The Graduate Council met on Wednesday, August 26, 2020, at 3:30 p.m. via Zoom.

Members present: Jill Anderson, Suchendra Bhandarkar, Michael Cacciatore, John Campbell, Swarn Chatterjee, Joon Choi, AnnaMarie Conner, Merrily Dunn, Melissa Fahmy, Tim Foutz, Cari Goetcheus, Georgia Harrison Hall, Dan Johnson, Ray Kaplan, Elizabeth Knight, Kyser Lough, Laura McAndrews, Christof Meile, David Mustard, Kerry Oliver, Kaori Sakamoto, Jennifer Samp, Shane Singh, Shavannor Smith, Seth Wenger, Catherine White, Dayton Wilde, and Ming Zhang. Ron Walcott, Meredith Welch-Devine, Robert Scott, Cheri Bliss, Robin Bingham and Olivia Myers represented the Graduate School. Shayla Lee represented the Graduate Student Association as current president.


Associate Dean Ron Walcott called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.

Minutes of the April 9, 2020, Graduate Council meeting were approved as posted on the Graduate School website.

Dr. Walcott began with an introduction of members and an overview of the four committees.

Graduate Council Committee Reports and Action Items

A. Administrative Committee
   No business to report.

B. Appeals Committee
   Christof Meile, Chair
   No business to report.

C. Program Committee
   Liz Knight, Chair
   No business to report.

D. Policy and Planning Committee
   No business to report.

Old Business
No old business.

New Business

A. Graduate School response to COVID-19 pandemic. See attached document.
B. Student concerns related to COVID-19. See attached document.

From a student standpoint, other concerns are that online and face-to-face aren’t equitable and the concern about fulfilling requirements if online only.

Emergency funds will continue for both COVID-19 and non-COVID requests.

Of the CARES Act, $12 million went directly to students. Majority of funding went to Pell Grant recipients. $1500 cap and other requirements. All $12 million was dispersed. 15% went to graduate students.

C. Consideration of changes to policy for oral examinations.

An exemption was in place to allow oral exams and defenses through spring. That exemption ended with Fall 2020 semester. Should we return to a blanket exemption? If so, for how long? Or should current policy be modified?

Input:

…Like idea of flexibility. Should be able to request online. On ones attended online, only a slight reduction in interaction and rigor.
…Can do a lot more remote effectively. In person best option and preferred, but flexibility makes sense.
…Online meetings and defenses have worked equally well and better attendance. Ecology 100% in favor of extending exemption.
…Concur. Satisfactory option to continue.
…Agree. Much better attendance. Quality probably as good.
…Blanket exemption for length of pandemic makes sense. All remote or all in person makes sense.

Consensus is blanket exemption until end of spring 2021. PPC Committee will take up issue of exams and do benchmarking for change to current policy.

Vote to extend exemption through Spring 2021…Passed, 26-0.

Information Items

Curriculum Report: The Graduate School has approved 48 new courses, 55 course revisions, and 26 deletions.

Next meeting: September 23, 2020 at 3:30 pm via Zoom

After splitting into committee groups for discussion, the meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.
Response of the UGA Graduate School to the COVID-19 pandemic
Prepared for the August 26, 2020 meeting of the Graduate Council

- Assistantships intact for continuing students who are able to do their duties remotely
- Tuition waivers to new international students who had been offered assistantships but who had to remain abroad
- Temporary approval for oral exams and thesis / dissertation defenses to be held online
- Online transmission of oral comprehensive exam and thesis / dissertation defense forms
- Laptop loan program for students
- Enhanced emergency financial support for students
  - $199,070 in May & June assistantships for 51 students whose graduation was delayed
  - Transferred $6000 to a program that needed to house students quarantining after returning from abroad
  - Increased development efforts for Emergency Fund
    - From March 1-June 15, individuals gave more than $28,000
    - 181 COVID-related awards have been made ($221,672)
- Allowed departments to waive GRE requirements for applicants who had not taken the test by March 1st
- Duolingo for demonstration of English language proficiency
- Students who would have graduated in Spring 2020 but were delayed allowed to graduate in summer without registering for additional coursework (28 students)
- Exemptions for GSRA recipients who did not reach candidacy in year 4, due to COVID, to still “pick up” year 4 money
GRADS survey with 1012 responses
6/22 to 7/2

- 180 wanted return to full operations
  - 42 left the “concerns” question blank
  - 72 expressed essentially no concerns about returning but did have concerns about NOT returning:
    - Decreased quality of instruction
    - Fear about job prospects
    - Missing out on hands-on instruction or labs
  - 66 expressed concern despite wanting a return to full operations:
    - For their own health or that of their friends, family, or faculty
    - Of these, many said they only wanted a return to full operations if there was mandatory mask-wearing

- 433 said strictly online-only
  - Their concerns about returning included:
    - What students will be doing when off campus
    - Poor compliance on campus
    - Personal exposure
    - Spouses / family who are immunocompromised
    - Exposing their students to potential harm
    - Disbelief that social distancing is effective in a closed classroom
    - Transmission to people in town from university community
  - Their concerns about not returning included:
    - Maintaining relationships with advisors
    - Missing out on personal exchange and discussion
    - Assistantships being revoked
    - Impacts on research and delayed graduation
    - Hard for some students to work from home (internet, other responsibilities)

- 364 wanted some sort of hybrid option
  - Concerns mirrored those of above groups

- Remainder (35) were unsure or thought it too early to tell.