

Meeting of the GC Policy Committee
Tuesday, November 29, 2011; 12:00 pm – 2:00 pm
Graduate Students Centre, Room 200

Present: Daniel Granot, Douglas Harris, Jessica Iverson (minutes), Peter Leung, Philip Loewen (Chair), Jamie Paris, Andrew Patterson, Jenny Phelps, Susan Porter, Cindy Prescott, Max Read, Curtis Suttle

Guests: Wayne Riggs

Regrets: Akram Alfantazi, Beth Haverkamp, Darrin Lehman, Clive Roberts, Brent Skura, Kishor Wasan

1. Adoption of Agenda

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

2. Minutes of last meeting (September 20, 2011)

<i>All</i> } <i>That the minutes of the September 20, 2011 meeting be approved.</i>

Carried.

3. Business arising

a. Doctoral Exams reforms – Status Update

Philip Loewen provided a report on the Doc Exams reforms from the last two meetings of Grad Council. Reforms have been worked out and are moving forward. What wasn't settled at Grad Council is the implementation of the timeline. Under the new policy, a review by the FoGS Dean (or Dean's rep) will be triggered if the examining committee has two or more dissenters when it comes to making the final recommendation. This will start with exams scheduled in 2012 as we want to give students a fair amount of time to be informed. The new rules will be posted on the

website later this week. For exams already scheduled in 2012, students will get a personal email detailing the changes.

As an FYI to the Committee, Philip noted that the new Doc Exams form includes a checkbox for no changes required. Philip said he plans to follow up with exam chairs when defences are deemed to be perfect and will monitor whether or not the form needs further tweaking in the future.

b. B Arch to M Arch degree name change – Status Report

Philip checked with the University Counsel that the name change would not spoil the implicit contract the University has with its graduates. Counsel said the change is fine but that the academic legitimacy of the change is the Policy Committee's responsibility. This is an initiative that should have the disciplinary support of the faculty to which the program belongs. Philip relayed the news to the head of SALA and now the school is working with the Faculty of Applied Science.

c. Turnitin – on Canadian servers? Can US government get access?

Max Read provided a report on Turnitin. In 2006 UBC reached an agreement with Turnitin that all material submitted by Canadian universities would be stored on Canadian servers. In March of this year UBC discovered that Canadian material is actually stored on US servers. UBC and UVic have been working with Turnitin to come to a resolution but it seems Turnitin is not interested in having Canadian servers.

In the past, when students submitted papers to Turnitin using WebCT a lot of additional information was also sent, but that has been stopped entirely. Now submissions must be direct to Turnitin. Identifying information is turned into code and there are provisions for removing papers a year and a day after they have been submitted to Turnitin's database. There is plenty of information on the UBC website, including instructions on how to submit to Turnitin directly. There is also an office at UBC that provides additional support.

Paul Hancock is the Access and Privacy Manager in the Office of the University Counsel. He has been looking into this issue as well. While non-Turnitin alternatives are being investigated, Paul recommends that all personal information (including title pages and acknowledgements) is removed before theses are submitted. FoGS is already doing that. Paul says it's unlikely the US government would use Turnitin to locate suspicious theses—they have far better avenues. FoGS is following Paul's advice for removing personal information but is continuing to use Turnitin. The Centre for Teaching, Learning & Technology is looking at other duplication identification services and will keep Max posted.

Comments:

Curtis Suttle asked if individuals that submit to Turnitin are informed that their submissions will be stored on US servers. Max said there is a disclaimer in the registration process. A concern was raised that students won't see this disclaimer if their instructors make the submissions. Jamie Paris seconded the concern, and raised another concern that there is no second option for students who are uncomfortable submitting via Turnitin. Max responded—FoGS doesn't have control over what students work out with their departments. For FoGS's use of Turnitin, UBC students do agree to

allow FoGS to use a plagiarism-checking service, although there is no specific reference to US servers.

Douglas Harris said that he uses Turnitin in his courses and advises students to use an alias if they're uncomfortable submitting their information. Douglas then asked if there are alternate plagiarism checking websites and Max said there are, but did not have details on which specifically have Canadian servers. The Committee discussed the advantages and disadvantages of using Turnitin. Douglas asked if there are issues with the Patriot Act if UBC uses servers in the UK. Max responded—no, but CTLT is looking for a service that is specifically Canadian in case the UK has a change of government and enforces something like the Patriot Act.

Max asked if the Turnitin issue should be broadcast to the University. Jamie suggested that the University continue using Turnitin until there are clear answers to the privacy questions it raises. Philip was concerned that sometimes individuals are suspected of plagiarism and their work has to be checked, and that is one instance of being compelled to submit to Turnitin. Philip noted that he would be more comfortable if faculty are compelled to accept submissions under an alias.

Max said the Protection of Privacy Act will allow students to submit to a UK server without including identifying information. Jenny Phelps asked for clarification on what “such data” means on the report Max circulated. Max responded—“such data” refers to first and last names and email addresses. Jenny then asked about theses and Max said identifying information should be removed from those too.

Andrew Patterson indicated that he would also like to see a second option but Susan Porter didn't think that would be viable if the content will be made public in a couple of weeks anyway. Douglas noted that ideally there would be a Canadian alternative to Turnitin, but in the meantime one way to address security concerns may be to disseminate information to graduate programs. Noted clear guidance from FoGS about best practices would be beneficial.

***Actions:** Inform graduate programs and students about Turnitin and the related privacy issues; stand in favour of faculty members using Turnitin with anonymous submissions from students; monitor and report back as things change.*

d. Parental Accommodation Policy

- **Academic Aspects**
- **Financial Considerations**

The committee discussed a possible alternative to medical or personal leave for students who take leave because of new family members joining them.

The last time the committee discussed this type of leave, the idea was to provide some sort of bursary to these students. Philip visited Anna Kindler, who proposed that Philip make the pitch for funding part of the FoGS budget request for the coming year. At the last meeting the committee was not ready to get the bursary into the budget proposal for FoGS. The committee now has another year to round up money. Anna also suggested splitting the bursary and funding issue from the academic aspect of the proposal.

Philip circulated just the academic aspects of the Parental Accommodation Policy proposal.

Highlights:

Eight weeks of reduced activity; scholarships that originate at UBC will keep getting paid until they are completely drained; automatic one-term extension for maximum allowable time in a program/to advance to candidacy.

Susan asked how this policy differs from UBC's regular parental leave. Jenny responded—right now there is a parental leave but it was brought to the Committee's attention that the main drawback to the terms of the current parental leave is that students lose funding. The proposed changes allow students to maintain student status and continue making academic progress. Jamie noted that in his experience graduate students are already adhering to this policy but on an informal basis.

Curtis wondered which units are so inflexible that they won't work with students wishing to take parental leave. Susan responded—this policy would ensure that doesn't happen. Additionally, the policy signals to students that FoGS appreciates their choices and will accommodate parental leave. Philip noted that having this policy in place means students won't be seen as receiving special treatment.

Jenny reminded the committee that the students who initiated discussion of this policy provided examples of US universities with similar policies, including the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Michigan. Philip mentioned that in line with these US universities, Anna Kindler suggested a 6-week period of reduced activity, but the proposed policy will remain at 8 weeks.

Susan advised that the Scholarships Committee should see the proposed policy because it is a change in policy for scholarships. Jenny responded—scholarships should not be affected because it is not a leave of absence. Susan said the proposal should still go to the Scholarships Committee.

Referring to items (a)--(d) under "Funding" in the draft as circulated, Philip noted that for a) UBC Scholarship Recipients, FoGS administers this funding and can therefore continue to provide funding to students so long as the Scholarships Committee is supportive. He also noted that for d) External Scholarship Recipients, NSERC and CIHR have some policies for boosting research grants of supervisors who use those grants to pay students on parental leave. Philip indicated that c) Graduate Teaching Assistants informs students that the TA union has funding to help them— included for information purposes.

Action: *Committee members to inform their Deans of this particular point (c) in the policy.*

Curtis noted that someone who is expecting a child may not be able to hold a TA position because of the demands of the job. Jenny responded—the committee is trying to require that TA positions are not terminated. Curtis suggested adding an expectation to the policy—for example, there is an expectation that students will not be penalized for taking up to 8 weeks of parental leave. Susan suggested talking to HR to see what kind of accommodations could be made to support TAs.

Curtis asked whether this Parental Accommodation Policy is needed—if there is a problem that it addresses. Jamie responded—he assured Curtis that it is. Jamie gets emails weekly from students about parental leave—it is something that affects the student’s cohort.

Susan noted that if partners are also granted Parental Accommodation Leave then it would probably be best not to have it surrounding the birth. Jenny suggested leaves are taken at same time for birth mother and partner but Susan and Curtis disagreed. Jenny said the 8 weeks is meant to be negotiated in good faith between the student and the supervisor.

Philip requested that committee members make sure their Deans are aware this policy is being put forward. Jenny said FoGS could request additional room in their budget for next year if the Deans support this policy. It was noted that the University of Waterloo has a separate bursary for parental leave on top of scholarships—this bursary comes from central funding (\$8,000 for 4 months). Philip consulted Waterloo’s policy for further details. Max asked if working out the details of a similar bursary at UBC would be FoGS’ responsibility or that of Financial Services. Philip responded—FoGS would first have to come up with a credible proposal.

Andrew suggested that FoGS take a definitive stand on the issue of supervisors who refuse to pay the graduate students they employ if those students take parental leave. Philip responded—FoGS has no money and isn’t in the position to contest supervisors who won’t pay. Curtis suggested the proposal simply state that there is the expectation that students would have ongoing, continual financial support at whatever level they previously were for up to 8 weeks, without penalty. If as a result of that there is feedback that this policy isn’t working then the committee will have something to go with, but clearly stating this is the *expectation* may save the committee from creating a raft of new policies because there would be fewer issues to address in the first place. Philip agreed and said he would modify the language in paragraph B (Graduate Research and Graduate Academic Assistants) of Section V. Susan indicated she still wants to check with HR, as she had previously mentioned with regards to funding TAs.

The committee returned to issue of duration of leave for two partners. Peter Leung suggested each partner get 8 weeks. Curtis disagreed—it doesn’t need to be equal, can be flexible. Cindy Prescott said eight weeks total.

Jamie noted GSS members may not support the policy if it’s not LGBT-friendly or adoption-friendly. He was assured the language is neutral.

Susan suggested eight weeks for birth mother and additional time for partner. Philip is concerned that the automatic one-term extension may be disproportionate to period of “reduced activity”. The committee disagreed—having a baby is reason enough for extension. Curtis noted that while reasonable, 8 weeks of leave is more than that offered by other universities (particularly in the US).

The committee reached an agreement that the proposed policy allow eight weeks of leave per student, per child, with scholarships continuing to pay. Philip said the wording of the policy will be amended to reflect these terms. Jenny noted the policy is cost-neutral except in the rare cases where a PI has two students in a lab and both take leaves. Philip asked committee members to take this policy to their Deans and ask for creative funding ideas, particularly for the bursary. Jamie indicated

the GSS would look into the creation of a bursary for graduate students at the request of FoGS (letter format). Susan reminded the committee that the policy itself does not require any money.

Andrew commented that if the GSS could pass a referendum for students to pay \$5 each to fund a bursary for GRAs it would come to \$50,000—but couldn't guarantee the referendum would pass. GSS would need more than lukewarm support from FoGS and the Deans to hold a referendum. Jamie noted a public referendum may attract negative attention to the policy.

4. New Business

a. Leave of Absence

- **Categories: Add “Creative/Professional Development”?**
- **Minimum Duration: Allow less than one full term?**
- **Maximum Duration: Are current ceilings realistic and enforceable?**

Preliminary discussion—net yet a proposal. Jenny discussed the highlights:

1. **Partial-term leaves** – For graduate students not engaged in course work, the academic Calendar means very little. Sometime these students need to take a leave that isn't a full term, or crosses over between two terms, and right now the only option students have is to take a full term whether or not that corresponds to what they need. The FoGS database will only allow for a full term and Jenny is not optimistic systems can be changed. She indicated she is willing to go to the registrar to see if SISC can be structured to allow for month-to-month leaves and month-to-month tuition payments.

Comments: Jamie said GSS is in generally in favour but he had questions about students with internships (because of deadlines). Jenny said the internship issue is separate from partial-term leave but will take the next step to ask about it if the Grad Policy Committee supports his doing so. Philip suggested a minimum duration of 4 weeks for a partial-term leave. Jenny said partial-term absences are common for students with medical issues. Curtis raised the question of what happens to students' privileges when they take a partial-term leave (library access in particular). Jenny said she is working with the library.

2. **Duration of leaves** – Current policy on duration of leaves is unclear but FoGS is working with University Counsel to ensure the wording is correct. Jenny raised another issue she is investigating—what is the University's obligation to provide leave to students with medical issues? There are some students with over 3 years of medical leave. There may come a time where a student's coursework becomes outdated. University Counsel's sense is that the BC Human Rights legislation requires the University to continue to provide medical leave as an accommodation of disability unless there are reasons why doing so would compromise the academic integrity of the degree. FoGS is continuing to work with University Counsel on what kind of wording makes sense—we may still want to say that medical leave is normally limited to 12 months but may be extended in certain circumstances.

Comments: Jamie expressed concern about integrity of degrees. He wondered if it's fair/realistic for students to jump back into work after their leaves, particularly in areas where

things change quickly (like science). Jenny responded—when FoGS grants a leave they are saying that students are entitled to come back and continue in their degree program. There is no policy mechanism to say courses are too old. Curtis noted that normally students must a meet “satisfactory progress” clause when returning from a leave. Philip said leaves should not total more than one year. Jenny responded—that is the case except when the University is obligated to accommodate students with disabilities. Jenny commented that a supervisor may have to cut ties with a student who has taken multiple leaves of absence. The committee discussed cases where a supervisor may have to hire someone else if a student’s leave it too long. Jenny said the committee has to come up with wording around criteria for leaves longer than one year, and will bring back proposed wording to committee.

3. Creative/Professional leaves – Request from colleagues in the Arts faculty to create a new type of leave of absence—something that isn’t directly related to student’s academic work, but is an opportunity they want to take advantage of. Seen as a potentially less stigmatized type of leave.

Comments: FoGS has no problems with adding this category. Philip said FoGS would need to see documentation from the grad advisor and/or supervisor endorsing the student’s request. Leaves should “normally” be limited to 12 months. Douglas noted that students already take leaves like this under the “personal” category and that it may be worthwhile to include this type of leave in an existing category.

4. Returning from medical leave – Right now when FoGS grants medical leave they don’t require students to show any documentation that they’re ready to return. Jenny wants to investigate with Legal Counsel whether FoGS has the right to get medical clearance from students who have been given a medical leave before allowing them to return to study.

b. Comprehensive Exams – General Discussion

As the meeting time ran out this item was not discussed.

5. Adjournment of the meeting

<i>Doug Harris</i> <i>Cindy Prescott</i>	}	To adjourn the meeting.
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Carried.

6. Next meeting: January 17, 2012