



School of Graduate Studies

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Graduate Council  
March 21<sup>st</sup> 1:30 pm  
GH 111

Present: Dr. D. Welch, Ms. S. Baschiera, Ms. C. Bryce, Dr. T. Porter, Dr. C. Hayward, Dr. B. Gupta, Dr. A. Sills, Dr. E. Badone, Ms. R. Estok, Dr. D. Pelinovsky, Mr. R. Narro Perez, Ms. H. Yousefi, Dr. L. Thabane, Dr. S. O'Brien, Ms. N. Shen, Dr. T. Adams, Dr. B. Doble, Dr. I. Marwah, Dr. M. Thompson, Dr. B. Ibhawoh, Dr. A. Kitai, Dr. E. Grodek

Regrets: Dr. S. McCracken, Dr. A. Deza, Dr. A. Guarne, Dr. A. Fudge Schormans, Mr. P. Self, Dr. N. Agarwal

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## A G E N D A

### **I. Minutes of the meeting February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017**

The minutes of the meeting of February 21<sup>st</sup> were approved on a motion by Dr. Hayward, seconded by Dr. Adams.

Dr. Welch said there had been a good question about why only SGS names appear in the minutes. This is a practice that almost all McMaster Councils follow. In decision making bodies there has been evidence that when names are put in the comments it can complicate matters. The best practice judged is to name the folks answering on behalf of institution only.

### **II. Business arising**

There was no business arising.

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

Dr. Welch reported on a few items. He noted that Council members might recall back in November the Academic Accommodation policy was on the agenda. He said they could expect it to be on the agenda for next month and that it had undergone significant revision.

Dr. Welch noted that there was a research integrity and mentoring workshop for new faculty. It is something that they're trying to do every year. They pass along resources they have for mentoring including various handouts from academic integrity and supervisor student relationship documents. There will be a chairs and directors version of the same talk coming up.

Dr. Welch also reported that the applications and admissions for graduate studies is going much better this year in terms of turnaround and completeness of paperwork coming to SGS. This is partly in response to a third admissions person and partly due to efforts to improve Mosaic and efforts to improve the process side to ensure efficiency. At the end of last week up they were up to date with the offers received to that point.

He noted that a search committee had been formed and met twice to find a new associate dean of humanities to replace Dr. Ibhawoh who is ending his term at the end of June. The process isn't yet to the point of interviewing candidates but that will happen in the next few weeks.

Dr. Welch reported that the university is in the middle of negotiating the second SMA with province. The SMA is a three year arrangement between the province and university about what both parties will do in terms of recruitment and support of students and how much the province will be contributing in operating grants. SMA 1 was very different in that one of the main aspects of that agreement was graduate growth. The university is putting together the first draft of SMA 2 for the province. Dr. Welch said he has been working with Institutional Research and Analysis to establish graduate support numbers and projections to go forward. By this time next month they will have a much firmer idea of what it will look like. The goal right now is to ensure existing planned programs are supported at the level intended, including those starting next year. Programs starting near the end of the SMA would have support built into them for domestic students.

He also noted that there was a working group looking at the concept of an interdisciplinary PhD across McMaster. The basic idea is to create a more natural ability to mix the standard stand-alone Ph.D. with interactions with other programs through a 3 to 1 year mix of experiences. He said that more details and consultations would follow and that McMaster has a strength here, so many strong programs already.

He noted that the comprehensive examination working group haven't quite got the new wording yet but that it wouldn't hold anything up in terms of implementing in the future. He expected it to come back to an upcoming meeting.

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

Dr. Hayward reported that they are getting close to finalizing the document for program handbooks and hope to bring back to Graduate Council next month or the one after. The intent is to make sure they're all formally approved within two years of starting this. She also noted that FHS has been looking at overtime students they shared the data for the current year with their programs. She said questions had been raised about whether SGS will take over these notifications and that programs have found it interesting comparing their overtime

data. The worst performers have 13% to 15% overtime. Overall there were only 39 over time and 6 out of time students, out of their share of graduate students which is 25% of the graduate student population. She noted the Faculty is happy with application numbers for programs this year. The biggest challenges to enrollment are research programs with CIHR funding. They are working on recruitment videos for different programs and have been having discussions with feeder undergraduate programs about how best to promote. FHS had also been working on how they recognize graduate student achievement. They have asked whether summa cum laude or cum laude designation could be used to highlight excellence. In general they are working on promoting a culture of recognizing graduate student achievement at the university. They would like to find out if these designations are possible otherwise programs plan to create recognition awards for their own students. Programs felt strongly about the need to recognize graduate level achievement.

Dr. Welch responded that he thought this was possible. He noted that one of the areas where there are few awards general is purely research and suggested it was possible to improve there as well.

Dr. Porter noted that recruitment is going well in the Faculty of Social Sciences.

Dr. Gupta reported that the Faculty of Science had held the graduate student-led alumni event on February 24<sup>th</sup>. He noted that it had been very successful with 10 alumni and 50-55 graduate students in attendance. There were a lot of good interactions and they are hopeful they can continue this going forward. He also reported that the Faculty had reviewed their TA policy, including how they're assigned to courses and had some recommendations that have been drafted into a policy and distributed to science departments. Dr. Welch noted that was an employment consideration rather than academic. Dr. Gupta confirmed.

Dr. Ibhawoh reported that things were going smoothly with admissions within the Faculty of Humanities. One of the issues that's come is support for international students. Programs are finding it difficult to compete with other universities in terms of tuition waivers or supports. There have been discussions in a number of areas and all agree international students are important. The trouble south of the border has the potential to increase the number of international students. As a Faculty they've decided to release a visa bursary. It won't cover everything but allows programs to plan and leverage funding. He suggested a holistic approach to this at McMaster would be helpful to attract the best students going forward.

Dr. Thompson had no report.

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

Ms. Baschiera explained that coming next month there will be two joint graduate/undergraduate policies. The first is an awards policy intended to harmonize the approach on both the graduate and undergraduate side. She noted that specifics and detail will still be governed by the graduate calendar. The second policy is a joint certificate and diplomas policy. Diplomas are still governed wholly by the IQAP. In the past, the certificates

piece has been a gray area. She noted the revised policies would ensure a good approach across all the graduate programs.

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

There was no report.

**VII. Faculty of Health Sciences Graduate Policy and Curriculum Committee Report**

Dr. Hayward presented the items and noted that they were going forward to the Health Sciences Faculty Executive the next day. The Occupational Therapy admission requirements used to be lower than the university standard. In practice, the only folks getting in were above their requirement so they have proposed a change to raise the minimum average to B+. The other change was from Biomedical Discovery and Commercialization and they proposed adding a milestone related to internship planning and are accordingly proposing a change to program requirements for the addition of this milestone. The for-information items were course changes and new courses.

Dr. Hayward moved and Dr. Thompson seconded, 'that Graduate Council approve the proposed changes as described in the documents, subject to FHS Executive Council approval.'

The motion was carried.

**VIII. Faculty of Engineering Graduate Curriculum and Policy Committee Report**

Dr. Thompson explained that the Faculty of Engineering is requesting approval for a co-op and work experience option. He noted that for those engaged in the upcoming SMA there is a demand to demonstrate integrated learning and that any student experience in work placement is beneficial to them in terms of career. The option involves two courses, one which helps prepare students for a placement and another which keeps them enrolled full-time. It is built this way to ensure international students (50% of students in the faculty) can gain valuable work experience.

He noted that Materials Science and Engineering was asking for a change to reduce the number of courses for Ph.D. completion. This change is largely reflective of the opinion of the Faculty to move more of the learning experience into comprehensive. Students will still be able to take more courses if needed but the program would rather see students working on research and the comprehensive. The School of Engineering Practice and Technology (SEPT) brought forward two changes, one to program length (which is being increased after previously being decreased). There was a belief that they could compress it but that has not turned out to be the case. So, the proposal now is to turn it back to what it was historically. For the Master of Engineering Design SEPT proposed a minor change to course requirements as they had one course which was split into two.

The last change was from Engineering Physics who proposed an addition to their section of the calendar to declare research competency in Biomedical Engineering as they have had a number of new hires in this area. Dr. Ibhawoh asked about the career training fee for the co-op/work experience option. He asked the extent to which the Faculty can impose additional ancillary fees. Dr. Thompson responded that they're requesting the fee be approved through the normal channels, starting with Fees Committee. The fee would be used to develop professional skills, use of Oscarplus website for this and to pay for the career manager to go out to visit co-op sites both before the placement and supporting throughout. He noted that at the same time, students will not be asked to pay tuition while away. Dr. Ibhawoh asked for clarification on the tuition front. Dr. Thompson said the situation would be similar to a leave of absence but that they would be considered a full-time student.

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

The motion was carried.

#### **IX. Change to Scholarship Committee Membership**

Dr. Welch explained that they're recording who is going off the committee and who is replacing them and noted that this is a large committee.

Dr. Thabane moved and Dr. Thompson seconded 'that Graduate Council approve the proposed changes as described in the document.'

The motion was carried.

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

Dr. Thompson asked if the travel award was intended to be open only to holders of an OGS. Dr. Welch confirmed this was the case. Dr. Thompson proposed a friendly amendment to include the word 'only' to ensure this was clear.

Dr. Thabane moved and Dr. Hayward seconded 'that Graduate Council approve the proposed new scholarships as described in the document.'

The motion was carried.

#### **XI. Graduate Degrees in the Ontario Environment**

Dr. Welch explained that he had received an invitation from the Dean of Engineering to attend a retreat on Reimagining the Ph.D. There were a number of panelists including the graduate dean from UBC. His part was

to outline restrictions on McMaster outside of the institutions own processes as well as to outline requirements as they stand now, how we make changes, and thoughts about evolution.

The definitions of what the university calls Ph.D. level work are in the Graduate Calendar. This used to be a document that every graduate student and program received. It was printed at large cost and often underutilized. He noted that they had since transitioned to a web version which was easily accessible. The calendar includes policies, program requirements and exams among other things. In section 4.2 it basically says there is no minimum course requirement. Programs may choose but the minimum is zero above Masters. Biochemistry and Biology are both examples of programs with low course requirements. Each program does get to set minimum course requirements and new programs have to meet the test of Quality Council. Whatever the program comes up with has to come through GCPC and Grad Council and Senate. In section 4.3 a set of examinations is described. Section 4.4 is devoted to the thesis which is a normal requirement at the Ph.D. level. Requirements have remained relatively static in this section and notes that the oral examination is required and afterward they expect the dissertation to be published. He noted there had been a CAGS discussion about what the dissertation could constitute going forward and what forms it could take. In the old days there were hard copies of the thesis which were not very well circulated. Now theses are published to MacSphere, which is an online repository. Dissertations are available instantly to anyone who wants it and this has created its own reactions. Some leading journals will not published something that is available online. They do have ability to have temporarily embargo a dissertation but eventually they must always become visible. A student is able to request embargo for one year automatically. More than one year requires a justification and the thesis can be embargoed up to a maximum of two years. Section 4.6 show how long the degree takes and the process by which a student's progress is reviewed.

Dr. Welch explained that the cornerstone or bedrock document of legal system in country is constitution. In the case of education it's a provincial responsibility to describe statutes. Each of the older universities have a bill establishing the university and in this document it explains what McMaster University can do. It describes what powers McMaster has and how it has to be organized to exercise those powers. In that act there are two principle elements defined: Board of Governors (concerned with financial matters) and Senate (concerned with academic matters). The description of Senate has a lot of material including what powers it has. There are no separate definition of degrees, diplomas or certificates other than what is listed there.

Article X of the Senate by-laws describe Graduate Council and includes the requirement of who is to be here and their role. It notes that Graduate Council has the power to make rules and regulations, establish ad hoc committees, to regulate matters of graduate work of concern to university as a whole and to determine the eligibility of departments to offer graduate work.

Taken by itself the act says McMaster can make any degree it wants but since McMaster is a publically assisted university, in return for support from the province the institution has agreed to comply with the recommendations of the COU which exercise its quality control through Quality Council. So, Ph.D. degrees must meet certain degree level expectations. New program proposals must highlight how they meet these expectations. Universities have agreed to not offer any degrees not approved by Quality. The Ministry leaves quality assurance up to Quality Council – they only approve the funding amounts.

In terms of potential next steps for the Ph.D. there are a number of options. One thing is to change the form a comprehensive exam takes. A very large fraction of programs have expressed opinion that they value it but that they would like more flexibility in how they're given. This would possibly include changes in timescale or approach. Another thought is to reimagine the product of the Ph.D. – which takes two forms: monography or sandwich theses. Other possibilities for change include the external review parameters and reimagining who can participate on the supervisory committee. These are all places that McMaster could push the envelope.

The real bottleneck to change is not the ministry or Quality Council but agreement within the faculty members in the discipline about where they want to take things.

Dr. Ibhawoh raised the example of a student a few years ago who wanted to write a dissertation in indigenous language but that the calendar says only English and French are accepted. He noted it seemed anomalous that university in Canada would not accept a dissertation in an indigenous language and thought this would be a great place to start. One of the difficulties that came up when this was raised that a question around whether they could find external examiners to review quality. He suggested they could include some language about 'where there is capacity' a thesis can be in an indigenous language.

Dr. Welch noted said that he recognized that there's a lot of paperwork that comes to Graduate Council but noted that there is power to do more than the regular business and that they should always keep our eye out for that explore options available to us. A committee member asked if there was other institutions in the country that have already started the steps of working on reimagining the Ph.D. Dr. Welch responded that they have mainly gone nowhere. He noted that the University of Victoria had done some work around indigenous issues.