

**Meeting of the GC Academic Policy Committee
Wednesday, December 2nd 2015, 12:30pm–1:50pm**

Room 200, Graduate Student Centre, 6371 Crescent Road

Present: Larry Walker (Chair), Matthew Evenden, Don Mavinic, Beth Haverkamp, Wendy Robinson, Barb Conway (in lieu of Thomas Chang), Natalie Marshall, Ran Xiang, Jenny Phelps, Zhaoming Xu, Max Read, Sheri Eastman (minutes)

Regrets: Susan Porter, Kin Lo, Gail Murphy, Clive Roberts

Absent: Yousry El-Kassaby, Ljiljana Biukovic

1) Introductions and regrets

2) Adoption of the agenda

<i>All</i>	}	<i>That the agenda be approved.</i>
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Carried

3) Minutes of the meeting held 09 September 2015*

<i>All</i>	}	<i>That the minutes of the meeting held on 09 September 2015 be approved.</i>
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Carried

4) Chair's Remarks

a) Approval of Candidates for degrees

Rather than conducting an email vote of the Graduate Policy Committee, candidates for degrees for November 2015 conferral were approved at the meeting of Graduate Council and the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies on 13 November 2015.

b) Policies approved: Larry reported that the following four G+PS policies have been approved by Senate:

1. Application and admissions documentation
2. Doctoral defenses
3. Leaves of absence
4. Pass standing and academic progress

5) Business arising from the minutes

- a) Requirements for English language proficiency:

Larry initiated this review in response to a disproportionate number of students encountering poor progress or academic misconduct as a result of language issues. He shared current G+PS language proficiency requirements and those of comparator Canadian and US Universities indicating that no other university has lower standards than UBC Grad Studies (currently requiring a minimum TOEFL score of 80). The implication is that we are attracting applications from students who are not able to meet the standards of peer institutions.

Within UBC the current undergrad requirement requires a TOEFL score of 90 as does UBC-O College of Graduate Studies. Among the different graduate programs at UBC there are significant variations ranging from 80 to 108 with 100 being the mode and many having minimums specified for the four component scores (reading, writing, listening, speaking). It was also noted that at G+PS we are routinely asked to make exceptions to the TOEFL score of 80 (up to 24 a year). High-quality applicants with marginal language scores can be directed to the Conditional Admission Program at UBC's English Language Institute (ELI). This allows otherwise qualified students to be guaranteed admission to a UBC graduate degree program provided they successfully complete the ELI program.

Posed for discussion: consider adopting the UBC undergrad requirement of a TOEFL score of 90: reading (22) writing (21) listening (22) speaking (21) and equivalencies for other tests.

Comments and discussion included:

- UBC English Language Institute is geared toward achieving this minimum standard
- The IELTS is a more comprehensive measure of language proficiency (a 90 TOEFL score converts to about a score of 7 with the IELTS)
- Only the faculties between 80-90 will be affected if we adopt this increased standard
- Concern was expressed over higher requirements possibly discouraging international students; also concern that increased minimum may result in a request for more exceptions
- Required increase may not be appropriate to all faculties: e.g. School of Music
- There seemed to be general support for increasing the graduate minimum standard: Pharmacy and LFS have already increased their TOEFL requirement, Civil Eng is pushing to increase it further to 100.
- Lengthy discussion around students who struggle to communicate in English especially in a laboratory context where it's easy and efficient to revert to first language; GPS and almost all grad support is offered in English.

It was decided that Larry would contact each grad program and tell them we are considering raising the grad minimum to the undergrad level or higher. He will report back with any response and pushback.

b) Requirements for **fast-track** and **direct-entry** into doctoral programs:

Larry set the context by outlining the typical entry procedure into master's and PhD programs. He then outlined the doctoral direct-entry requirements noting two disconnects between policy and procedure.

1. The requirement of an "honors degree" and "advanced research ability" have not been monitored by G+PS.

(This was presented at the Joint Grad Council Meeting in November and received without a great deal of pushback or discussion).

Discussion point #1: Remove the honors degree requirement. This does not effectively change practice but signals to programs that this is no longer required. It might increase the number of students coming in via this route. At the moment we depend on programs to make that distinction.

2. When students are permitted into the direct-entry they are on probation, having to complete a certain amount of coursework in their first year. For some faculties, this presses students to load up on their courses making it hard to get started on research.

Discussion point #2: Extend the probation term to two years for direct-entry students. Criterion remains the same but the timeline changes.

One disadvantage noted from the full faculty meeting is that it would then take two years to tell a student they're not going to make it.

Another suggestion is to modify the entry requirements for fast-tracking into the doctoral program. This would involve changing not only credit requirements but also adding a probationary period into the procedure much like the direct-entry program.

Lengthy discussion included:

- Acknowledgement that there is a wide variability among programs
- Concern was raised over "lowering the bar" and the need to have 12 credits for scholarship potential; potential funding complications
- This issue is complicated by the emotional, psychological and funding impact on a student who is fast-tracked then pushed back into a master's program
- Fast-track program can draw students; many American universities offer direct-entry

- Having some type of evaluation after one year
- Concern over the two-year probationary period causing students to take longer to finish
- Concern that this request for extended probationary period is coming from one program. If only one program wants this, is that reason to change the policy?

This issue was put before the full faculty meeting without any suggestions or resolution.

No motion or recommendation was made on this issue. Larry asked those who want to consult with their programs to do so and we will discuss again in the 2016-17 academic year.

6) Forthcoming Business

- a) admission appeals
- b) laddering of credentials

7) Adjournment

All } *That the meeting be adjourned.*

Carried

*Minutes of previous meetings are available here:

<http://www.grad.ubc.ca/faculty-staff/graduate-council/academic-policy-committee-previous-meetings>