

Meeting of the GC Academic Policy Committee
Wednesday, November 13, 2013; 12:30 pm – 1:50 pm
Graduate Student Centre, Room 200

Present: Colúm Connolly, Douglas Harris, Beth Haverkamp, Peter Leung, Susan Porter, Cindy Prescott, Max Read, Larry Walker (Chair), Lisa Blomfield (minutes)

Guests: Brian Cairns (for Kishor Wasan)

Regrets: Gail Murphy, Jenny Phelps, Michael Richards, Clive Roberts, Kishor Wasan

Absent: Akram Alfantazi, Brian Bemmels, Marina von Keyserlingk, Daniel Weary

1. Introductions and regrets

2. Adoption of the agenda

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

3. Minutes of the last meeting (October 9, 2013)

All	}	<i>That the minutes of the meeting held October 9, 2013 be approved.</i>
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Carried.

4. Chair's remarks

Negative external examiner reports: Larry alerted the committee to the excessive number of negative external examiner reports that have occurred lately. There have been 5 within the last month, which is approximately half of what we usually get in a year. Larry has spoken with the external examiners and in each case they have identified substantial problems with the dissertation. One factor that seems to be causing difficulties is that often the expression of ideas and use of the English language is not what it should be. In these situations external examiners tend to wonder how carefully the student has been supervised and how much editing has gone into the product. We are hopeful this is just an anomaly.

Action: Larry will report back on the full term at the next meeting.

Doug raised an example of a situation where a student is insisting that their dissertation go to an external examiner over a committee's objection. Larry commented that technically the dissertation cannot go to the external examiner until it has the approval of the supervisory committee. There is no capacity where a student can insist on this; however the committee recognised that these situations can be complicated.

Challenges with the appointment of university examiners for doctoral exams: In particular the requirement that one of the two university examiners be outside of the program that the student and supervisor are in, and at arm's length. Larry believes this is a good policy, and allows for broader scrutiny of the work being done. Unfortunately some of our colleagues do not agree with this policy and would like examiners who are solely in-house to review dissertations, and have been known to nominate people who are not at arm's length. We continue to resist this and stand by the principle that students should be able to communicate the significance of their research to a broader audience.

Clarifying the appointment of non-members of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies to supervise students or serve on supervisory committees: This can be a headache for staff, especially when students are advanced to candidacy (or reach the defense stage) and we discover that not all of their supervisory committee members are members of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. We are attempting to soften the wording we have on this topic so that it is not so heavy-handed and more welcoming of supervision by experts.

5. Motion to approve: Candidates for Degrees

Doug/Cindy	}	<i>That the candidates for degrees be approved and forwarded to Senate for approval, and that the Dean, in consultation with the Registrar, be empowered to make any necessary adjustments.</i>
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Carried.

6. From October 2013: Business arising/updates

a. Visiting International Research Students (VIRS)

Jenny reported on this at our last meeting. This policy has been through the Committee of Deans, the Executive and the Senate Academic Policy Committee and is currently within the hands of central administration. There is nothing further to add at this time.

b. Minimum residency requirement

Max has been working on renaming the calendar section which is currently titled “*Duration of Program*” to “*Residency Requirements and Program Duration*”. This change will be made at the next calendar publishing.

c. Prohibition on supplemental examinations in graduate programs ([Supplemental Examination Policy](#) from UBC Calendar)

Larry has been working on this issue, but requires more input from the department that initiated this conversation as to why they want the prohibition on supplemental examinations lifted. As of yet we have not heard back from them so will give them until our next meeting to produce a more thorough rationale.

Larry did touch base with Paul Harrison, Chair of the Senate Academic Policy Committee, and Stephanie Oldford, Academic Governance Officer, regarding this policy and essentially supplemental exams are something of an anachronism. Stephanie determined that across the entire university last year there were only 80 that occurred.

Action: Larry will report back once we have more information on the reason behind the request to lift the prohibition on supplemental examinations.

Doug raised the discrepancy between undergraduate students (who are allowed to sit supplemental exams) and graduate students (for whom supplemental exams are prohibited). Perhaps, if we intend to uphold this policy, we need to create a rationale for why graduate students cannot sit supplemental exams.

Discussion points were as follows:

- Larry commented that, in fact, the largest faculties on campus do not allow supplemental exams at any level. We see supplemental exams permitted in what tends to be demonstrated competency courses. They are more likely to occur in professional schools.
- What we need is someone to make the case for why our current policy isn't working. We do allow students to retake the course.
- Doug asked why, when a student is required to retake a course, the grade threshold is higher than when they first took the course? Doug would be in favour of abolishing the rule pertaining to the higher grade requirement, however it would be extremely complicated, and perhaps isn't enough of a priority at this time.
- Colúm commented that the GSS doesn't get many complaints about this issue.

7. Business Arising

a. Continuous registration policy

We touched on the continuous registration policy at our last meeting, and what we realised is that this was a reflection of a tuition model that is controlled by central administration. For this reason, we hope to get this on the agenda of the registrar in order to explore alternatives.

With regard to requiring course-based master's students to be continuously registered, the solution we have is that students in course-based programs who are not taking courses can apply for professional leaves of absence, which essentially stops the clock and decreases their fees.

There was discussion around the difference between a course-based fee and a program fee, and the terms to which they apply. For research-based degrees continuous registration is appropriate.

8. New Business

a. English proficiency requirements from international universities with some instruction in English

This issue was raised by Julian Dierkes from the Institute of Asian Research. They have had students from universities that teach primarily in a foreign language, but do have one or more programs taught in English. What they have discovered, however, is that the English language skills of these students are not as strong as they hoped, despite having gone through courses taught in English elsewhere.

The department is not unhappy with our policy, and there is no policy change needed. Students from these universities still have to submit a TOEFL (or similar English proficiency) score, and it is up to programs whether they want to require higher TOEFL scores than our minimum stated in the Calendar.

However, upon investigating this issue, we discovered that our calendar entry specified different English language requirements for Master's and Doctoral degrees. This was an oversight and will be corrected so that the requirements are the same.

b. Calendar entry clarifying % of undergraduate courses allowed to count towards master's degree

We have a curriculum proposal that required a couple of clarifications to the calendar entry. This proposal is 3 years old and was approved by our curriculum committee at that time, but for some reason never appeared in the Calendar.

After speaking with representatives from the Senate Governance Committee, it appears that this needs to be approved by the Graduate Academic Policy Committee, and then by the Senate Academic Policy Committee.

The clarifications are related to undergraduate courses that can be credited towards a graduate degree. It has now been made clear that:

Undergraduate courses numbered 300 to 499 may account for no more than 20% of the course credit requirement.

Courses numbered 100 to 299 and courses taken through Continuing Studies may not be counted towards the requirements of a master's degree program.

Beth moved that the committee approve the revised curriculum proposal.

<i>Beth/Doug</i> }	<i>That the committee approve the revised curriculum proposal clarifying the percentage of undergraduate courses that are allowed to count towards a master's degree.</i>
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Carried.

c. SCARP PhDs teaching master's courses

We have received a proposal from the School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP) with regard to allowing their PhD candidates to teach Master's-level courses. Currently, the BOG Policy 75 allows graduate students to teach undergraduate courses (and not graduate-level courses); however exceptions may be granted at the discretion of the Dean.

As background, Larry informed the committee that since 2007 we have had an agreement with the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies (SLAIS) to permit their PhD candidates to teach master's students in a different stream. These are situations where there are no undergraduate programs, where they routinely have to hire external people who are less qualified than their own students, and where their students don't have the opportunity to teach very often. The SLAIS agreement has worked well for the last 6-7 years and allows us to maintain integrity in graduate teaching.

The proposal we've received from SCARP mimics our agreement with SLAIS. They will still have to seek approval from the Faculty of Graduate and Doctoral Studies on an individual basis, and meet the usual conditions.

Larry reminded the committee that this is not a policy we need to vote on, this is an exception that will be made at the discretion of the Dean, and this proposal forms the framework and outline of criteria we will use to make the exception.

The committee is in agreement with the precedent being set.

9. Forthcoming/proposed agenda items

a. Restructuring of Graduate Council

There are many implications to be discussed on this topic at our next meeting.

b. Plagiarism and scholarly misconduct processes

The new Policy 85 has created some complications. This has come about due to the new procedures that the Tri-Council agencies have implemented with regard to investigating research misconduct, which were included in the revised Policy 85 this past spring. It has taken UBC some time to get up to speed with implementing the changes in procedure, which includes having an external representative sit on the investigative committee, and has implications for the way we word our policies for handling these complex and difficult situations.

More straightforward plagiarism still goes through the President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline. Discussion to be continued.

c. Thesis embargo policy

The Tri-Council agencies are floating a new open access policy, which has implications for thesis embargo. Discussion to be continued.

10. Adjournment

<i>All</i>	}	To adjourn the meeting.
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Carried.

11. Next meeting: Wednesday, January 15, 2013