

**MINUTES OF THE 322<sup>ND</sup> GRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING  
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME  
OCTOBER 27, 2010**

**Members present:** Greg Sterling, Panos Antsaklis, Bob Bernhard, Phil Bess, Sunny Boyd, Julia Braungart-Rieker, Paolo Carozza (for Dean Nell Newton), Greg Crawford, Bill Evans, Steve Fallon, Jeremy Fein, Patrick Flynn, Umesh Garg, Peter Kilpatrick, Dan Myers (for Dean John McGreevy), Gerald McKenny, Susan Ohmer, Kasey Swanke, Rich Taylor, Victoria Froude

**Graduate School representatives present:** Brian Flaherty, Ed Maginn, Nyrée McDonald, Barbara Turpin

**Members excused:** David Campbell, Laura Carlson, Dennis Doordan, Jennifer DuBois, Susan Harris, Carolyn Woo

**Reporter:** Mary Hendriksen

Dean Sterling welcomed members to the second meeting of the 2010-2011 academic year. He took up the agenda items as follows:

**1. Minutes of the meeting of September 9, 2010:** The minutes of the Graduate Council meeting of September 9, 2010, were approved as presented.

**2. Proposed *Bulletin* change regarding course numbering:** Dr. Turpin explained that the Registrar's overhaul of the University's course numbering pattern a few years ago make necessary corresponding changes in the Graduate School's directives on course numbering. [The current *Bulletin* provisions are available at <http://graduateschool.nd.edu/assets/29023/bulletin.1011.pdf>, pp. 15 and 17.] [The Registrar's guidelines are available at [http://registrar.nd.edu/course\\_renumbering.shtml](http://registrar.nd.edu/course_renumbering.shtml)] Several changes were discussed with DGSs at their October meeting, with some DGSs offering suggestions as well on appropriate parameters regarding undergraduates' access to graduate courses.

When the proposed amendments were presented to the Graduate Council, several members objected to language that seemed to deny access altogether to undergraduates. Prof. Garg and Dean Crawford both noted that in some departments, undergraduates who meet the prerequisites for certain graduate-level courses are encouraged, or even required, to enroll in them. Dean Sterling pointed out that it is perfectly acceptable for courses to be cross-listed as both 40000- or 50000-level courses *and* 60000-level courses. Instructors in such courses should require more work of the graduate students. Several members of the Council indicated that it was routine for undergraduate students to take some graduate courses at the graduate level. Dean Sterling indicated that the intent was not to exclude undergraduates as much as it was to clarify the relative levels.

Further discussion focused on whether courses below the typical entry-level graduate course number—60000—can or should be counted towards a student's GPA. Dean Sterling said that while a program may choose not to count courses lower than 60000 for program requirements, the purpose of the proposed revisions are to make clear that such courses *will* appear on the student's transcript and be counted when calculating the GPA. Dean Sterling explained that the context of the provision is that some graduate students on the border of a 3.0 GPA have taken an undergraduate course unrelated to their major to raise their GPA.

After extended discussion, members voted unanimously, with one abstention, to amend the current *Bulletin* provisions as follows:

[p. 15] *Courses numbered 60000 and above are typically taken by graduate students.*

*Qualified advanced undergraduates may be admitted to these classes with the permission of the instructor and the approval of the chair. Courses numbered 70000 and above are advanced graduate courses open only to students who have completed the prerequisites.*

*The advanced undergraduate courses numbered 40000 – 59999 may, with the approval of the department chair and the Graduate School, be taken to satisfy up to 10 hours of graduate credit requirements. Grades in these courses will count towards the student's GPA. Departments may place additional constraints on the use of 40000 – 59999-level courses to meet their degree requirements. No graduate credit is allowed for courses below the 40000 level.*

[p.17] *Quality point values are used to compute the student's GPA. The GPA is the ratio of accumulated earned quality points to the accumulated earned semester credit hours. GPA computation takes into account those grades earned in Notre Dame graduate courses or in 40000-and 50000-level courses by students with graduate status at Notre Dame. For courses taken outside the University, the grade will not be included in the GPA computation.*

**3. Report on the National Research Council rankings:** Dean Sterling explained that in September, the National Research Council (NRC) released its long-awaited data-based assessment of research-doctorate programs in the United States. See <http://www.nap.edu/rdp/>. The data, collected for the 2005-2006 academic year from more than 5,000 doctoral programs at 212 universities, for twenty-one variables. In addition to the data, the report contains two ranges of rankings for each program, as well as ranges of rankings for three dimensions of program quality: research activity, student support and outcomes, and diversity of the academic environment.

A powerpoint presentation of Dean Sterling's remarks is attached. It covers methodology, an overview of results, and how the data might be used internally. In the course of his presentation, Dean Sterling observed that because the data points are from five years ago, programs might have very different rankings if the same analyses were to

be performed today. A good example might be Psychology, which has recently hired a significant number of new faculty members.

Focusing on how the data might be used internally, Dean Sterling outlined three possible benchmarking approaches:

- All programs (212 universities)
- U.S. members of the Association of American Universities (AAU) (61 universities)
- AAU private universities (26 universities)

Dean Sterling said that the most valuable aspect of the rankings is that for the first time we have data to compare individual programs nationally. One approach might be to see how each of our 16 programs fared on each of the 21 variables used in light of the three benchmarks above. The data could be given to each program to work through, with the expectation that they would also explore ways to improve.

Another strategy, he said, might be to create some kind of Web presence for each of our programs that would provide profile information from the data. Prospective students could assess the profiles quickly. Not all DGSs were in favor of a similar idea (one that did not use NRC data but other markers, such as Graduate School applicant and completion data) broached two years ago. DGSs from a few very strong programs feared that the data might discourage some prospective students from applying because their chances would look slim. DGSs from programs not ranked as highly feared that their programs might not appear competitive enough. Dean Sterling said that he would like to lay both fears to rest. First, the data are available from such sites as Ph.D.s.org. Second, the Graduate School already has comparative data for its programs for Princeton, Duke, and Brown. In relation to these highly regarded graduate programs, we do better than most people think. Thus, in his view, the data help rather than hurt programs.

Dean Kilpatrick said that in his college, the composition of the faculty is 50-60% changed from five years ago. Thus, he sees little value in extensive analysis of data that are now five years old. The value in the NRC assessment lies in recognizing what a large number of evaluators say are important variables—publications, awards, etc.—and then using the data internally to evaluate how programs are doing today as opposed to 2005, and also charting where we want to be in 2015.

Dean Crawford asked how programs' rankings correlated generally with their size. In many Science disciplines, there is a strong correlation between a high ranking and a large size.

Dean Kilpatrick said that, with some notable exceptions, it is indisputable that size plays a key role—often indirect and implicit—in rankings. This is clear from the differences in the NRC's "R" and "S" rankings. It would be a huge help to the internal dialogue if programs had available a corollary study of size.

Dean Sterling said that he will investigate performing additional analyses of size—either through absolute numbers, or by comparing the R and the S weights for each program relative to its size. Based only on what he knew about the faculty size of our programs, he pointed out that some programs of the same relative size were ranked differently-- for example, History was ranked similarly to English but was notably smaller in 2005-2006. Political Science was roughly the same size as English and Philosophy but was not as highly ranked.

Prof. Evans suggested that one must control for rankings *within* institutions rather than only between them. Given limited funds, universities will spend more money on their most successful programs. In any individual institution, the larger departments are generally going to be better. Looking only *across* programs is problematical. The better way is to examine programs' relative rankings within an institution.

Dean Sterling asked if Graduate Council members would generally endorse posting data on the Web. As mentioned, much of the data is available at Ph.D. org and other places.

Prof. Myers said he objected. The rankings are fundamentally flawed, and by using them at all, the flaw permeates the whole. In Sociology and Political Science, the rankings are absolutely useless, because they do not count books—which are half of the scholarship. He does not want to perpetuate the flaws by using the data elsewhere.

Dean Sterling said that, to clarify, he does not mean posting the NRC data wholesale. The idea is to post only selected data—not all 21 NRC variables. Sociology, for example, could post data on the number of faculty members' books. The proposed Graduate School webpages could include data on the applicant pool, completion rates, time to degree, number of graduates/year, placement. All these are variables within the NRC already. He questioned the utility of secrecy regarding the data. If we do not like the data out there, we should put up data that is both good and current.

Prof. Taylor said that he would support posting some key statistical quantities that characterize the programs *and* that can be generated by the Graduate School. There would be more chance of buy-in if the data is generated by the Graduate School rather than the department. He cautioned against having too much department-specific data on the Graduate School website, as it is difficult to keep that data current.

Prof. Myers said that metrics might be different for different programs.

Prof. Maginn seconded the view that data on Notre Dame programs are better than many believe. The kind of data Dean Sterling is advocating posting—e.g., applicant numbers, completion rates, GRE scores—are held by the Graduate School. He pointed out that if we do not post our current data then we run the risk of having prospective students find the data where it is available.

Given the lateness of the hour, Dean Sterling deferred discussion of his response to the Grantwriting Committee report.