

**Meeting of the GC Academic Policy Committee
Tuesday, April 14th 2015, 12:30pm–1:50pm**

Room 200, Graduate Student Centre, 6371 Crescent Road

Present: Brian Bemmels, Ljiljana Biukovic, Barbara Conway, Beth Haverkamp, Jenny Phelps, Susan Porter, Daniel Fritz (minutes), Cindy Prescott, Max Read, Larry Walker (Chair), Daniel Weary

Regrets: Mike Richards, Don Mavinic, Gail Murphy, and Clive Roberts

Absent: Colúm Connolly, Daniel Wood

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 10 February 2015*

<i>All</i>	}	<i>That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2015 be approved.</i>
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Carried

4) Chair's Remarks

Larry provided a brief update on the Public Scholar Initiative. The Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies held a workshop on March 30, 2015 that had outstanding attendance. It is clear that there is a great deal of interest in the Public Scholar Initiative.

5) Business Arising from the Minutes

a) uptake on parental accommodation policy

In 2013-2014, twelve students took advantage of the parental accommodation policy. Even for the first year of the program, this is a relatively low number of participants. Susan asked if RA- and TA-ship would be affected by the accommodation. Larry noted that the RA- and TA-ships would not be affected by the parental accommodation policy as the students who are taking advantage of this policy are still registered in their programs.

b) referral of issue of paid maternity leave to Scholarships Committee

There had been some discussion in the previous meeting about providing a stipend to students who are on maternity leave. This issue has been referred to Associate Dean Janice Eng and the Scholarships Committee for review.

6) New Business

a) Proposal for clarification of **pass standing**

- There is a phrase in the policy that is creating confusion as it has multiple meanings in different contexts. Ultimately, the Policy Committee is trying to clear up what is meant by an “excessive number” of pass standing grades which is used as the grounds for requiring a student to withdraw from their program.
- The other issue with the current wording is that students were achieving pass grades, but programs were requiring grades higher than 60% in some courses for a pass (e.g. Landscape Architecture core courses require a grade of 68% or higher to pass).

- The General University Policy section of the Academic Calendar currently states:

“For master’s students registered in the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, Fail (F) for individual courses is defined as below 60%.... However, only 6 credits of pass standing (60-67%) may be counted toward a master’s program. For all other courses, a minimum of 68% must be obtained. Some graduate programs may require a higher passing grade for specific courses.”

Recommendation- Change the policy to state:

“For master’s students registered in the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, Fail (F) for individual courses is defined as below 60%.... However, only 6 credits of courses with grades in the C to C+ range (60-67%) may be counted toward a master’s program. For all other courses, a minimum of 68% must be obtained. Some graduate programs may require a higher passing grade for specific courses.”

- The Grad Studies section of the Academic Calendar currently states:

“A minimum of 60% must be obtained in any course taken by a student enrolled in a master’s program for the student to be granted pass standing. However, only 6 credits of pass standing may be counted toward a master’s program. For all other courses, a minimum of 68% must be obtained.

Where a grade of less than 60% (C) is obtained in a course, and on the recommendation of the graduate program and the approval of the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, the student may repeat a course for higher standing or take an alternate course. If the graduate program does not make such a recommendation, or if the recommendation is not approved by the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, the student will be required to withdraw. A student who obtains a grade of less than 68% in an excessive number of courses will normally be required to withdraw. The student

will be informed of unsatisfactory academic progress in writing before any action regarding withdrawal is taken.”

Recommendation- Change the policy to state:

“The minimum passing grade in any course taken by a student enrolled in a master’s program is 60%. However, only 6 credits of courses with grades in the C to C+ range (60-67%) may be counted toward a master’s program. For all other courses, a minimum of 68% must be obtained. Some graduate programs may require a higher passing grade for specific courses.

Where a failing grade is obtained in a course, and on the recommendation of the graduate program and the approval of the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, the student may repeat a course for higher standing or take an alternate course. If the graduate program does not make such a recommendation, or if the recommendation is not approved by the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, the student will be required to withdraw. A student who obtains a grade of less than 68% in more than 6 credits may be required to withdraw for inadequate academic progress. The student will be informed of unsatisfactory academic progress in writing before any action regarding withdrawal is taken.”

- Discussion from the Committee followed:
 - Jenny asked: if a student takes a 6-credit course and fails, then retakes the course and receives a passing grade, then takes a different 3-credit course and fails, does the student have 6 or 9 credits of failed courses?
 - Larry noted that both courses would be included on the transcript.
 - Brian asked if stronger language should be used in place of “may be required.” The use of “may” (underlined in the above excerpt from the Academic Calendar) still seems a bit ambiguous to the students. It was suggested to change “may” to “will normally.”
 - Ljiljana made the suggestion that stronger language could be included in each individual program’s Calendar language. The revised Calendar language (as recommended) allows for programs to include stronger language or standards.
 - Cindy also provided strong support for including the language of “will normally” as it allows more power for programs to require students to withdraw from their program.
 - Jenny noted that she preferred the proposed wording as it currently stands because it is more neutral, and allows for programs to make their own decisions in relation to the policy.
 - Beth stated that the policy appears to be similar to the policy for special admit students in the Faculty of Education, where a special case needs to be made for a student to be admitted to a program. Similarly, if a student has more than 6

credits of fail grades, the program would need to make a case for the student to be required to withdraw from their program. Moreover, she hopes that the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies would defer to the program to make the request and the ultimate decision in requiring a student to withdraw from their program.

- Jenny stated that the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies contacts programs when they have a student who has a failing grade. From that point, G+PS works with the program to resolve the issue of the failing grade. The programs are responsible for identifying when a student has an excessive number of pass-standing grades.
- Jenny suggested that the proposed language (will normally) might be a bit too severe because (with the updated language) the policy essentially states that students who have more than two courses with a grade of C will normally be required to withdraw.
 - Cindy noted that the new policy language may not be too severe because graduate students should not receive multiple grades at or below the 60-67% range.
- It was observed that the inclusion of the “6 credits” wording adds some clarity to the policy that would be useful for supervisors. Adding more specific language provides some useful guidance for supervisors when making the decision to ask a student to withdraw from their program.
- Jenny stated that, as it is the program’s responsibility to track pass-standing grades, G+PS does not track student with grades between 60-67%, only those below 60%. Therefore, the wording that students “will normally be required to withdraw” is not necessarily accurate.
- Jenny also stated that most of the cases that appear before G+PS (for requiring a student to withdraw from their program) are from professional master’s programs.
- Daniel Weary recommended that, instead of stating the maximum number of credits at pass-standing, perhaps the policy could indicate the maximum percentage of total course credits at pass-standing.
 - Larry noted that changing the policy to refer to the percentage of total course credits is especially problematic because there is a wide range of differences in total course credits between graduate programs.
- **Amendment to the proposed policy wording:** Change “may” to “will normally” in the third sentence of the second paragraph of the proposed language above (underlined for clarity).

<i>Dan Weary</i>	}	<i>Update Pass standing policy wording as proposed, and include the amendment to change “may” to “will normally.”</i>
<i>Beth Haverkamp</i>		

Carried

b) Review of leaves of absence policy (V-302.1)

- The Leaves of Absence policy is a Senate policy that requires review 2 years after initial approval. The policy is currently scheduled to be reviewed which is an opportune time to revise some of the issues that have become apparent.
- There are five types of leaves detailed in the current Leave of Absence Policy:
 - Parental, Medical, Professional, Personal, or Concurrent (for undertaking a second program of study)
- The basic policies of all leaves are that:
 - Leaves generally begin at the start of the term for a period of 4, 8, or 12 months
 - Leaves are normally limited to 12 months (except for concurrent program leaves)
 - Students in course/credit-fee (non-installment) programs are not eligible for leaves
 - There is an “on-leave” fee paid by students while they are taking away from their program of study. There is also a difference in the on-leave fee for domestic and international students (the fee is higher for international students).
- For some perspective on UBC’s Leave of Absence policy, the Committee reviewed comparative Canadian University’s Policies (“U13” Universities- that is, the U15 Universities not including the two Francophone Universities):
 - Most other Canadian Universities have Compassionate Leave, while UBC does not.
 - Parental and Medical leave are available from all of the U13 Universities.
 - Less than half of other Canadian Universities allow for professional leave.
 - UBC is the only University that officially allows for a concurrent registration leave.
 - Personal leave is only allowed by UBC, Manitoba, and McMaster.
 - UBC is far more lenient than the other universities in this category. UBC appears to be the only University to offer students the ability to take personal leave without providing any documentation.
 - Compassionate leave is offered by more than half of the other U13 universities. Compassionate leave is similar to what UBC calls Personal leave.
- For further reference, the Committee reviewed the data from the 2013-14 Academic year at UBC:
 - There were 906 terms of leave taken in the 2013-14 academic year.
 - Domestic students take more leaves than international students.
 - Leaves are more common in the Summer than in the Fall and Winter terms.
 - Leaves are slightly more common at the doctoral level
 - Of all of the leaves taken in 2013-14, over half were under the “Personal” category.
 - Very few students use the Concurrent leave category.
- Based on the data reviewed, the question was posed: “Do we need a Concurrent Registration leave?”
 - Of the 13 students on Concurrent leave in 2013-14:
 - 4 withdrew from or abandoned their program
 - 2 were attempting to finish their previous degree
 - 4 started a different program
 - 3 were medical resident students who were enrolled in other Faculty of Medicine programs
- It is important to note that, in 2013-14, over half of the graduate programs at UBC did not have students on “on leave” status.

- The Master of Engineering program has a high percentage of leaves from students who do not have courses/co-ops/internships/etc. during the summer term. It is less expensive for students in the MEng program to pay the “on leave” fee than it is to pay the standard tuition/student fees.
 - For comparison, MASc students took very few leaves in the same time frame. Note, the MASc students are generally enrolled in many of the same courses.

- **Recommendations:**
 - Better define Professional leaves: There should be a better definition of relevant work or professional development experience (i.e. experience doesn’t need to be paid).
 - Replace Personal leave with “Compassionate” leave, and request documentation for the leave.

- Discussion from the Committee followed:
 - Jenny asked what does documentation mean? Does the student need to explain their leave or is official documentation (doctor’s note) required?
 - The policy will be left open-ended purposely to allow for many different forms of documentation (i.e. doctor’s note, proof of bereavement, proof of serving as a primary caregiver, memo written by the student, etc.).
 - Susan asked: What is wrong with the current Personal leave policy?
 - The major issue appears to be that Personal leaves do not require documentation, and requiring documentation will raise the bar for those requesting leave. Students will be forced to consider or even have a discussion with their supervisor on why they need to take a leave of absence.
 - Dan Weary asked if the policy affected all graduate students.
 - Any changes to the policy will apply to all graduate students at UBC (including MEng students, who are not administered by G+PS). But, the Faculty of Applied Science administers the leave process for MEng students and their other professional master’s programs, so the Faculty of Applied Science staff would be able to grant leaves as they see fit.
 - Susan asked: What if a student “needs a break” from their program?
 - It was suggested that the student should have to make the case for needing to take a leave. The staff at UBC should be compassionate in their discussion with the student needing a break and grant a leave of absence as necessary.
 - Dan Weary noted that giving students a break from their program can be an effective tool for helping them complete.
 - Dan Weary also identified that the needs for professional programs are far different from the needs for research-based programs. This makes a discussion of policy changes for all programs difficult.
 - Jenny stated that changing the name of the leave to “Compassionate” may not accurately reflect the reason for the leave.
 - There was strong support from the Committee members for students to provide documentation for taking a personal leave.
 - The implementation of this policy change (i.e. requiring documentation for a personal leave) means that somebody at G+PS will need to review the

documentation and determine whether it is valid. This may be problematic for the administrative staff at G+PS.

- There was strong support from the Committee to keep the category of the leave titled as “Personal.”
- **Amendment to the proposed policy wording:** Do not change the title of “Personal” leave to “Compassionate” leave.

All	}	<i>Change Professional leaves to include a better definition of relevant work or professional development experience.</i> <i>Require documentation for students who are requesting a Personal leave.</i>
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Carried

7) Forthcoming agenda items

a) Review of requirements for fast-track and direct-entry into doctoral programs

There have been requests for the Policy Committee to review the requirements for the fast-track and direct-entry into doctoral programs. The discussion of this topic will most likely occur at the next Policy Committee meeting.

b) Discussion of the issue of laddering of credentials

There has also been a request to discuss how diplomas and credentials can be used as a ladder into more formal degree programs.

c) BArch re-credentialing into March

The School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture has requested that the Policy Committee review the re-credentialing of old Bachelor of Architecture degrees into Master of Architecture degrees. This issue was discussed by the Policy Committee some time ago (3-5 years ago). The Policy Committee noted some specific issues at the time, and it is unclear as to whether SALA has dealt with those issues.

8) Adjournment

All	}	<i>That the meeting be adjourned.</i>
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Carried

*Minutes of previous meetings are available here:

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