

## MINUTES OF THE 308<sup>TH</sup> GRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING NOVEMBER 29, 2006

**Present:** Donald Pope-Davis (chair), John Robinson (for Dean Patricia O'Hara), Gretchen Reydams-Schils (for Dean Mark Roche), Joseph Marino, Thomas Fuja, Theodore Cachey, Philip Bess, Igor Veretennikov, Crislyn D'Souza-Schorey, Thomas Slaughter, Sharon Hu, Mark Alber, Robin Darling Young, Graham Hammill, James McAdams, Richard Taylor, Scott Van Jacob, Michael Lundin, Amber Handy

**Graduate School Representatives:** Terry Akai, Michael Edwards, Barbara Turpin

**Absent:** Carolyn Woo, James Merz, Darcia Narvaez, Umesh Garg, Christine Maziar, Jennifer Younger

**Reporter:** Mary Hendriksen

Prof. Pope-Davis called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m.

### I. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 307<sup>TH</sup> GRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING (SEPTEMBER 20, 2006)

Prof. Pope-Davis invited a motion to approve the minutes of the Graduate Council meeting of September 20, 2006. After a motion was made and seconded, members approved the minutes without change.

### II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### A. Inaugural Graduate School Commencement Ceremony

[Beginning with May 2007 commencement, the Graduate School will host its own ceremony for doctoral and master's students. Graduate students will be invited to attend both the Graduate School and the University commencement exercises, but the hooding of Ph.D. recipients and the conferral of non-law and non-business graduate degrees will take place at the Graduate School ceremony, to be held in the Marie P. DeBartolo Center for the Performing Arts on Saturday, May 19, 2007, at 1:00 p.m., the day before the University ceremony.]

At today's meeting, Prof. Pope-Davis distributed a letter from Fr. Jenkins explaining the rationale for the new ceremony—primarily, the desire to create an event that would focus attention on graduate students' unique accomplishments and degrees. With a separate Graduate School ceremony, as is the norm at many peer institutions, all doctoral and master's degree recipients will be recognized in a special way, without the time constraints present in the University-wide ceremony. See: [http://graduateschool.nd.edu/html/graduation/jenkins\\_letter.html](http://graduateschool.nd.edu/html/graduation/jenkins_letter.html). Prof. Pope-Davis noted a few logistical details of the ceremony but noted that such matters as the identity of the speaker and ticket distribution for family members are still to be finalized.

Several members had questions or expressed concerns about the ceremony. Prof. Pope-Davis clarified that while Ph.D. and master's degree recipients will be invited to attend the Sunday ceremony, it has not yet been determined what recognition they will receive at that event. He emphasized that the main event for Graduate School degree recipients will be the Saturday ceremony. There, deans will recognize the students from their colleges and degrees will be conferred. In response to a member's question, Prof. Pope-Davis said it is not true that, with the new commencement ceremony, law and business graduate students will receive greater recognition than Ph.D. and masters'

students. The entire purpose of the event is to recognize the University's doctoral and master's degree students as individuals and to bring them into parity with law and MBA students.

## **B. Division of Graduate Studies and the Office of Research/New Vice President**

Prof. Pope-Davis updated members on the search for a vice president of research. [In September 2006, the Academic Council endorsed the recommendation of Provost Burish to reorganize the central administrative offices of the Graduate School by creating two distinct entities with separate reporting structures: Graduate Studies and the Office of Research. [See *Notre Dame Report*, vol. 36, no. 3, p. 112] The members of the search committee are Profs. Steven Batill (Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering), Neil Delaney (Philosophy), Margaret Dobrowolska-Furdyna (Physics), Maureen Hallinan (Sociology), and Richard Taylor (Chemistry and Biochemistry), as well as Graduate Student Union President Michael Lundin (Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering).

Members posed questions about the reporting structure of institutes and other entities at the University. Prof. Taylor, a member of the search committee, said that details of the organizational plan are not set in stone. Some reporting lines might change as a result of negotiations with candidates for the position of Vice President of Research.

## **C. Metrics of Assessment Initiative**

Prof. Pope-Davis informed members that he has begun discussions with the deans of the colleges on how best to assess the performance of the various colleges and departments, and how to allocate resources to them accordingly. He explained that the metrics initiative is in response to the provost's new emphasis on doctoral programs. Rather than the Graduate School articulating the metrics for the departments, each department is being asked to formulate its own metrics for assessment. These indicators of success and improvement will then be tied to the allocation of new resources. Prof. Pope-Davis noted that the development of the metrics is a year-long process. The process is still in the discussion phase; once the metrics are agreed on, they will be implemented in the University's next budget cycle.

## **D. Establishment of a subcommittee on practice/procedure of oral examinations**

Prof. Pope-Davis announced that in addition to the Graduate Council subcommittee now reviewing the policies and procedures of the Graduate School as embodied in the *Graduate Bulletin* [See minutes of the meeting of September 20, 2006, *Notre Dame Report*, vol. 36, no. 5, p. X], he has constituted a second subcommittee to study practices and procedures for oral examinations and dissertation proposals. Topics will include the proper size of doctoral committees (both exam and defense) and procedures for conducting examinations—for example, whether they can be conducted by conference call. The subcommittee will pay special attention to developing graduate students' capacities for oral expression and debate. Profs. Garg (Physics) and Hammill (English) have agreed to serve on the subcommittee, along with Graduate Student Union Vice President Amber Handy (History). The subcommittee's outside member is Prof. Dawn Gondoli (Psychology).

## **III. UPDATE ON THE PH.D. IN BIOENGINEERING**

This item was deferred to a later meeting.

## **IV. PRELIMINARY REPORT ON GRADUATE STUDENT HEALTH CARE**

Dr. Terry Akai, associate dean of financial resources for Graduate Studies, provided an update on graduate student health insurance: The high cost of graduate students' health insurance premiums has long been an issue at the University—both as a quality-of-life issue for graduate students and the role it plays in making Notre Dame competitive with peer institutions. As an interim solution to the problem, three years ago, the University instituted a subsidy program (now \$350/year for students with full stipends) to help students with the cost of the premium (currently, about \$1350/year) for the University's Mega health insurance. Now, Dean Pope-Davis and Provost Burish have directed that a more long-lasting funding solution must be found as soon as possible.

Dr. Akai noted that the issue of graduate student health care is a very complex problem—Indiana law, federal law, insurance regulations, and the status of students are just a few of the issues that come into play. He explained that a task force was created this fall to work on a definitive solution. [Task force members are Sue Vissage, Graduate Studies business manager; Jill Bodensteiner, associate vice president and counsel; Denise Murphy, director of compensation and benefits; and Sr. Sue Dunn, assistant vice president, Office of Student Affairs.] Meanwhile, for the 2007-08 academic year, the Graduate School will use its own funds to continue the students' subsidy at or above the current level. Also at this time, the Graduate School is directing a very thorough study of other universities' programs and the possibilities available at Notre Dame. A consultant will be brought in soon to help with further study and then to propose potential solutions. Dr. Akai also informed members that the Provost has given the Graduate School \$2 million of last year's Fiesta Bowl earnings to endow a fund for graduate student health insurance—with proceeds estimated to be in the range of \$60,000/year. The current cost of the subsidy is \$400,000/year.

Elaborating on the study of other universities' insurance plans, Dr. Akai reported that there is a wide range of premiums and levels of aid. He noted that some universities may claim that they have "free" health insurance, but in reality, the premium is included in students' stipends.

Prof. Taylor commented that it is only graduate students who receive their stipends from the Graduate School—as distinct from those who are funded from a grant—who are at issue here. Thus, if the Graduate School decides to fund students' health insurance at a level of 100%, that action would result in a substantial "tax" on departments in the Colleges of Science and Engineering, which typically fund their students from grant awards. Prof. Taylor clarified that he is in full support of 100% funding for graduate students' health insurance but believes that such a high level of support would be a hardship for many grant recipients, who have caps on their grants.

Dr. Akai responded that he is well aware of this situation. In fact, the Graduate School has assumed the cost of graduate students' health insurance subsidies when a grant has expired or fallen short of funds.

Prof. Pope-Davis said that the majority of schools do not fund 100% of their students' premiums, and it is unlikely that the University will choose to do so. Health insurance is an enormously expensive proposition for the University. But, given that solving the problem of its high cost is *the* priority of the Graduate School this year, the task force is examining all models. He noted that models look different at universities with medical schools. While Notre Dame does not have a medical school, Prof. Pope-Davis noted that there are two hospitals close to the University that may be willing to become partners. Again, all options, including self insurance, are on the table.

Prof. Reydam-Schils asked about insurance for dependents. The kind of students enrolled at Notre Dame makes insurance for dependents important, she said. There are few options available to many students with families.

Dr. Akai said that the study the Graduate School is conducting has identified only one school that includes even a partial subsidy for dependents. The point of the current study is to find the optimum level of coverage and price in what is a very expensive market.

Prof. Pope-Davis reiterated that the issue of graduate students' health insurance is still very much in the study phase. He and all administrators know that health insurance is a recruiting issue. That is one reason it has assumed such a high priority.

## V. REPORT ON RESEARCH INITIATIVES

Michael Edwards, assistant vice president and director of the Office for Research, distributed copies of *Changing Lives: An Overview of FY 2006 Research*, the office's second annual report, and gave an update on two items:

(1) The electronic research administration initiative: Because the federal government has moved to electronic grant submission (thus meeting demands for higher levels of compliance and transparency), the University has moved to this as well. Last week, the University's budget working group approved purchase of a \$1.3 million software package, to go on line in January 2008. This should increase ease of submission for University researchers, heighten transparency, and facilitate compliance and recordkeeping.

(2) The business process initiative: The Office of Research has created portfolios of researchers for each of its six research administrators to enhance working relationships and facilitate preparation of grants. This should allow researchers to focus more on their work and less on grant administration.

Sparked by a comment by Prof. Cachey, members then held a wide-ranging discussion on the danger of "research" becoming overly identified with the sciences, to the detriment of research in the humanities. Prof. Cachey noted that nationally, there is an enormous emphasis on scientific research; with research in the humanities struggling. His initial reaction to the Office of Research publication Mr. Edwards distributed to members today is that it features scientists very heavily. Prof. Cachey commented that, with its revenue-producing possibilities, it is very easy for scientific research to overshadow research in the humanities. The amount of research money involved in the National Endowment for the Humanities is dwarfed by the money available in science.

Prof. Taylor commented that he has found within the search committee for the University's new vice president of research that many humanities faculty identify their research more with the dean of graduate studies than with the office of the vice president of research.

Prof. Reydam-Schils made two points: When speaking of "research," it is important to distinguish between "research" and "research and development." The latter is a fairly narrow view of research. It is also important to distinguish between relative and absolute value. If one looks at pp. 42-43 of the Office of Research publication, a mere \$160,000 expenditures in the humanities has put Notre Dame first nationwide—but it would hardly buy the equipment for most scientific labs. Keeping these differences in mind helps to correct the tendency to favor science.

While members said that their comments were not meant to focus solely on the Office of Research publication—for the problem is national in scope—Mr. Edwards did say that he would note members' comments for future annual reports.

There being no further business, Prof. Pope-Davis adjourned the meeting at 4:30 p.m.