

**Meeting of the GC Policy Committee**  
Tuesday, January 17, 2012; 12:00 pm – 2:00 pm  
Graduate Students Centre, Room 200

**Present:** Douglas Harris, Lisa Pountney (minutes), Philip Loewen (Chair), Jamie Paris, Andrew Patterson, Jenny Phelps, Susan Porter, Max Read, Curtis Suttle, Beth Haverkamp

**Guests:** Wayne Riggs, Shelley Small

**Regrets:** Akram Alfantazi, Daniel Granot, Darrin Lehman, Peter Leung, Cindy Prescott, Clive Roberts, Brent Skura, Kishor Wasan

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**1. Adoption of Agenda**

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

**2. Minutes of last meeting (November 29, 2011)**

<i>All</i>	}	<i>That the minutes of the November 29, 2011 meeting be approved.</i>
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*Carried.*

**3. Business arising**

Philip briefly updated the committee on the Doc Exams reforms that came about from the last few meetings of Grad Council. The new policy, resulting in a review by the Dean of FoGS when the examining committee has two or more dissenters, has been put in place and took effect on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012.

Additionally, we have also informed graduate programs and students about Turnitin and the related University policies.

**a. B Arch to M Arch degree name change**

Philip informed the group that this item is still on the back burner.

**b. Parental Accommodation Policy**

- **Reports from the Faculties**

- **Academic aspects**
- **Financial considerations**

Philip spoke to the committee about the proposed Graduate Parental Accommodation Policy, and some key changes that were made in response to the discussions at the last Policy meeting. The proposed amendments to the text were as follows:

- *Students who are approved for Parental Accommodation will be granted an “Accommodation Period” of up to eight consecutive weeks surrounding, starting within eight weeks of the (expected or actual) date of childbirth or adoption.*
- *Students granted an Accommodation Period who are supported by a Research Assistantship will be excused from regular duties for a period up to eight weeks. without loss of The Faculty of Graduate Studies expects their RA financial support to be maintained, with no change in value, throughout this period. ~~The~~ Such students may choose to continue their duties in a modified capacity but are not required to do so.*

Philip led the group through these changes, asked the committee if they had received any feedback from their respective Deans and then opened the floor for contributions.

Lengthy discussion from the committee ensued. Key points to note were as follows:

- Professors Suttle (Science) and Riggs (Pharmaceutical Sciences) expressed that their Deans were mostly supportive, and thought this already happened in the majority of cases. Curtis commented that a lot of the time it comes down to the individual supervisor.
- Philip read out an email from Professor Lehman (Arts), which included the consideration of the extra funding that would be needed to replace TAs for an 8 week period. Philip commented that TAs are in a separate category as they are part of a union and there is some form of relief there.
- There was general discussion around funding implications from NSERC, SSHRC and CIHR. NSERC has some maternity funding, but it is believed that SSHRC doesn't include this type of funding.

***Action:** investigate and confirm understanding of parental funding from NSERC, SSHRC and CIHR.*

- Discussion about the implications around replacing an RA for 8 weeks, including funding, and finding students willing to take on such short term positions.
- Concerns around additional funding needed to replace RAs coming out of the graduate student pot.
- The levels of RA salaries in different Faculties and the resulting implications would need to be built into any possible funding model.
- Jenny reiterated that this is more for students on scholarships. The only option they have right now is to not take a leave, so that they can continue to receive funding. Or, they can take a leave and have their funding suspended until they return. The understanding is that most supervisors do accommodate parental leave, but this is a policy that will set the expectation and ensure that this happens.

- There is not sufficient flexibility in our current leave policy to give students room to negotiate the time they really need.
- The GSS is very supportive of this policy, and would like to see it move ahead. They think it should be centrally funded, and would like a robust policy that can relieve the anxiety of graduate students.
- Concerns were expressed around having a centrally funded policy that is not available to all graduate students.
- The committee was generally supportive of the idea that students should not be financially penalized if they take 8 weeks leave; however there were concerns around how to communicate and implement this.
- Questions around the human resources/employment regulations for maternity benefits for Research Assistantships were raised, and the committee agreed we need more information on this.
- Discussion around determining under what conditions RA funding can be stopped.
- Jurisdictional issues and considerations were discussed, and the need for more data was apparent.

Philip tabled the discussion in order to allow time for further investigation, and will report back to the committee at the next meeting.

***Actions:***

- *FoGS to investigate human resources/employment standards and regulations for Research Assistantships.*
- *FoGS to establish whether there is already an institutional expectation of continuing RA support for students taking maternity/parental leave.*

**c. Leave of Absence**

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

Jenny presented the work she has been doing on the Leave of Absence policy to the committee.

The GSS requested that FoGS look into leaves whose duration is less than a full academic term. Current policy and administrative systems require that leaves of absence be granted in correspondence with standard academic terms. This poses a problem when graduate students who are not engaged in coursework require a leave from study that does not correspond with an academic term.

The main barrier to having partial term leaves has to do with our student systems, and their inability to designate students with “registered” status and “on leave” status during the same term. Jenny met with the technical staff in Enrolment Services to find out whether it’s a possibility and the result of that was to do a further consultation on what it would take to reprogram our student information database to allow for this capability. There is an established process for putting in a project request, and Jenny will be meeting with the person who facilitates that process. There will then be a scoping exercise to determine the size and scale of the project, and following this it will fall into a line of other projects that are all prioritized by a governing body in terms of the importance to the university.

Jenny will report back once we know more about the technical requirements and scale of the project.

On the topic of duration of leaves, Jenny reported that with regard to medical leave, our current policy is limited to 12 months, and we have recently learned from UBC legal that this does not comply with human rights legislation. Students with ongoing medical disabilities may require an accommodation that includes additional terms of leaves of absence. As a result we have changed the proposed wording and this type of leave to accommodate this.

We also touched on the development of a creative/professional leave at the last meeting. This would recognize a student taking leave from their studies to take advantage of a professional opportunity or to have some sort of creative sabbatical.

Jenny then presented the proposed new calendar entry to the committee and invited discussion. Points to note included:

- The issue of access to the library while a student is on leave was raised. This is in the library's hands right now – they were supposed to develop a system that would identify students on leave and allow them to have library access.
- Discussion around a student making academic progress while on a leave, and how this could possibly be tracked? The question of whether students should be making academic progress or meeting with supervisors while on leaves was discussed.
- It appears that some students take leaves so that they don't have to pay tuition, but still continue to work and make academic progress.
- The cost of a degree and how the payments are split up was discussed.
- Medical leave can last longer than one year, but a leave will normally begin on the first day of a term of 4, 8 or 12 months. Students need to apply for extensions if they want to go over 12 months.
- UBC Legal has advised us that we can't cap medical leave; however at some point the program requirements may need to be reconsidered, as previous work may become obsolete.
- Discussion on when course work can be deemed as obsolete. Our guidelines on this currently mimic our transfer of credits deadline of 5 years. *The Policy committee could look into defining this in the future.*
- There was lengthy discussion on the length and stacking of leaves, and whether limitations can be enforced. Currently our policy is silent on the issue of stacking leaves.
- We need an affirmative statement that shows that the consideration of leave is made in the best interests of the student.
- How do we protect the student, supervisors and programs? Concerns around students who are taking extended leaves, so that they don't have to give up their spot to another student.

*Jenny Phelps  
Doug Harris*

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*That the proposed calendar entry on Leaves of  
Absence be approved for submission to  
Graduate Council.*

Further discussion on the motion from the committee followed:

- The issue of access to the library needs to be resolved, and the total duration of leaves and question of re-admission needs to be clarified.

