye to improvement. This assessment will be conducted off campus.

7. Career Workshops for Fall 2016/3 Minute Thesis

Mohan: Request to share information widely. Fall is mostly about academic careers. We're trying to clear up the differences between resumes and CVs and who should use what when. Fall and Spring Career Expos, primarily undergrad focused, but good practice for graduate students who may be interested in improving their communication with recruiters.

3MT is on November 9. Information sessions will be held before then. This is particularly good for students in their last year. The competition is judged for both a people's award and a judges' award, winner does receive a small cash prize. The student who wins the judges' award will go on to the regional conference. OGPS will provide funding for that student to attend the conference.

8. 2016-17 CELT/OGPS Brown Bag Lunch Series (will choose two topics)

Cunningham: Brian Mitchell is going to host these Brown Bag lunch series. The first one is Sept 28, on effective mentoring. Will go out to DGS as well.

Outcome of the vote:

9. Medical/Maternity leave policies

Cunningham: We have two policies to cover this. Childbirth policy is about giving birth and is associated with Title IX. PELP can also include paternity leave, because that's a little easier to foresee. PELP could also apply to caring for an ill family member. It helps to keep insurance in place. Childbirth policy has a roughly 8 week time frame around it that is flexible to accommodate medical needs. How would this work with being on fellowships or grants? Faculty member will not be penalized for having a grad student out to give birth.

Rodning: PELP can encompass medical leave?

Cunningham: Yes

Rodning: Childbirth policy – how does this work with exams that are on an annual basis. Would it be reasonable to postpone a year?

Cunningham: Can be individualized. Student affairs, DGS, Faculty should be involved to come up with the solution. Student should be presented with their options and what that will mean to make their choice. Pregnancy is considered a temporary disability so accommodations should be made, which can involve delays or giving extensions to certain things.

Rodning: My department is allocated stipends, and if we give one to a student and they don't take it, it's gone. If a student is allocated a stipend and then needed leave, we wouldn't get that stipend back. On an annual basis, we can reallocate them.

Cunningham: The schools will need to make sure that the student has the stipend

Rodning: That may leave the student hanging if the student needs the money later. An 8 week leave period makes sense, a semester sounds fine. Can a stipend be prorated?

Cunningham: If the student was TAing for part of the year, then they should still get that

Pealer: Could we indicate that the university's policy is 8 weeks but departments could have greater flexibility?

Cunningham: A lot of Title IX issues for presidency are related to high school, so there's not a great set up.

Pealer: This feels like a cap rather than a minimum

Cunningham: We want to make sure that deans that may not be very supportive have this guideline in place. This is all a pretty individualized experience. We also wanted this to cover adoption and things like that. There was concern that this was going to be abused or take too many resources, but experiences with same-sex partnerships where similar concerns were voiced indicate that that might not be the case.

Pealer: What is the process? When do you want this in place?

Cunningham: End of this academic year if possible. We are the decision making arm of the graduates. This body will be the one to say that this is the policy.

Mohan: Should we edit the “up to 8 weeks” to say a “minimum of 8 weeks”

Cunningham: Policy should have a timeline on it. Wording is tricky. Make it clear that it is 8 weeks and after that there may be some flexibility but that after that it may be unpaid or there may be other issues.

Mohan: Most students would take only what is paid, but it would be good to know that there are options.

9. Graduate student pay issues

Cunningham: Especially important for new students to the university. They must present verification of their I-9 within a certain time frame or they may not get paid on time. Paperwork has been getting lost that’s not the student’s fault as well. This means that they need to come to the university at least two weeks before school starts. There are ways to verify remotely within the US.

Elfer: Nick Fears and I met with Karen D’Arcy and John Harvey and Louis Rose, there are several steps between a student registering for classes and getting paid their stipend. These steps diverge. Students don’t seem to be knowledgeable about deadlines for turning in their paperwork in time, and they’re working on some way to get this done.

Cunningham: This information may need to be in the acceptance letter. We’re going to work with staff and DGS who process these. Also, students are given a lot of fees right at the beginning of each semester and that is hard for many new students. We want to see if there is a way to spread this out then they start. Returning students will actually delay registration to delay the fees, which also causes problems for classes since these classes look underenrolled. We’re going to have to work with A/P. More information will need to be given to students who are going from full time to part time. Cuts costs but also cuts benefits for grad students. What happens when you age out of your parent’s insurance if you’ve been using it?

Wendte: Speaking of insurance: health insurance fee has to be paid in one lump sum if you don’t want to accrue interest. Especially if you’re coming back from a field season, they may not have any money.

Cunningham: We have a culture of privilege at the university so we presume that everyone has \$1500 to slap down.

Mohan: Thanks to Kate for her work. These pay issues are significant negatives that will reverberate through their careers.

10. Checklist for annual reviews of PhD students

Cunningham: Last year we talked about this. All grad students should be reviewed at least once a year. We need to follow up to make sure that departments are doing this. I’m going to communicate with associate deans to make sure departments are doing this.

11. Women in Science and Engineering

Cunningham: New group that's supposed to be intergenerational

Elfer: 4th year students planning to do a 4+1 program may be interested

Cunningham: The group will be under OGPS

Elfer: I'm a cofounder. It originated as a call because grad students were in informal mentoring relationships with undergrads and postdocs, and formal mentoring with professors. We're interested in covering how to fund your entire career, research colloquium for feedback, mixers for industries or departments.

Pealer: Architecture just created Tulane Women in Architecture, could do joint events.

Elfer: We're hoping to promote community with social events

12. Memo of Understanding for Free Trade Agreement for Interdisciplinary Program

Cunningham: Some faculty have had problems teaching or taking classes outside their discipline. Can be difficult for students who try to take classes outside their major, based on whether they have waivers or pay by the credit. I'm going to work with the various deans to try to figure out a MOU.

13. Graduate Student Stipends

Cunningham: Our stipends are low compared to our peers. Some departments are able to get creative to give more, but we really need to increase the stipend levels. We're looking at a capital campaign to raise funds for this that has not gone live yet. Provost Forman talked about grad students a lot at his introduction to Academic Affairs.

M. Cunningham adjourned the meeting at 9:38 AM.