



**School of Graduate Studies**

1280 Main Street West  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
L8S 4L8

Phone 905.525.9140  
Ext. 23679  
<http://graduate.mcmaster.ca>

Graduate Council  
March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 9:30 am  
GH 111

Present: Mr. P. Self, Dr. P. Swett, Dr. M. Thompson, Dr. C. Hayward, Dr. T. Porter, Dr. B. Milliken, Dr. J. Richardson, Ms. V. Lewis, Ms. C. Brown, Mr. P. DeMaio, Dr. D. Gillespie, Dr. A. Fudge Schormans, Dr. E. Gedge, Mr. R. Mah, Mr. D. Finnerty, Dr. E. Badone, Dr. A. Roddick, Ms. B. Gordon

Regrets: Dr. N. Agarwal, Dr. S. McCracken, Dr. A. Deza, Dr. A. Guarne, Dr. A. Holloway, Dr. A. Dean, Dr. A. Shi, Ms. R. Pereira

By Invitation: Dr. R. Friendly

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## **A G E N D A**

### **I. Minutes of the meeting of February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016**

The minutes of the meeting of February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016 were approved on a motion by Dr. Hayward, seconded by Dr. Porter.

### **II. Business arising**

There was no business arising.

### **III. Report from the Associate Vice-President and Dean of Graduate Studies**

Dr. Welch thanked Dr. Milliken for chairing the previous meeting and noted that a meeting had been set up to deal with the outcome of the discussion of the supervisory committee report revision discussion at the previous meeting of Graduate Council.

Dr. Welch noted that the ability to deal with payments to and from graduate students had been an issue. Students were getting double-charged or an additional payment was being applied to their accounts. This issue has now been solved. Ms. Gordon said that there had been quite a bit of development over the past couple of weeks. SGS has been working very closely with UTS and Accounts and Cashiers and Financial Aid. They have been looking at the root causes of why some of the things have happened. She also noted that there has been a transition of employment issues from SGS to HR. Human Resources is now the department responsible for dealing with any benefits issues.

Dr. Welch provided updates on a couple of working groups, noting that the Graduate Pay group had an upcoming meeting and that there is work ongoing with respect to the Risk Management in Grad Student Travel with some of the key meetings coming up.

Dr. Welch reported that there are a number of issues that have shown up on the provincial radar including a budget with some interesting new challenges and thrusts for funding students in the future. The university is still seeking clarity on whether these initial elements of net tuition are going to be first at the undergraduate level or if there will be a simultaneous push for similar efforts at the graduate level.

#### **IV. Report from the Graduate Associate Deans**

Dr. Thompson reported that the Faculty of Engineering had just held an innovation retreat during which they worked to figure out where they can insert the ideas of entrepreneurship into programs.

Dr. Hayward noted that Faculty of Health Sciences had hosted two sessions for undergraduate students interested in pursuing graduate studies in FHS fields. Student ambassadors were in attendance to provide an overview of their programs and answer questions that the undergraduate students had. Feedback will inform future sessions as the Faculty is looking to meet needs of undergraduate students interested in learning about graduate programs. She also reported that the Faculty is up applications by 3% and recognized the efforts of all staff working on admissions. FHS is holding their Research Plenary coming up in May and it will include an element of web conferencing to meet the needs of students who are full time off campus. She also reported that Dr. Raha will be holding an interactive workshop for graduate students on how to make an effective presentation.

Dr. Milliken highlighted the work of a student group within the Faculty of Science who have organized a survey that will be given to TAs and undergraduate students to get a read on how well supported TAs are and how undergraduate students view their TAs. The Faculty is also holding a workshop on Latex to help students format their theses as well as alumni events with the aim of trying to connect students with alumni so they can learn about various paths to industry. Dr. Swett reported that Dean Welch and Dean Cruikshank sponsored students to attend a conference on the Future of the Humanities. They will report back on what they've learned. The conference happened last year at McGill and TRACE grew out of that. They are repeating the conference this year with new themes.

#### **V. Report from the Associate Registrar and Graduate Secretary**

There was no report from the Associate Registrar and Graduate Secretary.

#### **VI. Report from the Assistant Dean, Graduate Student Life and Research Training**

There was no report from the Assistant Dean, Graduate Student Life and Research Training.

#### **VII. Faculty of Business Graduate Curriculum and Policy Committee Report**

Dr. Welch explained that a previous iteration of the EMBA calendar copy had been submitted to the previous meeting for approval and that the version included in this meeting package was the correct one.

Dr. Milliken moved and Dr. Swett seconded, 'that Graduate Council approve the clarified calendar copy as described in the document.'

The motion was carried.

### **VIII. Faculty of Humanities Graduate Curriculum and Policy Committee Report**

Dr. Swett presented the proposed changes. She noted that the Classics program had found that good students that they want in the program have less Greek and Latin preparation than they used to have. They've proposed a change to their admission requirements accordingly as well as a change to their overall course requirements in the program so that once they're here they get the language training they need. They have added a sentence to their calendar copy to note that students lacking language training should expect to take the two year program to allow for the additional training.

The changes proposed by the French program were not fundamental program changes, but simply clarifications to language in the calendar copy. For the Masters program, they wanted to change the language they used to describe their MRP. With respect to the Ph.D. they clarified the following items: for coursework they wanted to be specific about what number of units is required for coursework, for language requirements they wanted to provide more flexibility around the third language requirement, allowing their students the option of completing a MIIETL course or graduate seminar in another department outside of French in place of that third language requirement. The comprehensive exam in the program can be achieved in two different ways and they have added additional language clarifying that. The final change to their calendar copy for the Ph.D. was the inclusion of a timeline so that their students would have a clearer sense of the progress through their degree.

History proposed changing the administration of their comp exam. The Major field reading component will be the same process, including an exam in the preparation class. The comprehensive exam itself will now be evaluated through their dissertation proposal. They are getting the exact same training but are being evaluated in different ways.

Gender Studies and Feminist Research proposed changing three points in their calendar copy. They wanted students to be clearer that their elective course is in addition to the requirements of their Ph.D. program. The program also wanted to strengthen language about the expectation around attendance at the department symposium. The final change proposed was to make it more clear in their calendar copy that GSFR had to be central to their dissertation as well as their work in the diploma.

Philosophy proposed some minor changes for clarification to their calendar copy around Ph.D. requirements and added headings so students could find material more readily.

Dr. Hayward asked about the comprehensive examination change for History. She noted that it seemed the program was calling the end of first year Ph.D. committee meeting an exam. Students are only being examined by their committee, not an external and it doesn't indicate how they're required to show comprehensive knowledge. Dr. Swett responded that in History it has always been the supervisory committee that did the oral and written exam in History.

Dr. Hayward noted that it's hard to compare what different programs require but that she was concerned that a lot of programs might want to move in the direction that History had proposed. Dr. Welch responded that he thought that the question raised was reasonable but that this had already been approved internally at the relevant Faculty committees. He proposed that Graduate Council review the general process around comprehensive exams at McMaster generally. He also noted that the change doesn't seem dramatically different from previous practice.

A council member agreed that a committee or some other group where there can be a broad discussion of the comprehensive examination process across the board is a good idea, noting that there is significant variation between departments even within the same faculty. She had a sense that there has been a trend to de-emphasize the comprehensive exam generally and that that might be something worth moving towards and discussing at the institution level.

Dr. Welch responded that he thought that there should be a meeting with the associate deans to discuss this. They would also need input from a variety of people from within each Faculty to get a full sense of what happens across campus and that there needs to have a bigger discussion of where McMaster is going with it. He suggested that there would be a discussion of the comprehensive exam, based on a scan of what is currently done at McMaster and that they would come back to Graduate Council with steps forward. He also said that the history item is not that different from what is done in some other programs.

A council member emphasized the point of about an external committee member. Dr. Welch responded that he knew that there are a large fraction of programs where comprehensive exam committees are distinct from supervisory committees but that this isn't always the case. He didn't have a sense of the ratios. If it is the case that there needs to be someone from outside the committee on the comprehensive committee that that is something that needs to be decided as an institution, methodically.

Dr. Hayward asked if the current proposal meet calendar requirements. She read a portion of the calendar copy related to comprehensive exam and it seemed to suggest that the comprehensive committee should be distinct from the supervisory committee. Dr. Welch responded that he understood the section differently, noting that it said that the program is responsible for making that determination about who participates.

Dr. Swett responded that she recalled that in History that the Graduate Director does participate in these meetings in the past and will do so in future state. So, there is one external member to the supervisory committee. The Graduate Director sits in to compare and contrast across committees.

Dr. Hayward agreed that a review of comprehensive examination procedures at McMaster is timely and suggested a friendly amendment in the wording around the History change noting how the exam would be testing breadth and comprehensive knowledge.

Dr. Swett moved and Dr. Porter seconded: 'that Graduate Council approve the proposed curriculum changes as described in the documents, with the friendly amendment to the language around the change to the History comprehensive exam procedure noted.'

The motion was carried.

#### **IX. Discussion of Graduate Supervision Document for Incoming Students**

Dr. Welch introduced this item, noting that one of the things the university has been doing in recent years under the AVP Faculty office is holding a number of training sessions for new faculty and chairs and directors. This document that Peter has been shepherding along has been discussed as a way to improve the overall quality of graduate supervision and reduce misunderstandings at the earliest possible juncture in a student's academic career.

Mr. Self said that he'd been working with Dr. Rayna Friendly, a postdoc working in the School of Graduate Studies, on the document. He noted that this is not a new concept and a number of universities in North America have taken it on board. The intention is to ensure students and supervisors are on the same page as to what they can expect their experience to be. The intent is for it to be a living document. It is not something that Graduate Council is going to approve and will stay in the same format for many years; the document is meant to be a tool to start a conversation. They are looking for more input as to how they can make this more effective. Some of the comments they have received in previous requests for feedback include that the document should be more discussion oriented, as well as a concern highlighted around having students and supervisors sign the document. They have tried to keep the document as short as possible to make sure it's useful.

Dr. Hayward said that she would like to take it to the programs and get their input. She noted there is a lot of diversity among programs and that they may need to use the document as a template and use it to make a program-specific version. Mr. Self agreed that modifications made sense, particularly as there would be some language specific to lab environments, for example. Dr. Hayward said she would put them on the agenda for the Faculty of Health Sciences meeting next month.

A council member commented that he thought it was great and would have loved to have had this when he started out as a student. He noted that the form gives a student structure and would help to encourage them to ask questions that might come up in the course of their studies. He asked if there was any merit to not keeping it small. He suggested it might be worthwhile to include everything and then a program could

cut out what they want and keep what they want. Mr. Self responded that he thought that might be a good idea, particularly if it's going to be a modifiable document.

The council member wondered if health and safety might be worth including, noting that this might be department-specific. Dr. Hayward responded suggesting that health and safety material should be omitted from the form. The current safety training is on Mosaic and the supervisor is required by McMaster to do due diligence to provide appropriate training to students. Dr. Welch suggested that it might be worthwhile to mention it in the document but not to bring up the entire health and safety code. The council member agreed, noting that there could be a check box to mark that it had been discussed. Dr. Thompson said that if there was a conflict between the two documents it could create some strife. The graduate supervision document should be informational only, noting who the safety officer of the department is and where records are kept.

A council member asked if the intent is that the document would be completed when the student starts the program. Mr. Self replied that he believed that that is the point in time where it would be of the most value initially but that it could be revisited over time. The council member responded that perhaps a shorter version of the form could be used at supervisory committee meetings, particularly discussing the information around careers and intellectual property. Dr. Welch responded that the document could be broken up to address different phases of what a student should be concentrating on at different points in their academic career. He emphasized the importance of department Chairs and Associate Chairs in making it known to faculty and incoming students that this is a discussion that should happen in the first few weeks. At the moment there is nothing on the student record ensuring that there is a culture of communication where all students are treated equally.

A council member noted a concern that the form is addressed to science and engineering, particularly in the sections on conferences and scholarships. The departments that the council member belongs to hold competitions for travel to conferences and, therefore, they are unable to say at the outset of a student's academic career whether they will or will not receive travel money.

Dr. Welch didn't want there to be the impression that it actually is a contract. If people believe it is, it can displace other things. He said that the signatures and dates should come out.

Ms. Friendly asked if the Council had any thoughts on whether they should be asking about career goals.

A council member thought that it might be worth developing Individual Development Plan as part of this.

Another council member agreed that discussing career goals from the outset is a good idea. She noted that this was an important part of the mentoring process and said that there is a lot of disparity to the degree to which it's done by supervisors.

Dr. Welch noted he had come from an IQAP meeting that morning and suggested that it would be great to be able to say in every IQAP review that this document exists and that students have taken it as their responsibility to ensure they have the discussions at the beginning of a student's career.

Dr. Milliken asked what the potential concerns with talking about career goals were. Ms. Friendly responded that sometimes students might fear that if they divulge to their supervisor that they don't intend to carry on in academia they might receive less attention from supervisor. Dr. Welch responded that this is something that he had heard before – students in this case might fear that they will be treated differently from other students. Dr. Milliken responded that the university would want to get rid of that culture of fear as quickly as possible and get students and supervisors on the same page as quickly as possible. The student and supervisor having different visions for goals after the program may invite problems. Dr. Porter noted the importance of changing the faculty perspective in this respect and agreed that it's good to include career goals in the document.

Ms. Friendly said that on page six they thought they would include an editable template part for program to include program requirements. Dr. Welch responded that it should not just be requirements but also other opportunities that are available to the student. He wanted to ensure that degree requirements aren't confused with available experiential education. He assumed the document would be revised and circulated for further review/discussion at a future meeting of Graduate Council.

Mr. Self responded that they would share it widely after some revisions are made and that programs can start using it whenever they want.

Dr. Hayward noted that Nursing had a similar tool that was intended to be a guide for discussion but it was never actually used. Dr. Welch responded that this is where the feedback from the chairs to faculty members that the document is useful will be important. Dr. Swett asked why it wasn't used. Dr. Hayward responded that she thought it was that the formality around the contract was off-putting. She also said that she could see the issues for petitions and appeals if it's seen as a contract.

A council member noted that it would still be useful to have a document given to entering students ensuring that these issues are discussed but not signed. Dr. Swett raised the issue of students being tentative in asking question. She would like the onus to be on the supervisor.

Dr. Hayward noted that her Faculty had conducted a study on different types of supervisory committee forms. It was quite short and it was taken to focus groups of faculty and students. The main concern that supervisors expressed was not about the content of the document but about the volume of paperwork if they had a lot of students. She emphasized the importance of being able to tailor the document for particular programs. Dr. Welch responded that if a supervisor had three or four incoming students they could have a group meeting.

Dr. Hayward noted that some of the issues in the form are dealt with in the program handbooks.

A council member said that he thinks that something like this the document is needed on the student's side as it helps to set an expectation for establishing relationship between students and supervisors. Students coming in feel like they are solely tied to supervisors and their rights need to be addressed.

Dr. Hayward said that, having been involved in legal cases, the university is legally held to the content that is in the graduate calendar and program handbooks. Dr. Welch suggested that there may be conflict, that isn't related to the graduate calendar or the handbook that could be headed off by early conversation.

A council member noted that the experiences of graduate students vary between faculties. In her program there are two annual supervisory committee meetings with a written record of the discussion. In some ways this stipulation that they should arrange and attend regular meetings with a formal written record seems a little redundant. In departments where there are two supervisory committees meetings per year this is already done. She suggested that the form would mandate a certain level of required official interaction and thought that unofficial informal interaction is either going to happen or not regardless of how it's mandated on the form. She noted some hesitation about increasing the level of bureaucratization. She said she understood the need of students to feel they can raise issues but was not convinced that adding another form is the most effective way of dealing with it. She was not sure that the form would make a difference in the case of supervisors who were going to behave irresponsibly in any case. Dr. Welch responded that the goal is to affect those supervisors and to help students not getting effective help. He agreed that there is a whole range of how well people do this across the university. He still thought there was enormous value to setting up an expectation of early communication on these matters.

Dr. Welch asked the University Librarian, Ms. Vivian Lewis, to provide an update. She said that Graduate Council members should drop into Mills – there's a display that includes images of what the library would look like in ten years if they had certain amount of money. She noted that she had mentioned previously that the budget was a bit of a concern and she wanted to confirm that they're doing okay: journals won't be cancelled. She also reported that March 23<sup>rd</sup> was the closing event of the writers in residence program.

#### **X. New Scholarships**

Dr. Welch explained that there were several to be approved today. All of these awards will also be going to TFOC. Ms. Gordon confirmed that these are standard awards and there's nothing in them of any concern to SGS.

Dr. Swett moved and Dr. Hayward seconded, 'that Graduate Council approve the proposed new scholarships as described in the document, subject to TFOC approval.'

The motion was carried.