

**MINUTES OF THE 310<sup>TH</sup> GRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING  
APRIL 11, 2007**

**Present:** Donald Pope-Davis (chair), John Robinson (for Dean Patricia O’Hara), Gretchen Reydams-Schils (for Dean Mark Roche), Joseph Marino, James Merz, Theodore Cachey, Philip Bess, Igor Veretennikov, Crislyn D’Souza-Schorey, Thomas Slaughter, Sharon Hu, Mark Alber, Darcia Narvaez, Umesh Garg, Christine Maziar, Robin Darling Young, Graham Hammill, Richard Taylor, Michael Lundin, Amber Handy

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

**Absent:** Thomas Fuja, James McAdams, Scott Van Jacob

**Reporter:** Mary Hendriksen

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

**I. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 309<sup>TH</sup> GRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING (JANUARY 31, 2007)**

Prof. Pope-Davis invited a motion to approve the minutes of the Graduate Council meeting of January 31, 2007. After the reporter noted a minor amendment to the minutes, they were approved unanimously by Council members.

**II. GRADUATE CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS**

Prof. Pope-Davis explained that at the last executive committee meeting, members decided that the Graduate School should explore the general area of graduate certificate programs at Notre Dame—both their necessity and procedures to govern their establishment and oversight. This summer, the Graduate School will look at graduate certificate programs in place at peer institutions and then make a recommendation back to this body in the fall term 2007 regarding similar programs at Notre Dame. Procedures and protocols formulated and approved will then provide a template to the Graduate School as it goes forward with requests from departments, programs, institutes, and centers to launch graduate certificate programs. Prof. Pope-Davis said that any certificate programs now in existence at Notre Dame will be required to conform to the standards approved next year.

**III. Termination of OAK Program**

Dr. Turpin explained that in 1996, the Graduate School developed the One-of-a-kind (OAK) PhD program, which allows faculty in non-PhD-granting departments to act as advisors and mentors to PhD students and to direct their dissertations. The program was designed for truly exceptional students who already had a master’s degree from another institution and who wished to earn their PhD by working with a particular Notre Dame faculty member in a department that does *not* have a PhD program—for example, Music or Romance Languages and Literatures. The program was intended as well to

function as a retention measure for distinguished faculty in non-PhD-granting departments. Faculty enlisted for the OAK program were intended to be scholars whose reputation within the discipline would allow them to attract, train, and place an outstanding PhD student.

Dr. Turpin further explained that the OAK program was designed with a stringent application process to ensure that it was used as intended; yet, since 1996, there have been only five applications—with one student admitted. That student left the University eventually without earning a PhD. She attributed his departure to structural problems within the program. When faculty members are not familiar with the normal progression to the PhD at Notre Dame, and when there is no existing cohort of graduate students to consult, a solitary student can slip easily through bureaucratic cracks.

Profs. Maziar and Narvaez pointed out that several peer institutions have programs in which it is possible for a student with interests that do not conform to a particular department to earn a cross-disciplinary PhD. Dr. Turpin clarified that the OAK program is not a program for cross-disciplinary students.

In response to members' comments, Dr. Akai pointed out that German and Russian Languages and Literatures was the source of the OAK program, not Romance Languages and Literatures. He agrees that the difficulties with the OAK program—for example, taking supporting courses, gathering a cohort for the student, providing teaching experiences for the student—are structural. With departmental cooperation, it is certainly possible for PhD students to work across disciplines at Notre Dame.

Prof. Merz, who was dean of the Graduate School when the OAK program was initiated, offered the perspective that the program was designed primarily to function as a faculty retention measure. Perhaps the OAK program was not the appropriate vehicle for students whose interests do not fit within traditional departments, but the University should be vigilant about keeping avenues to a PhD available to these students.

Prof. Pope-Davis asked for a vote on the proposal to terminate the OAK program. With one abstention, the proposal to terminate was approved. The Graduate School will submit the proposal to the Academic Council for its approval.

#### **IV. Graduate School Bulletin Revisions**

In the fall 2006 term, Prof. Pope-Davis appointed a committee to update and revise the Graduate School's *Bulletin*, which sets forth the academic regulations for the Graduate School. Committee members were: Crislyn D'Souza-Schorey, Thomas Fuja, Michael Lundin (Graduate Student Union President), Darcia Narvaez, Thomas Slaughter, and Barbara Turpin (Graduate School, *ex officio*). After undertaking benchmarking of some AAU universities, members worked through the first 27 pages of the 2006-2007 *Bulletin* to update the text, conform it to actual practice, and organize some sections more clearly. Members were sent a revised text before today's meeting, with three suggested policy changes highlighted:

- Eliminating the position of outside chair for examinations and dissertation defenses;
- Abolishing the policy of requiring Graduate School approval of faculty from other departments than the home department (or universities other than Notre Dame) to serve on examining committees, with the recommendation that the department itself can provide the approval;
- Changing an incomplete grade to an F on the transcript if work to remove the incomplete has not been submitted by the deadline. Currently, the incomplete is factored into the calculation of the GPA *as if* it were an F, but an actual grade of F is not assigned.

Simultaneously with the *Bulletin* revision committee, Prof. Pope-Davis appointed a second committee to examine the specific issue of regulations for oral examinations. As described in detail below, its members—Umesh Garg, Dawn Gondoli, Graham Hammill, Amber Handy (Graduate Student Union vice president), and Terrence Akai (Graduate School, *ex officio*)—also circulated their suggested changes to members before today’s meeting. On one particular aspect of oral examinations—that the position of outside chair continue—this committee formulated a different recommendation than the *Bulletin* revision committee.

The first proposed *Bulletin* revision discussed concerned the position of outside chair in examinations and dissertation defenses. Prof. Slaughter, chair of the *Bulletin* revision committee, explained that the position of “outside chair”—a faculty member from a department other than the candidate’s home department who chairs the examination and represents the Graduate School—was established to ensure that examinations are conducted fairly and rigorously. Members of his committee concluded, however, that the outside chair functions primarily as a timekeeper. Moreover, the position is not common at other universities and its existence invariably presents scheduling difficulties. Thus, committee members recommend eliminating the position.

Council members then engaged in a lively discussion over the issue, with some members, including Profs. Pope-Davis and Merz, saying that they have had personal experience as outside chairs in monitoring fairness of examinations—for example, when a faculty member either answered questions for a candidate or, in a much different situation, verbally abused a candidate. And, outside of his or her role as a monitor, they believe that the outside chair can provide a valuable perspective on the defense. Mr. Lundin and Dr. Akai also supported this viewpoint, saying that graduate students regard the position of outside chair as a safeguard, a way to ensure fairness in the examination and dissertation processes. While situations described by Profs. Pope-Davis and Merz occur rarely, the position is nevertheless a critical safeguard.

After further discussion, Prof. Pope-Davis called for a vote on whether the position of outside chair should continue. By a show of hands, members voted 10 to 6, with two abstentions, that it should.

The Council then considered the recommendation that departments assume responsibility for approving faculty from outside the home department on examinations. With Prof. Slaughter explaining that Graduate School approval of faculty from other departments or universities serving on examining committees is invariably *pro forma*, the committee's proposal to abolish the policy requiring such approval was not controversial. Council members agreed that the disciplinary expertise to judge the professional qualifications of examiners and dissertation committee members—both those outside the department as well as non-teaching-and-research faculty within it—should reside in departments and colleges. Through a series of friendly amendments, members agreed that the appropriate language for the *Bulletin* should be: "A student's department shall approve the members of examining committees."

Finally, the Council turned its attention to the recommendation that the University assign a grade of F to a student's transcript when work from a previous incomplete has not been submitted by the deadline. Now, for the purposes of the grade point average, an incomplete grade is factored into a student's grade point average as an F, but an actual grade of F is not assigned. Committee members recommend that while exceptions can always be made for special circumstances, as a matter of policy, an F should appear on a student's transcript rather than an incomplete.

Council members showed unanimous support for the committee's recommendation but could not agree on the precise language for this *Bulletin* provision. Thus, Prof. Pope-Davis remanded this provision back to the committee for further crafting.

Recommendations of the oral examination sub-committee, appearing in Attachment G to the Graduate Council agenda, were considered next by the Council. The first issue concerned the imposition of time limits for passing oral examinations and approval of dissertation topics. The committee proposed language for the *Bulletin* stating that all students must pass both of these hurdles within four years of enrollment. Exceptions to this policy may be made by the Graduate School in cases where established disciplinary practices dictate otherwise, with the department concerned establishing the need for such exceptions.

While Council members gave full support to the subcommittee's recommendation, which was described as current Graduate School policy, Prof. Pope-Davis asked that the subcommittee further refine the particular language of this provision as well. One issue raised was whether candidates must actually pass the examination in four years or whether they must only make a first attempt at passing the examination. Another issue raised by members was whether failure to pass the examination leads to loss of student *status* or only to loss of Graduate School *support*. Dr. Turpin replied to both concerns, stating that students must not only take the exam but also pass it within

four years of first enrolling at the University; however, if a student fails to pass the exam, it is the funding that is affected, not student status.

The Council then moved on to a consideration of the composition of oral examination committees. The committee charged with this review recommended, and Council members unanimously agreed, that the examination committee for oral candidacy examinations consist “of at least three members [instead of the current four], including the dissertation director but not including the outside chair. Of these, at least two members (preferably including the dissertation director) must be physically present at the examination. The others may participate via audio or video conference call. A two-thirds majority of the committee is required to pass the examination. The outside chair does not vote.”

Finally, while not mandated by the *Bulletin*, as recommended by the subcommittee, Council members asked that the Graduate School prepare a brochure for the outside chairs so that they can understand their role in the examination process more clearly. Prof. Taylor suggested as well that, for the sake of uniformity, the Graduate School give outside chairs a simple form to submit their comments to the Graduate School after an examination.

As for the graduate students taking the examinations, the Graduate School was asked to create a brochure or to provide written direction to a Web site that contains the specific rules for examinations. Special attention should be given in the brochure or Web site to the issue of students’ ability to question or challenge the fairness of an examination.

Before adjournment, Graduate School staff distributed copies of a new version of *Quickfacts*, which provides vital statistics on the Graduate School, and asked Council members to provide their comments on its content to Dr. Akai in the next few weeks.

Prof. Pope-Davis said that given the lateness of the hour, he would postpone updates on departmental reviews and the Office of Research until a future Graduate Council meeting. He then adjourned the meeting at 5:10 p.m.