

**MINUTES OF THE 309TH GRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING
JANUARY 31, 2007**

Present:

Donald Pope-Davis (Chair)	Peter Kogge (for James Merz)
Mark Alber	Michael Lundin
Theodore Cachey	James McAdams
Gay Dannelly (for Jennifer Younger)	Darcia Narvaez
Thomas Fuja	Gretchen Reydam-Schils (for Mark Roche)
Graham Hammill	John Robinson (for Patricia O'Hara)
Amber Handy	Thomas Slaughter
Sharon Hu	Scott Van Jacob
Carolyn Woo	Igor Veretennikov

Graduate School

Representatives: Terry Akai, Michael Edwards, Barbara Turpin

Absent: Philip Bess, Crislyn D'Souza-Schorey, Umesh Garg, James Marino, Christine Maziar, Rich Taylor, Robin Darling Young

Reporter: Mary Hendriksen

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

I. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 308TH GRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING (NOVEMBER 29, 2006)

Prof. Pope-Davis invited a motion to approve the minutes of the Graduate Council meeting of November 29, 2006. After a motion was made and seconded, members approved the minutes without change.

Minutes of Council meetings have long been published in *Notre Dame Report*. A member requested that minutes be posted as well on the Web. [Minutes from the 2006-2007 academic year have now been posted on the Graduate Council page of the Graduate School Web site. See <http://graduateschool.nd.edu/html/about/gc.html>]

[In addition, *Notre Dame Report* has recently introduced an on-line version of its publication. See <https://www3.nd.edu/~provost/academic-resources-and-information/NDreport/>]

II. UPDATE ON GRADUATE STUDENT HEALTH INSURANCE

At the meeting of November 29, 2006, Dr. Terry Akai, associate dean for financial aid for Graduate Studies, provided an extensive update on graduate student health insurance at Notre Dame. At today's meeting, he announced that Hewitt Associates has been selected as the consultant. It continues to be a fast-tracked project, he said. The Graduate School should receive the consultant's report by May 2007.

In the meantime, the Graduate School will continue to offer Mega health insurance to graduate students for the next academic year. The premium, which was \$1310 for the 2006-07 academic year, will rise to \$1415 next year—actually, a rate increase a bit lower than expected, Dr. Akai said. The subsidy the Graduate School provides to students will be at least at the same level as last year: Approximately \$380.

Prof. Pope-Davis clarified that the goal is to have the new health insurance plan in place by the 2008-09 academic year. Given that the consultant's recommendations are due this May, the earliest date for Graduate Council input will be the first meeting of the next academic year. All at the Graduate School recognize the importance of pushing forward in this area and offering graduate students the best possible mix of premium and coverage.

Mr. Lundin asked: Has the consultant been instructed to look at only certain options, or was it given a wider mandate?

Prof. Pope-Davis responded that the consultant is looking at the entire spectrum of choices; however, there are very few institutions offering 100% coverage. The Graduate School's own benchmarking study indicated that the norm is closer to 50% or 70% of premium coverage.

III. UPDATE ON GRADUATE STUDENT APPLICATIONS

Dr. Akai also updated members on graduate student applications to Notre Dame departments, most of which have a February 1 deadline. As of today, the Graduate School has received 3900 applications for next year, as compared to a total of 4100 last year. He expects there to be the usual flood of last-minute submissions tonight. The number of women applying has remained constant at about 38%; the number of minority applicants is 14% of U.S. students—somewhat higher than in the past. International applications are at 33%, similar to past years. Some departments have seen a significant rise in applications—for example, Economics and Econometrics, Peace Studies, the Medieval Institute, and Sociology. Other departments, however, seem to be experiencing a noticeable drop in applications—including Aerospace & Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Physics, and Architecture.

The big drop in applications occurred three years ago, he said, when the number of applications from international students, particularly Chinese students, declined sharply—perhaps in response to more stringent visa regulations. Now, there appears to be a slow increase from that initial drop.

Dr. Akai said that typically, the acceptance rate for international students is about half that of domestic students—thus, 10% compared to 20%.

Prof. Alber asked about applicants to the bioengineering program. Prof. Akai clarified that because that program was just approved, applications will not be accepted until the next cycle, in the 2008-09 academic year.

Dr. Akai and Prof. Pope-Davis then reviewed the revamped procedures for processing applications this year. For the first time, the Graduate School hired temporary workers during the holiday period to process applications and move them on to departments and directors of graduate studies. In most cases, that process was on target with its goal of a four-day turn-around time. Departments with early deadlines were processed first. While there were some glitches in a few departments, overall, the directors of graduate studies have expressed appreciation for the timeliness in which they have received the materials for applicants this year.

Prof. Alber asked if additional statistics were available—for instance, the number of applicants to the Graduate School who identified Notre Dame as their first-choice institution. While this particular data is not available, Dr. Akai said, he took this opportunity to expand on assessment of metrics for graduate students—for example, GRE scores. He explained that there is considerable variation in applicants' scores, often related to whether the student is applying to a department in the humanities or in mathematics, the sciences, or engineering. There is also a discrepancy in typical verbal scores for domestic and international students. Overall, though, the mean scores for students *admitted* to Notre

Dame (not merely applicants to Notre Dame) are: 600 verbal, 700 math, and 5 in analytical writing.

Prof. Pope-Davis offered to provide Graduate Council members with the Graduate School's "fact sheet," which provides data on applicants and accepted students. He will circulate the fact sheet at the March meeting. Soon, it will be available on the Web. Placement data will be provided at a future meeting. Fact sheets for the Business and Law Schools can be circulated at the next meeting as well.

Prof. Slaughter asked about progress in making the application process entirely paperless. Dr. Akai replied that while the technology exists for receiving letters of recommendation and statements of intent electronically, unfortunately, not with the University's current Banner system. He is in the process of writing up some recommendations for a new system, to be presented to Prof. Pope-Davis and then to the provost and the executive vice president. If approved, Dr. Akai cautioned, a paperless system for the Graduate School would still be three to four years away. It appears to be a very expensive proposition.

IV. UPDATE ON NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL (NRC) ASSESSMENT OF DOCTORATE RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Dr. Barbara Turpin, associate dean for academic policies and programs, distributed a chart showing completion rates for the NRC program and faculty questionnaires.

She explained that nationally, there are more than 5,000 doctoral programs participating in the survey. As of January 30, 2007, the average institutional completion rate was 14.7%. At Notre Dame, 16 programs are participating in the survey, and 14 of those programs have submitted completed questionnaires. Thus, by tomorrow's deadline, two departments must submit their questionnaires in order to be included in the national rankings.

As for the faculty component of the NRC rankings (which has a February 15th deadline), faculty from various departments have widely varying completion rates—from a low of 33% to a high of 80%. Dr. Turpin explained that for a program to be included in the survey, 70-80% of its faculty must complete the faculty survey. Some faculty have encountered problems in filling out the survey, but she urged members to let colleagues know that she can usually find solutions. If faculty report that they are "too busy" to complete the survey, she sends that response on to their dean.

Several members remarked on the importance of encouraging colleagues to respond to the survey. If fewer than 70% of a department's faculty respond, that particular program will not be ranked. Such a result, said Prof. Pope-Davis, would be extremely damaging to departments—perhaps even "the kiss of death." Other members pointed out that when students apply to a program, its NRC ranking can be a critical factor in their choice of programs. Also, with the current survey, rankings will be available on line—and thus much more accessible to prospective students and faculty.

Prof. Slaughter and other members held a discussion of how data gathering might be streamlined and centralized at the University. Both the Office of Institutional Research and OIT were named as prime candidates for enabling members of the University community to respond to requests for data and making such requests more efficient.

V. NEW BUSINESS

Prof. Slaughter said that Prof. Taylor, who could not attend today's meeting, asked him to convey the following message to the Council: The decision to eliminate the hooding of PhD students from the Sunday graduation was received by the faculty of the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry with disappointment. The faculty feel that the decision goes against the University's pronouncement of an elevation in the status of graduate education.

They believe that the Graduate Council should have been consulted on this change prior to implementation. He suggests that the Council discuss the decision in detail and offer its support or opposition.

Prof. Slaughter said that discussion of this issue could serve as a possible starting point for a discussion of communication issues.

A member said that Dean Marino asked him to report on discussion of the new commencement ceremony in the Council.

Prof. Kogge said that there were concerns in his department as well about the change in commencement. He also said that as the new cycle of departmental reviews is put in place, a review of the Graduate School itself should occur early rather than later.

Prof. Pope-Davis said that there will be an update on the departmental review process at the next Graduate Council meeting.

There being no further business, Prof. Pope-Davis adjourned the meeting at 4:45 p.m.