



School of Graduate Studies

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To : Members of Graduate Council

From : Christina Bryce
Assistant Graduate Secretary

The next meeting of Graduate Council will be held on **Tuesday February 21st at 1:30 pm in Council Chambers (GH-111)**

Listed below are the agenda items for discussion.

Please email cbryce@mcmaster.ca if you are unable to attend the meeting.

A G E N D A

I. Minutes of the meeting January 17th, 2017

The minutes of the meeting of January 17th 2017 were approved on a motion by Dr. Hayward, seconded by Dr. Thompson.

II. Business arising

There was no business arising.

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

Dr. Welch noted that the academic accommodation policy would not be reviewed at the meeting as they're still working on it.

Dr. Welch noted that with respect to graduate admissions one of the things that everyone was in favour of was better turnaround in terms of graduate offers. To that end after the review SGS was given an additional permanent position in admissions. There have also been two different working groups, one for process improvements and one for Mosaic-specific improvements. He said that this had been working very well so far and that as of that day there was a one business day turnaround for offers. He noted that there is also a system where departments can get application packages picked up rather than having them sit in campus mail.

He reported that the provincial government is in the process of renegotiating the Strategic Mandate Agreements. This agreement is the contract between universities and province about what will be supported

in terms of funding to universities and total provincial grant and what the limitations on new program development will be during the three year period covered by the agreement. Each university negotiates with a representative from the Ministry. The negotiation is partially to determine what elements are put in various envelopes that ministry is defining. Universities are starting with same total grant but now there will be a corridor model for funding: a fixed amount of money and from there the university decides how it will deploy the money. This differs from the previous grant which had specific money for graduate expansion. The other thing that the agreement will do is identify caps on enrollment. As of the start of planning, every university has lost its current cap and if it chooses to have a higher cap it's up to the university to justify that to province. The SMA also includes a definition of strengths and growth areas that the university and province agree on.. The goal is to have similar set of areas identified for new programs in the new SMA. There is a fairly short turnaround for the development of the new SMA. The Provost and President made themselves available at a meeting last Thursday to engage with the community on this topic. Dr. Welch also noted that five boundary conditions for the upcoming SMA are known and include: student experience, innovation in teaching and learning excellence, access and equity, research excellence and impact, and innovation, economic development and community engagement. In the first SMA, one of those areas of focus was graduate expansion. That is no longer province-wide priority and it is now the responsibility of universities to decide if this is a priority. The Provost and senior administration have made clear as research-intensive university they do want to continue to grow graduate education at McMaster.

Dr. Welch noted that there had been a question at the previous meeting about graduate pay over the holidays and he had checked into the situation. He said that the issue in question was that if you looked at the distribution of TA pays, up until the end of December and then when they started in January, there was a two week date where a student might have expected a pay where they didn't get a pay. He spoke with Student Accounts and Cashiers and noted this has to be done because the pay has to be paid out when the work is done. There is a gap between when the work is done in December and when it resumes in January. There wasn't any error in that pay schedule. He said it was something they could draw attention to in the salary distribution letter given to graduate students.

A council member asked how the cap on graduate enrollment would work and who would manage it. Dr. Welch responded that the change should have no effect on programs per se because any growth beyond what is allowed would be an expense that the university as a whole would absorb. When the money comes in from the province, it is distributed to the Faculty where the decision can be made. They can absorb the risk and give guidance to programs about the number of graduate spots they can afford. They haven't had an issue with caps here in the past as the university had negotiated very high caps in the past. However, other universities

went over their caps which meant they had unfunded domestic students they accepted. The university/Faculty took the hit in those cases, generally.

A council member asked about the portion of the SMA where it ties job outcomes to success. He noted that if a student is not working in a related field, it could be seen as a failure and he thought it might not be the best way to manage outcomes. Dr. Welch responded that one of the things each university has been asked to provide are the metrics that it wishes to be measured by. Universities will produce metrics and there will be a joint province-university survey which will ask about student experience and how work relates to training but that is not likely to be available until SMA 3. The government line is that nothing much is going to change right now. What they clearly say is, they're asking universities to define these metrics and if they're not met SMA 3 is where there is potential to experience true risk.

IV. Report from the Graduate Associate Deans

Dr. Hayward reported that they were busy planning the FHS research plenary. She noted FHS was working on a number of initiatives after reflecting on admission changes over the years. They have seen challenges in programs who rely on CIHR funding. They hope that the situation at CIHR improves but are also working on efforts to ensure that students do feel there is a future for programs that had been primarily funded in this way. She also reported that they had had Bernice Downey talk to the FHS Graduate Program Executive about Truth and Reconciliation to ensure they're making good efforts to promote recruitment of indigenous students. She asked a couple of programs who had pro-active initiatives to discuss and they noted the issue of dealing with a non-standard academic record. Dr. Hayward wondered if this is an issue Graduate Council should also have more discussion about. Dr. Welch responded that he thought it would be very timely to start a conversation about the TRC and the way it intersects with the Access and Equity area from the new SMA.

Dr. Hayward noted the importance of the indigenous student support office on campus.

Dr. Welch said that apart from the TRC, there are also issues with mature students who are deciding to retrain perhaps from an entirely different field. He said this is an area where a lot of thought would be welcome.

Dr. Thompson reported that the Faculty of Engineering had held their Ph.D. retreat a couple of weeks ago. He noted that a number of industry people had attended as well as Susan Porter from UBC. It was very successful and there was far more discussion than anticipated. They are trying to see what information they can utilize/implement in small pilot projects. Beyond that the only message is that there seems to be a lot of appetite for change in both industry and academia. He noted there is a push and pull between regulations and flexibility. Dr. Welch responded that he could give an introduction to what is required by the province, noting that there is a lot of flexibility.

Drs. Agarwal, Ibhawoh and Porter had no report.

V. Report from the Associate Registrar and Graduate Secretary

There was no report.

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

Mr. Self reported on the IUSRS – Indigenous Undergraduate Summer Research Scholars program. He noted an email about supervising had been circulated. The program was initially created on a two year grant from the Provost. Five offices will partner to fund for the program for the upcoming year. They're planning to run the program with 15 students this year and they're quite excited it's going to run again this year. His team is working with University Advancement to get donor support for the program on an ongoing basis. He noted that the deadline for supervisors was coming up. They want to have the information up on the website for better research matches and also want to do testimonials about what's happening with those students.

He noted that the thesis boot camp started the following day and ran for three days. 62 students signed up for three days of support to get their writing jump-started and they can do this during reading week because library allows exclusive use of space.

He also noted that the Three Minute Thesis finals are at 4:00 pm on Thursday. There are four heats throughout the day and the top 3 from each of those heats goes on to the final. There is an award for the top three in final. They did a bigger push to get students from non-STEM fields to sign up but still have had issues in this respect. Mr. Self noted that he is going to contact colleagues at other institutions about this.

He reported on Arrive and Thrive which is a wellness initiative funded by some provincial money that involves workshops about mindfulness, stress-relief and help with procrastination among other things. He said this is still available to graduate students and noted that pilot funding ends in March but they are discussing with the organizers to see how they can maintain services.

A council member noted that in the minutes of the previous Graduate Council about mental health initiatives at McMaster there was discussion about a positive vote in March and asked what a positive vote would entail. Mr. Self responded that from the university's perspective this would be graduate students voting to agree to pay the same fees as undergraduate students. The council member noted an issue of not being sure about what's going on with services. Mr. Self responded that one thing to note related to that is that referendums are controlled by students. University leadership can help drive it but can't dictate. Student leadership has to take it to graduate students for a vote and that decision is made at the GSA level.

The council member noted that one issue around fees that was raised is that most graduate students have families and financial constraints. The amount that undergraduate students are paying is a lot higher than what graduate students were paying. If the referendum comes back and asks graduate students to pay the same amount as undergraduate she feared that the outcome would be the same. She asked if there had been

any thought about how to solve it in a more positive manner and thought that graduate students need the service more than undergraduates because of the amount of stress they're under. Mr. Self responded that the University has not moved away from the premise that grads should pay the same as undergraduates and that it's being treated as an equity issue

A council member noted that in the case of undergraduate oftentimes their parents are paying their fees which is not the case with graduate students, who are being funded through TA ships, research grants and their own savings. He agreed that there was an argument to be made around the additional challenges of graduate students and the additional benefit they add but that the will of the university had to be behind this argument. Mr. Self also noted that Mr. van Koughnett is trying to run his unit with the funds available to him.

A council member asked if they can advocate for something other than a referendum, particularly in light of the focus on Access and Equity in the new SMA. Dr. Welch recognized many different facets of this issue and also recognized that it's currently entirely in the AVP Student's budget. Graduate Council is not involved in any decision making for this particular type of work. He said they were free to gather opinions and express themselves as groups of faculty and groups of graduate students to make their feelings known. He did not think a vote at the Graduate Council level would have a positive effect.

Dr. Hayward said that it was a matter of a group of people who want benefits over and above what everyone in the province already receives, so it has to be funded somehow. Dr. Welch responded that that was what Mr. van Koughnett was here to explain. He said there were valid arguments on both sides and everyone agrees that it would be better if everyone had more access. The goal is to get to the place where there is more support. Dr. Hayward said this is support offered beyond what OHIP is already funding. Dr. Welch agreed and further noted that it was on campus support.

A council member noted he had sat on a student services committee that looks at the budgets for different departments. He also noted the constraints by different provincial acts about where money can go. He wanted to state that graduate students do not necessarily have more stress than undergraduates but simply a different kind. He noted that there is also data that parents are not necessarily paying undergraduate fees and noted the need for reconciliation in the conversation around the issue. It's not graduate students over undergraduates or vice versa.

Dr. Welch clarified part of the issue here is the very reasonable rule that students have to agree to changes in fees. He thought Mr. van Koughnett communicated that very well.

A council member said she didn't know how the previous referendum question was formulated and suggested that the question should include more information including documentation about exactly what students have access to. Dr. Welch agreed and said it was his understanding is that Sean and the GSA are working toward this.

A council member suggested a note to department Chairs to advise them that there is a lack of equity and that the Chair could be a resource to provide information to grad students. Dr. Welch responded that they actually have circulated this information and noted that it might be worth doing again to explain what's happening.

The GSA attendee noted that a GSA council member is attending the student services meetings and discussions about what do next are happening there.

A council member commented on the services available and the difficulties of the transition away from counselling services being available to graduate students. She found the level of support provided after the change to be unhelpful and wondered if services for graduate students and undergraduate students could be looked at separately. Regarding the emails to chairs she noted that one thing she found is that her supervisor doesn't understand mental health issues and suggested an information session for supervisors.

Dr. Welch noted that Graduate Council is an academic body that makes academic decision. Business about wellness and treatment is something that Mr. van Koughnett's office is responsible for. There's not really a version of this body that exists which communicates with the AVP Student's office on a regular basis but he can make sure that there's an ability for all who are concerned to interact with Mr. van Koughnett. The main message that they want to get across to Chairs is to not make decisions themselves. Student Wellness isn't going to abandon anyone who shows up there. Students are not supposed to have to do it on their own he suggested there should be feedback from the people who have experienced issues in that respect to those in charge.

VII. Faculty of Humanities Graduate Curriculum and Policy Committee Report

Dr. Ibhawoh noted that there were just has a couple of changes for History and French. He said Dr. Grodek would speak about the French changes and the rest of the items are for information.

Dr. Grodek noted that French had submitted a few changes at the Faculty of Humanities GCPC meeting including the introduction of a Milestone requirement, a change to their language requirement, a change in course requirements to give direction to students who had taken their Masters at McMaster and had already completed a mandatory required course (705) about how this course could be replaced. The program also added more details around the comprehensive exam process and clarified that the part of the comprehensive is related to primary sources and critical approaches and the second is related to theoretical framework.

Dr. Ibhawoh noted that History proposed minor changes in the language in their calendar copy, removing a reference to OGS that no longer applies.

A council member asked for a French course title to be translated. Dr. Grodek responded that 6DD3 was Literature and Animals.

Dr. Ibhawoh moved and Dr. Hayward seconded, 'that Graduate Council approve the proposed changes as described in the documents.'

The motion was carried.

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

Dr. Porter presented the items noting that Graduate Council was being asked to approve the calendar copy for the new Labour Studies Ph.D. program. It had been approved at GCPC and the Faculty Council.

Dr. Proter moved and Dr. Thompson seconded, 'that Graduate Council approve the proposed changes as described in the documents.'

The motion was carried.

IX. Comprehensive Examination Working Group Recommendations

Dr. Welch explained that these recommendations constituted the work of a subcommittee that was formed at Graduate Council in September. As Chair of the subcommittee Dr. Thompson explained that they reviewed policies as listed in calendar and a committee was formed. The document constitutes contribution from folks all over campus. They were asked to discuss if there was any need to change the policy around comprehensives in the graduate calendar. He said there were two recommendations: one is that for any degree of flexibility to be added it was their opinion that the grad calendar should be revised such that SGS does not oversee comprehensives. All departments can continue the evaluation that they currently have but can also change the way they judge comprehensive knowledge in the future. They proposed changes to section 4 of the graduate calendar. He noted that in the document they are not saying that programs shouldn't assess comprehensive knowledge but that ultimately departments should be allowed to oversee the best way to test for this. The other suggestion is that if this recommendation is adopted that SGS provide a retreat where the best ideas to test comprehensive knowledge get put forward. Following the retreat they could create a guidance document to post on SGS website. He noted that they're not intending to vote today as there are still some concerns around evaluation component.

Around this component Dr. Welch clarified that a student can pass a comprehensive with distinction, pass, or fail. Currently students can fail once and retry. If they fail a second time they're out of the program completely. The expectations about what happens after a failure has to be very clear to ensure it's a fair system. If that is being changed, it will need to be clearly defined by the program so there isn't an absence of clarity about what to do once someone's failed.

A committee member asked if this was only related to the comprehensive examination and noted that an evaluation for committee meetings would be helpful. Dr. Welch responded that that had been added this year. The supervisory committee form was upgraded to explain precisely what each grade meant. The council member commented that they knew there had been a revision on the grading scheme but is looking for a more

detailed breakdown. Dr. Welch responded that most graduate program guidelines have information about the comprehensive exam.

Dr. Hayward asked if any program wanting to keep a comprehensive would have to clarify what would happen with a failure (including the potential for remediation) and asked if it would be dealt with like a course failure.

Dr. Welch responded that this is exactly what he was concerned about. Right now the proposed changes edit out that information. They either have to change it to describe well the new situation or require that the programs do so – it has to be done clearly somewhere.

Dr. Hayward noted that program level changes would require a coordinated effort. She discussed the state of program handbooks and saw the advantage of keeping something in the graduate calendar about this. She suggested some language to the effect that: if the comprehensive is a requirement, students should have a second attempt. Dr. Welch agreed and suggested that this is the kind phrasing that needs to be worked on. Dr. Thompson also agreed and noted the opportunities and challenges of opening the doors to flexibility in the future.

Dr. Agarwal noted there was agreement within the group that there is a need for comprehensive knowledge at the Ph.D. level. The intent behind the recommendation is to give programs flexibility to think about other ways to assess this. One way to address this is to give each program ability to judge what a comprehensive would entail and to mandate that they have to include the method of assessment and provision of two chances. A council member wondered if there had been examination of other universities. One of the concerns is that comprehensive is not just a measure of knowledge but also a teaching tool. He asked if there would be any impact on future employability. Dr. Thompson responded that he is on the CAGS comp committee review. They're seeing a survey of what is happening throughout Canada. He noted that there is a smattering of everything. Most programs have comprehensives. A little under 50% have no requirement for a comprehensive at the university level but most programs still adopt it. Dr. Welch noted that basically all universities in Europe don't have them.

Dr. Thompson said that all universities are asking the exact same question. They have done an extensive review of the research – there is a great deal on the dissertation but almost none on the comprehensive and their outcomes. He wanted to stress that this is not a way to minimize the amount of supervision required from the department and faculty. All they're trying to do is offer programs some flexibility to look at alternate ways of delivery. Comprehensive knowledge still needs to be developed.

Dr. Ibhawoh noted that he thought the committee had struck a good balance. Ultimately these decisions are going to be made a program level and they will look at comparators for a benchmark within the discipline. SGS can allow for that flexibility.

Dr. Thompson noted that CAGS is planning on putting out a white paper fairly soon on the comprehensive review process.

Dr. Welch asked if they reach the ability to describe the ways in which a student might pass or fail if the approach outlined is something that Grad Council members want. A council member said not if they're going to allow departments to do what's outside of the box and they define a failure. Dr. Welch clarified that they would reach an agreement of describing what constituted a failure if this the way forward. He saw the change as a broadening of the timeline for testing acquisition of knowledge. The council member responded it was great.

Dr. Welch noted that apart from the business of deciding what the calendar copy needs to be for pass/fail that all these changes would still need to go through the faculty curriculum and policy committees to be approved. A council member asked Dr. Thompson to comment on defining rules for specific programs. Dr. Thompson responded that he thought that most departments would hold to current best practices. There has been an evolution in the last 20 years and that most programs have moved to project-based evaluation of a research proposal. They have already moved a good step forward. The wording in the calendar says examination and that's what they're concerned with. Dr. Welch noted that the period of time is also proscribed. Dr. Thompson said that with the changes program could now add more flexibility while still respecting what they want to achieve.

The council member asked if Mike foresaw creating a document within the faculty of engineering that all of the departments would have to follow. Dr. Thompson responded that he didn't as he knew there was a great deal of variability. Dr. Agarwal noted that a survey of comprehensive exam practices had been done and what they saw there was a lot of variation between programs. Partially the intent of the current work is to legitimize practices that have already been changed.

A council member noted that something that isn't being taken into account are the committee members. They matter too. She said that someone could have a personal opinion that fails a student. She highlighted the concern around personality issues on committee and noted the example of a student whose comprehensive result was not representative of their ability. She reiterated the need for a specific rubric so that a student couldn't be failed on the whim of a faculty member. Dr. Hayward responded that one way to deal with this is administratively. If they're assessing comprehensive knowledge at a supervisory committee report there could be a box on the form to be completed if the program has a different format for a comprehensive.

Dr. Welch said he thought everyone agreed on goals at the end of the degree: a full-fledged scholar who does good research and has good comprehensive knowledge of field. He noted there are probably many reasonable paths to get there and that there is some restriction now, but it's not incredibly restrictive.

The GSA representative made the point that this is Ph.D. level education and wanted to ensure that the university is not offering subsidized four-year internships. She asked if that was what the institution was trying to be as opposed to an institution generating students with comprehensive knowledge.

Dr. Welch said that was an interesting point. At the Masters level there are clear distinctions between research and professional Masters but Ph.D.s are declared to be exclusively research-based. He noted that as there are over 70 graduate programs, that can mean many different things and perhaps it always should. As an institution the best McMaster can do is to set the target to good goals and reinforce behaviours in faculty members.

X. New Scholarships

Dr. Hayward asked how one of the awards was paid out. Dr. Welch said as there was no longer quorum the vote would have to be delayed.