

GRADUATE COUNCIL MINUTES

October 11, 2006

Approved: November 8, 2006

Present: Dave Downing, Tom Blume, Donna Free, Lisa Hawley, Frances Jackson, Mildred Merz, Meir Shillor, Lorenzo Smith, Joseph Shively, Kristine Thompson, Mohamed Zohdy

Absent: Claire Rammel

Guests: Cindy Hermsen, Kathleen Moore,

Staff: Julie Delaney, Lynette Folken, Eilene Lohmeier

I. Call to order

The meeting was convened at 2:08 pm by David Downing, Chair.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A MOTION to approve the minutes of February 22, 2006, March 29, 2006 and September 27, 2006 was made and seconded

Correction: September 27, 2006 minutes in include Lorenzo Smith as present and Tom Blume was absent.

The corrected minutes were passed unanimously.

III. GUEST PRESENTER

Cindy Hermsen, Director of Financial Aid

C. Hermsen was invited and welcomed to Graduate Council to provide members with an overview of the financial aid program and how student financial aid impacts new programs and policies. Due to the tremendous growth in enrollment of graduate students and current economic issues, there has been an increase in the number of graduate students applying for financial aid. Compliance issues and concerns, therefore, have become problematic. C. Hermsen reminded the committee that even though program design is up to the departments, it is important that departments work within the financial aid rules and regulations set forth by the U.S. Department of Education.

Eligibility:

- Maximum yearly graduate student aid -\$18,500 a year. Private loans are available, but can be less appealing due to the requirements, higher interest or repayment terms.
- To qualify, students must be an enrolled student either Full-time (8+ credits) or Part-time (4,5,6, or 7 credits). *Alternative programs are available for students only taking 1,2,or 3 credits; but the student may experience higher interest rate or repayment schedule not as good as federal loans).

- The Graduate student must be in a degree seeking program.

Discussion followed regarding the definition of “part-time”. Departments are asked to inform students that anything less than 4 credits make them ineligible for financial aid. D. Free shared an issue within the SBA. Graduate courses are 3 credit hours, not 4 credits; which would make the grad student ineligible for financial aid. At another comparable university, 3 credits courses are considered “part-time”; thus making the student eligible for aid. This also becomes a problem when partnering with other departments because of the difference between the 3 and 4 credit hour courses. D. Fee asked if the definition of “part-time” was a university decision.

C Hermsen explained that at the undergraduate level, the US Department of Education defines full-time as being more than 12 credit hours. However, at the graduate level, it is defined by the institution as long as they stay within the rules and regulations. Oakland’s decision was to set the minimum of 4 credits for part-time. C. Hermsen agreed to investigate this issue further and report back to Graduate Council.

Certificate Programs: Some certificate programs are approved for financial aid eligibility. However, the certificate program must be at least 1 year in length. The US Department of Education has established guidelines outlining those requirements and a list of qualifying certificates are recertified every 10 years with the last review in 2002. C. Hermsen and C. Rammel will be reviewing the certificate programs and will provide a set of guidelines to assist in the development of future certificate programs. D. Downing requested that the list of eligible certificate programs be forwarded to him for posting on the Graduate Council website.

Student Eligibility:

- Maintain part-time status (minimum of 4 credits per semester)
- Maintain satisfactory academic standing by completing 67% of the course work they are taking and maintain the minimum department GPA as defined in the graduate catalog. A problem arises when a department allows a student to stay even if their grade drops below the documented catalog GPA minimum. Since GPA aid eligibility is determined by what is stated in the graduate catalog, the student may lose their eligibility for financial aid until the grade is pulled back up to the minimum GPA.

Students are eligible for aid up to 150% of the program requirement (i.e. a grad program of 36 credits: a student can take 36 + 18 credits). This allows flexibility in repeating courses or taking other courses. However, extra hours must be taken before the degree is posted. Financial aid , however, will be based on the catalog minimum total for the required degree.

Endorsements do not qualify for financial aid.

PHD programs. In order to ensure student financial aid eligibility, we require that OU students completing their thesis or dissertation have continuous enrollment. Currently, a “P” (progressive) grade is awarded in lieu of a numerical grade to satisfy the financial aid grade requirement. Due to the recent issues in the interpretation of the “ P grade, the Graduate Council has supported the idea of changing this grade to “DF” (deferred). D. Downing asked if this would be acceptable

with financial aid. C. Hermsen said that if the “DF” means that the faculty is certifying the student did indeed work on the dissertation/thesis and complete what was expected during that time period, then it would be agreeable. She stated that financial aid is looking for something that means that the student has completed the requirements and expectations during that time period. However, the grade cannot be changed at a later time. The “grade” at the end of the semester is what financial aid uses to reconfirm the student’s re-eligibility for the next semester. If a faculty or department goes back at a later time and changes the grade to something other than a grade that means “satisfactory”, the financial aid department would have to re-access the student’s eligibility for aid for the next semester(s). That would include if a grade was changed to “I” meaning incomplete.

D. Downing reiterated the need to come up with a consistent grade that represents that the student is meeting expectations; yet remember that it cannot fluctuate at a later time“ in order to stay in compliance with the financial air regulations.

K Moore recommended that we look at other institutions, such as WSU, on how they handle this issue. She further suggested that the course work/research be handled as one issue and the dissertation/thesis as a separate grading.

C. Hermsen further explained that repayment of the student loan starts after a 6 month grace period from when a student receives their degree and/or terminates the pursuit of a degree. The university regularly confirms student status with the US Department of Education’s databases to determine when the student needs to go into re-payment. D. Downing confirmed that if the student drops out of a program or a student grade is retroactively changed causing the student to fall below the required GPA, financial aid eligibility is changed and the grace period begins. C. Hermsen suggested that a policy be instituted with a reasonable deadline date on how far back educational record changes can be made to avoid 3-5 year reassessment and adjustments.

C. Hermsen thanked the committee for the opportunity to meet with them and offered to provide statistical information and a break down of unit information. The financial aid department is currently working to standardize information to be shared with the units. C. Hermsen agreed to investigate the university’s part-time minimum credit requirement of 4 credits as well as to provide D. Downing with a list of Certificate Programs that are eligible for financial aid. D. Downing thanked C. Hermsen for sharing this information.

IV. GOOD AND WELFARE

A successful Graduate Open House was held on October 10th with over 220 attendees and 182 new applications. D. Downing thanked L. Folken, J. Delaney and E. Lohmeier for their help.

Dave is collecting additional information on the on BSW and MSW. There is no immediate plan to implement the MSW. It is a continuation and accelerated program linked to BSW. Until we have graduates from the Oakland University BSW program it is not an issue. D. Downing has not been able to verify if the MSW will be brought to Graduate Council.

F. Jackson asked that D. Downing share the faculty's concerns over recent collaborations and partnerships with other institutions. Faculty are requesting that administration provide definitions of collaboration and partnerships, explanation of the differences and address what that means. Furthermore, faculty expressed concerns that administrators are signing academic agreements without proper consultation from faculty and later informed about the agreement through public announcement. D. Downing will convey the faculty's concerns with administration.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 3:05 p.m. The next Graduate Council meeting will be held on October 25, 2006 at 2:00 p.m. in 100 Kresge Library.