



School of Graduate Studies

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Graduate Council
April 26th, 9:30 am
GH 111

Present: Dr. D. Welch, Ms. S. Baschiera, Ms. C. Bryce, Dr. N. Agarwal, Dr. C. Hayward, Dr. P. Swett, Dr. T. Porter, Dr. M. Thompson, Dr. B. Milliken, Mr. P. Self, Ms. B. Gordon, Dr. S. McCracken, Dr. D. Novog, Dr. A. Holloway, Dr. J. Richardson, Dr. E. Gedge, Dr. G. McClelland, Dr. D. Gillespie, Mr. D. Finnerty, Mr. R. Morton, Dr. F. Franek (attending for Dr. A. Deza)

Regrets: Dr. M. Verma, Dr. A. Deza, Dr. A. Roddick, Dr. A. Fudge Schormans

I. Minutes of the meeting of March 22nd, 2016

The minutes of the meeting of March 22nd, 2016 were approved on a motion from Dr. Agarwal, seconded by Dr. Richardson.

II. Business arising

There was no business arising.

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

Dr. Welch reported that there had been more and more positive Mosaic developments in recent weeks and months. A lot of progress has been made on improvements which will make a lot of the interactions one has with graduate school more paper and delay free. The information for preparing to pay students in the upcoming academic year will be distributed in July and August. Dr. Welch was pleased to report that the situation with admissions had improved significantly due to a joint effort between the departments and SGS. There were 17% more offers out for domestic masters and 29% more domestic Ph.D. Everything is tracking very well in terms of getting things out so people can decide on them and he noted that there are a number of initiatives in place to provide incentives for accepting offers.

The administration of TA employment and benefits has been transferred to HR as of May 1st. HR will be handling these issues entirely and SGS will support transition. He noted that there had been an issue with benefits being charged to researcher's grants and reported that this had been cleaned up as much as possible before the end of the grant year.

Dr. Welch reported that the GSA was holding a referendum later in the week. Some of the issues they're voting on are related to fees for student wellness, access to mental health services and also the professionalization available from SGS. The results will be known next week.

Dr. Welch asked Ms. Gordon to provide an update on the joint awards committee initiative. She reported that currently there's an undergraduate awards policy. It used to be a joint policy between undergraduate and graduate but for a variety of reasons that was changed. They now want to change back, in part because there are a number of benefits to reap related to Mosaic. The Secretariat's office asked that SGS bring it to Graduate Council to see if there were any concerns. Ms. Gordon noted that the nuances of graduate versus undergraduate would be reflected in the policy and that they're also looking for volunteers to participate on the joint committee. Dr. Welch asked if there were any volunteers and asked Ms. Gordon when the first meeting would be. She said that it would likely be May or June.

IV. Report from the Graduate Associate Deans

Dr. Agarwal reported that over the past year and a half the MBA development committee had been involved in a major revision of year one of the program. This step was taken in response to the last IQAP review as well as some benchmarking exercises the Faculty of Business has undertaken. The curriculum items will go to GCPC and will come to last meeting of Graduate Council. The other item of note was that the Faculty of Business had received some funding from the Provost to boost domestic enrolment in their Ph.D. program. The plan is to use some of the money on website renewal and more effective promotional material. Dr. Porter noted that the Faculty of Social Sciences has been interested in research snapshots and are working to find a way for graduate students to use research snaps to talk about the work they're conducting that's in progress. He also reported that a workshop for the Research Shop had been held recently. The intention of the Research Shop is to bring graduate students together to do short term research projects for community partners. The workshop training session were held at McMaster's Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) and included a number of facilitators, including Lorraine Carter, the Director of CCE, and a number of other experts in community engagement. The next step is to match up the graduate students who have been trained with community partners. The plan is to pilot the program and then hope to continue it more permanently. Dr. Welch noted that he had already received a lot of positive feedback.

Dr. Thompson reported that the Faculty of Engineering is going to survey alumni, starting with Ph.D.'s. McMaster has linked up with three other universities to represent the hiring climate in south-western Ontario. They have just gone through the rough draft of the actual survey and are eager to be able to present some results to grad council. The intention is to use the results for recruitment and to make some adjustments for in-course students.

Dr. Welch thanked Dr. Milliken for this time as Acting Associate Dean for Science and reported that he had been appointed Acting Dean of Science effective May 1st.

Dr. Milliken reported that the Faculty of Science is working on a Master of Financial Mathematics program that is currently in the process of getting approved. They hope to launch the program in September 2017.

Dr. Hayward reported that programs within the Faculty of Health Sciences had been provided with data from a recent alumni survey. They have also conducted a survey of health science affiliated program websites. A lot of the programs within the Faculty have been making big changes on their websites to make them more appealing. She noted that programs are on target for recruitment and reported that the Faculty had received funding to launch DeGroot scholarships of excellence. Each program has been given an allocation to go after the very best applicants.

V. Report from the Associate Registrar and Graduate Secretary

Ms. Baschiera reported on a number of initiatives occurring within SGS, including a website overhaul and the development of academic advisement. With the implementation of academic advisement, graduate students will be able to see their progress against their degree requirements. They have planned a soft launch over the summer. She also reported that the certificates and diploma policy is under review. Last year Graduate Council approved the concept of merging processes with respect to this policy with Undergraduate Council. She expected there to be some resolution on graduate certificates in the near future.

Ms. Gordon reported that entrance awards for students who are not graduating will not be in the Convocation program this year.

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

Mr. Self reported on a number of events his team had held to support graduate students. The first was Zero to Hero, a job hunting preparation event including employment preparation, resume and cover letter assistance as well as assistance identifying potential employers and mock interviews with volunteer professionals who provided feedback. 35 students signed up and there has been a lot of feedback that they found it to be very useful. The second event Mr. Self reported on was the upcoming thesis boot camp. It is the fourth time they've run the boot camp. A lot of students that they've worked with over the years have told them that the isolation really works at getting them through the final stage. The boot camp will run from May 17th to 19th and 50 students have signed up. He also reported on the Indigenous Undergraduate Summer Research Scholars (IUSRS) program. This is the second year of a two-year pilot project funded by the Provost. They're bringing in 23 students with a breadth of research interests. Dr. Welch thanked everyone involved in IUSRS, noting that being able to discuss successful initiatives on the indigenous front at OCGS was a pleasant position to be in.

VII. Faculty of Engineering Graduate Curriculum and Policy Committee Report

Dr. Thompson presented the changes proposed by the Faculty of Engineering. The first change is the introduction of an industrial Ph.D. option which all departments within the Faculty have looked at and

approved. This option would give students working full-time in industry the option to engage in full-time studies. A number of industrial folks have asked if they would pursue this option. The student needs to do all of their doctoral requirements but can do their research off campus. The option doesn't exclude them from doing work here as well. Dr. Thompson noted that the option for part time studies still exist but the introduction of this industrial option will give students the opportunity to accomplish the degree at a quicker pace. If a full time person who loses the position with industry, the Faculty will assume responsibility for funding that student. It's not a new degree but an option to be added to each department under existing curriculum for each degree.

He reported that the other items are related to the School of Engineering Practice. The Faculty of Engineering is merging the School of Engineering Technology (undergraduate) with the School of Engineering Practice. They are becoming the School of Engineering Practice and Technology and this has been approved by Senate and the Board of Governors. Some of the changes to SEP programs are a result of this merger. They have proposed a change in terms of wording to their admission requirements to add some flexibility, allowing them to consider applications from students from all STEM backgrounds. They have also rearranged some requirements within the programs themselves as there was some overlap. There were many course changes related to the other changes, and those were included in the package for information. Dr. Welch said that it's worth noting the memorandum of understanding that is built in as part of what's required to participate in the industrial Ph.D. option. Dr. Thompson responded that it was an important component as some people in industry may not be used to interacting with the university. It ensures the employer knows what they're in for.

Dr. Novog moved and Dr. Milliken seconded: 'that Graduate Council approve the changes proposed by the Faculty of Engineering as described in the documents.'

The motion was carried.

VIII. Faculty of Health Sciences Graduate Curriculum and Policy Committee Report

Dr. Hayward noted that all of the changes reported for information are straightforward and include the Child Life Studies courses developed as part of the launch of the new program.

IX. Graduate Calendar Revisions

Dr. Welch reported that this is the annual spring cleaning exercise of graduate calendar and asked if the council members had any questions about the changes. Dr. Hayward noted that she had sent along a couple of very minor editorial changes. Dr. Milliken asked about the change in UHIP wording where visiting students were concerned. Ms. Baschiera responded that if the student is coming in as a student and registered as a visiting student, they have to be insured. If they're coming in under other arrangements then the same

regulations don't necessarily apply. Dr. Welch responded he thinks the distinction in this case is between a visiting researcher and visiting student.

Dr. Hayward moved and Dr. Holloway seconded, 'that Graduate Council approve the proposed changes to the administrative sections of the Graduate Calendar as described in the document.'

The motion was carried.

X. Discussion of Revised Supervisory Committee Report Form

Dr. Welch noted that there had been a great deal of discussion and a considerable amount of input. He noted that the form had been cleared of unnecessary duplicative information. Some of the things that students need to have considered have been inserted. A very large fraction of supervisory committee members know the requirements but there are enough that don't that it's important to remind them within the form itself. There is a notation at the top that explains what needs to happen and when. The graduate administrators suggested that the form also clarify when this is required for people who start January and May and what happens for students with leaves, so that will be included. Dr. Welch noted that under the supervisor's report, the form has been changed to note that the section must not be filled out by the student. Part A, B, and C used to not have very much space for comments, so very brief comments were included. The fields have been expanded to show some indication of the level of detail that should be included. Part C has been changed from 'Comments' to 'Areas for improvement and additional direction'.

Dr. Welch noted that the main change requested was a rubric for different ratings and this is where most of the effort went into the writing. An additional intermediate grade and an explanation included for each rating to explain how they're to be used and in what timeframe. The grades given are not cumulative, so they can improve over time. Dr. Welch noted that SGS had done their best to codify this description but would very much like input on what has been created. He also noted that in the near future the form will be put online. No one who has already completed their meeting with the old form will be asked to use the new one. Dr. Welch said that they will ask for a vote on the form at an upcoming meeting.

A council member noted that in their program it is pretty common practice to submit the report before the meeting, instead of filling out that box. He suggested a note be included to say that something can be attached. Dr. Welch responded that while the form is in the paper format it's not an issue but once it goes electronic that information will need to be captured. He believed that they should be encouraged to at least produce what's intended here in addition to any other report. The council member noted that the revision date in the form needs to be updated.

A council member responded that they really liked the form and particularly liked that a student can get excellent for responding well to unexpected challenges. Another council member liked that the information was included right in the form and that it is, therefore, transparent to everyone.

Dr. Hayward suggested that the revisions would solve the issue of students being out of time and getting excellent or good ratings.

XI. New Scholarship

Dr. Swett moved and Dr. Hayward seconded, 'that Graduate Council approve the new scholarship as described in the document.'

The motion was carried.

XII. Other Business

Dr. Welch said that since the last meeting SGS had put together a list of the major practices of the comprehensive exams around the university that they could find. He wanted to propose that the Council have some discussion or that members take it back for consideration. There are a number of questions to consider, including thoughts on basic limits for best practices for the comprehensive exam and what McMaster would like the Ph.D. comprehensive exam to represent. There is also a question of whether comprehensive examinations should be continued period. To that end Dr. Welch had asked Dr. Swett to lead a future discussion regarding discontinuing the comprehensive. Right now it's a policy of McMaster but it may be that programs could be allowed to choose going forward.

Dr. Welch said that there had been a lot of discussion regarding the role the supervisor should play in the comprehensive. He noted that the supervisory committee has a potential conflict in that they obviously would like to the student to do well at the comprehensive exam. He said it's also unlikely, due to resourcing, that the entire comprehensive committee could be without any supervisory committee members in every department. Part of the proposal is to not put the supervisor in clear conflict of interest and have someone from outside the supervisory committee be part of the grading of the exam. In the review of comprehensive processes here at McMaster there are programs that do separate the comprehensive committee from supervisory committee. There were also a number of programs where there was someone in the program responsible for overseeing all comps. Because a comprehensive is not appealable, due to the fact that there are a number of academics making the judgement, the student is allowed to take the components again, once. If they fail any component twice, they are required to withdraw. Dr. Welch noted that this raises the question of what the minimum retake interval should be. Obviously, if it is attempted again to soon afterward there will likely be no difference in the outcome. Equally obviously, a year later there may be a huge difference.

A council member noted that he understood there might a conflict of interest but that the supervisor is also in the best position to question the student on their research area. The second consideration they noted in

this respect is that many students are officially or unofficially co-supervised, so eliminating the supervisors may mean eliminating two experts. He suggested that there could be some other way to limit the conflict of interest. Dr. Welch responded that he knew there were a lot of programs that allowed the supervisor to attend.

Another committee noted that they didn't quite understand the conflict of interest; as long as there is a chair of the examining committee to make sure nothing inappropriate happens the participation of the supervisory committee should be fine. In her program the Ph.D. advisor chairs all of the comprehensive exams. She seconded the idea that the supervisory committee is likely the best to review the student's knowledge and expertise. She asked for more clarity on this. Dr. Hayward responded that she had sat in on a comprehensive where there was a clear conflict of interest. In this case, the student was not able to complete their degree academically but was able to provide a lot of data, cheaply, for the supervisor. In that program the supervisor was allowed to ask questions but not vote. She has often wondered if the supervisor should be absent from the discussion when the comprehensive committee is voting/discussing. She said it was fine to have committee members participate but emphasized the importance of having someone external to Chair. The council member responded that in the Humanities it's rare for supervisors to be working on the same thing that their student is working on. The supervisor has expertise to oversee dissertation but areas are different. She noted the importance of recognizing the differences between disciplines. She would be reluctant to see universal policy that didn't take in account these differences.

A council member noted a case where the student failed twice and the supervisor wasn't on the committee and didn't agree with decision. The supervisor might have background knowledge and would be able to inform the committee as to whether student could do better on a retake.

Another council member noted instances where the supervisor has been in the room and has been a bully.

Dr. Welch responded that the only way that a student can appeal a Ph.D. comp exam is if it's biased. It is very much easier to establish a lack of bias if it isn't the supervisory committee making all of the decisions.

Another council member supported a model similar to what Dr. Hayward suggested where the supervisor leaves for the discussion of the outcome of the comprehensive. Her program modified their process because a supervisor used to argue on behalf of the students at this point of the examination.

Dr. Agarwal noted that the Ph.D. in Business was slightly different. The program takes students from different disciplines and there is a much heavier coursework component because of this. The examining committee has no reference to the supervisory committee. Those who teach the courses, become the comprehensive exam committee. The student's supervisor or supervisory committee member may have been the one to teach the course and it is by virtue of this role they would be on the committee. Each exam is marked by at least two independent markers.

Dr. Porter reported that he had had occasion to talk with the Chairs within his Faculty about this and noted that there had been a strong feeling that there was such variation across the discipline that it would be difficult to impose a standard that would fit all programs. They suggested that a comparison to peer programs at other institutions would be more important than comparing what happened between programs here at McMaster. He recognized that there could be an issue if there was no university standard for conflict of interest but reiterated a strong hesitation for universal rules

Dr. Welch suggested that perhaps there could be three options where programs chose one of three modes to reduce the potential for conflicts of interest. He also noted that every student who fails a comprehensive twice appeals.

Dr. Hayward said it would be useful to have a standard policy about what happens when there is disagreement between examiners.

Dr. Swett said that since she will be looking into university policy that it would be useful to have some examples of other programs outside of the Humanities where they don't have a comprehensive. She asked council members to send along the name of the institution and said that she will see what their experience has been and why they made that decision.

XIII. Faculty of Health Sciences Spring 2016 Graduands

Dr. Holloway moved and Mr. Morton seconded, 'that Graduate Council approve the list of the 2016 Spring Graduands, with amendments/corrections to be made as necessary by the Associate Graduate Registrar.'

The motion was carried.