

Graduate Administrators Council (GAC)

Koch Hall Board Room

Thursday, May 7, 2009

9:00-10:30 a.m.

Attending: Phil Langlais, chair, Brenda Neumon Lewis, Mike Overstreet, Ted Remley, Isao Ishibashi, Robert Wojtowicz, Osman Akan, Brenda Stevenson-Marshall, Mona Danner, Chris Osgood, Ali Ardalan, Laurel Garzon

Guest: Karen Medina

Approval of April 16, 2009 Minutes

Minutes were approved without changes.

Updates/Announcements

Dr. Langlais informed GAC that the Alumni Reception for graduating graduate students was a success. He stated that he had spoken to most of the students in attendance and that they appeared satisfied with their graduate experiences. He reminded Council that Commencement is scheduled for Saturday, May 9, 2009. Dr. Neumon Lewis reminded Council that their final reviews of the University Graduate Catalog were due on May 1st.

Updates from the 2008-09 Sub-Committees

a. GTAI Institute (Criteria for Evaluation of Oral Presentation and Recommendation for Continued Training)

Dr. Ardalan reminded Council that the purpose of the sub-committee was to propose an iBT speaking score that would serve as a substitute for the Speak Test and Student Presentation Test at the GTAI for graduate students who will be responsible for teaching a course or leading a lab. He presented the sub-committee's findings, and indicated that there was not enough data available to make a well-informed judgment.

Dr. Ardalan informed Council of the sub-committee's recommendations: 1) continue using the same total TOEFL score of 80 and its iBT Speaking score of 22 for admission decisions. Use speaking score of 22 as the minimum score for offering teaching assistantship. This score is smaller than the current required score of 26, but is higher than the scores for several of our currently successful teaching assistants. Continue screening international students' communication skills through Speak Test and presentations at the GTAI. Students can be assigned teaching responsibilities only if they earn a satisfactory score in Speak Test and pass the GTAI presentation. Each program may establish a higher iBT Speaking score for both admission decisions and assigning graduate teaching assistantship to students; 2) conduct

interviews that include both audio and video for screening applicants who are teaching assistantship candidates; 3) continue collecting iBT Speaking and Speak Test scores; 4) request deans to provide student evaluation results, especially the first semester of teaching, for the teaching assistants to the sub-committee; 5) collect retention and graduation rates for all students, to determine the validity of iBT scores for admission decisions; and, 6) extend “orientation” programs to include additional language/culture components for international students who may benefit from them. There was a lengthy discussion on the topic. Dr. Chris Osgood stated that some members of the ODU community are concerned GTAI students are sometimes judged too stringently in their oral presentations, and that this may be attributable to reviewers not being familiar with or knowledgeable about the subject on which the student presented. In response to this concern, Dr. Robert Wojtowicz indicated he did not believe this to be the case and not being familiar with the discipline does not hinder evaluating if the student is able to communicate effectively to freshmen students. He also urged Council members to become more involved in GTAI, and to perhaps become reviewers.

Dr. Wojtowicz suggested that Council prevent students in the same program from attending the same GTAI presentation session.

Dr. Brenda Stevenson-Marshall suggested that it become mandatory for deans to provide student evaluation results, after the first semester of teaching, for the teaching assistants, in an effort to gather additional data and to re-evaluate assistants’ teaching abilities. Dr. Akan indicated making it mandatory was not feasible.

Dr. Neumon Lewis asked what the minimum iBT score was that other universities consider acceptable. Karen Medina informed Council that there is not a great amount of consensus on this issue. But, according to the Cornell study on this topic, it was determined an iBT score of between 17 and 22 indicated sufficient speaking fluency, but that it may be weak for some programs.

Dr. Langlais suggested that the two issues relating to admissions and assistantships be separated. Council agreed that the sub-committee’s original task was centered only on the assistantship issue, and that mention of the admissions process should be removed from the current discussion.

Dr. Ishibashi suggested that if a student received a score of 24 or higher on the iBT Speaking test, then that student should be awarded an assistantship, and should not be required to pass the Speak Test. Conversely, if a student received a score less than

24, then they should be required to pass the Speak Test and GTAI before they are awarded an assistantship.

Dr. Langlais suggested that if an assistantship candidate scores 23 or higher on the iBT, then they do not have to pass the Speak Test, and they would immediately receive the assistantship. However, if the student scores less than 23, then they must pass the on-campus Speak Test and be withheld from serving as a TA in their first semester while they hopefully strengthen their communication skills. Dr. Langlais stated that there may be two consequences if this were to become policy; 1- students' financial support during the first semester may be negatively affected thus requiring alternative sources of support; 2- during the first phases of implementation of this policy, departments may not have enough instructors to cover all of their courses offered in the fall semester. Dr. Langlais suggested that the sub-committee meet and discuss with department chairs the issues related to this topic. Council was concerned about the fair treatment of undergraduate students who attend courses taught by graduate teaching assistants; all decisions must keep students' best interests in mind.

Council agreed that more data should be collected before making recommendations. Dr. Wojtowicz affirmed that the sub-committee will take all of these concerns into consideration, and then discuss these issues with associate deans and department chairs. The sub-committee should have a revised set of recommendations prepared for the next GAC meeting.

b. Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines

Dr. Wojtowicz recommended that the guide be presented to the Provost, in an effort to receive funding to edit the current version of the guidelines. Dr. Wojtowicz informed Council that there are people in his college who have performed these suggested editorial duties in the past. Dr. Wojtowicz volunteered one of these individuals to do the required editorial work for pay. Dr. Overstreet suggested that there be a faculty supervisor who has reviewed theses and dissertations to work closely with the editor during the creation of the draft. Dr. Wojtowicz volunteered to serve in the capacity of supervisor to the person doing the editorial work. Dr. Akan agreed to assist as well. Dr. Wojtowicz proposed that the length of the document be reduced, standard guideline material inserted, and that the document be sent to departments for any possible changes after the editorial work has been completed. Dr. Langlais requested that the sub-committee prepare a somewhat detailed description of the project and an estimate of the time and cost to complete this first phase. Once he has received that information, Dr. Langlais will submit it to the Provost for approval and funding.

Scheduled items that were not discussed will be added to the agenda for the next GAC meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 10:30 a.m.