

## **Graduate Council Meeting November 12, 2020**

Present: Professors: Badovinac, Butali, Cwiertny, Doucette, Forbes, Gardner, Gfeller, Greyser, Hoffmann, Hribar, Huber, Kang, O’Shaughnessy; Graduate Students: DeYoung, Gabriele, Piegors, Waldstein; Graduate College Personnel: Arbisi-Kelm, Campo, Kaufman, Keller, McKibben, Lara, Meintel, Teitle, Varga.

The meeting was called to order by Dean John Keller @ 8:15 AM.

### **1. Approval of the October 29, 2020 Meeting Minutes (Keller)**

No revisions to the distributed minutes were offered, a motion for approval was presented (O’Shaughnessy), seconded (Doucette), and unanimous consent obtained.

### **2. Announcements and Updates from the Graduate College (Keller)**

- i. Dean Keller welcomed Wendy Danger’s return to the Graduate College. She will be working part-time re-engaging in her role at the Graduate College and will resume greater participation in Graduate Council affairs spring semester 2021.
- ii. Tentative agenda items for the next scheduled Graduate Council Meeting convening on December 03, 2020 will include:
  - a. Reviewing the draft of the Graduate College strategic plan with respect to the reported DEI operations.
  - b. Update on the status of the Graduate College’s pilot project undertaken with the [Council of Graduate Schools \(CGS\)](#) to ascertain information about graduate students’ mental health and wellness issues in higher education. Summaries will be shared from the project’s related virtual sessions attended by Dean Keller and graduate student Adriana Swancy, a doctoral student in Psychological and Quantitative Foundations (Counseling Psychology Program).
- iii. Assistant Dean Jennifer Teitle shared the results of the recent [Three Minute Thesis 2020](#) virtual competition which was comprised of forty-three participants in the preliminary rounds and fifteen final student competitors from among the University’s colleges. The winners of the designated awards categories were announced on November 06, 2020 and the announced premier winner of the competition was Moala Bannavti from the College of Engineering whose presentation was entitled, “[No More PCBs in School Air](#)”. Honorable Mention awards were bestowed to Elmira Jangjou, Clarissa Shaw and the People’s Choice awards were conferred to Moala Bannavti and Mariam El-Hattab. It was noted that a trophy for “Research Communication” has been created this year that will be received by the Deans’ Office of the premier winner’s college.

### **3) An Unexpected Outcome: Considerations for Retaining the Remote Thesis Defense (Arbisi-Kelm)**

Assistant Dean Heidi Arbisi-Kelm in the Academic Affairs Office presented select results and preliminary conclusions from surveys conducted among students and faculty that participated in the Graduate College’s management of the virtual examination defense process initiated at the beginning of the pandemic (spring 2020 semester). Assistance and advice were sought from council members on the presented data given their valued role assisting in the formulation of the Graduate College’s administrative decisions.

The survey, launched during the spring defense peak cycle on April 2020, garnered 550 faculty and 150 student (largely) unique responses and had a two-fold purpose: to understand the nature of the students’ and faculty remote defense experiences upon entering an unprecedented time and to collect data for evidence-based decision-making to support in the future either retaining the remote defense option (in such case to support policy-making proposals presented to the Graduate Council), or otherwise learn if the process was not serving students favorably and therefore result in a discontinuance of the practice.

A preponderance of data indicated a preference by both faculty and students for face-to-face defense which may be based significantly on familiarity with the trappings of the conventions that participants appreciate about the in-person defense, given that a remote defense creates a new experience and different dynamics among participants. Furthermore it was noted—one of the most important takeaways

underscored from the data—that there are considerable choices that go into a defense and while the classroom or meeting room limits or makes choices for the participants, the remote defense necessitates that those decisions for how one wishes the experience to unfold become active. In this regard, survey results for faculty and students underscoring the benefits and disadvantages of the remote defense platform were highlighted.

- **Faculty Responses – Conversational Equity, Interactivity, Egalitarian Approach**

- i. The remote defense may lend itself to greater conversational equity, interactivity, and an egalitarian approach with respect to committee visibility and behavior as a group, an aligned hierarchy between student and committee members, a systematic Q&A, greater inclusiveness, and accessibility—wider audiences of scholars across campus and interinstitutional, students’ families, full-time professionals enrolled as part-time students, ADA accessibility (equally audio and visual), and the absence of pressure for students to provide comestibles.
- ii. Regarding the interactivity afforded by technology, many enjoyed the use of PCs for notetaking, obtaining files, multi-media access for sharing content, screen sharing and the chat feature for cross-referencing and ready access.
- iii. While some enjoyed the interactivity technology affords, many others felt the Zoom platform constrains the conversation. Many others reported a dislike for what was expressed as an unnatural feel experienced from having only one person at a time speak; that body language, non-verbal or visual cues were not present and the “give and take” were severely compromised in the mediated environment.
- iv. Faculty clearly thought that a successful defense through a virtual platform lacked camaraderie and celebratory elements; that the momentous occasion was extremely anticlimactic.

- **Student Responses – Conversational Equity, Interactivity, Egalitarian Approach**

- i. To a comparable degree, students spoke to the ways in which the remote defense could facilitate equity and inclusion. In the conversation attention could be focused on one speaker at a time, participants occupied the same amount of space on the monitor, and they viewed themselves as an active participant in the process. The defense is open to a much wider audience; the fact that family and other scholars could participate in the defense was very prominently represented in the data and ADA accessibility, which reduces mobility inequities and allows for hearing and seeing equally, was also noted. Proportionately documented were the absence of pressure to provide comestibles, diminished facial expressions and body language, along with the lack of celebration.
- ii. Student Unique responses spoke to aspects related to the space setup provided by the remote process, which served as an accommodation for anxiety during a high stress situation; facilitating focus on the defense itself rather than on their presentation skills and the audience which requires more cognitive and emotional energy.
- iii. Students responses included other life responsibilities and dimensions, such as caregiving.
- iv. Students also spoke to the ways in which the remote defense presumes a high level of access to technology that was potentially problematic (issues with processing, power, bandwidth and internet access, as well as the quality of available equipment).
- v. Personal facility with the platform –as well their mentors and/or committee chairs—significantly shaped the experience.
- vi. Due to the nature of the virtual defense, it was reported less conversational and more direct and efficient (assessed as both a pro and a con). The organized, structured and controlled dynamic of the experience was viewed as a benefit; students appreciated the pacing and being able to focus on one comment, person and question at time and committee members held back questions until the end of the presentation.

- **Platform Drawbacks**

Early on the incidence of Zoom bombing (no longer an issue with ID and password and waiting room security options); private spaces, noise control, responsibilities for spouses, children, pets and family were issues for students. Challenges were mentioned related to blackboard usage for illustrative purposes in some students’ disciplines, along with reproducing detailed schemas.

- **Preliminary Conclusions and Considerations**

- i. It was clear in the data evaluated that changing the defense mode reshaped the experience—some .

- benefit from the change; others are aggrieved—which would be important to consider moving toward policy options.
- ii. How can remote defense equity and other benefits persist post-pandemic, as many surveyed respondents recommended that this remain an option? Under what conditions could a remote defense be approved, who would set the parameters and by whom would they be ultimately approved? Would anxiety be an approved accommodation for a remote defense, or would a face-to-face defense be viewed as a more rigorous process?
  - iii. Policy must include best practice recommendations, even if the remote defense platform is used short-term.
- **Commentaries (Council Members & Presenter)**
    - i. Tech equity in managing a remote defense and systems integration and compatibility (sharing compatible hardware, operating systems, and software) was expressed as an absolute concern, especially with defenses that require visual and sound elements.
    - ii. Having a remote defense option was favorably expressed provided there are clear guidelines *and* improved technology in the future to address current tech equity factors.
    - iii. Notwithstanding the anxiety that may accompany an in-person defense, it was viewed to be a beneficial professional development experience in preparation for dealing with the rigors of a professorial role and a capstone of a long progression as a graduate student entering for the first-time the ranks of the academic career hierarchy.
    - iv. At this stage the survey analysis has centered on the qualitative responses captured and, in the future, the collected data on the success rate of remote defense exams will be appraised; however, anecdotally there has been no observed spike in field defenses. Notwithstanding, in the rare cases where an unsuccessful defense occurs, it was acknowledged that a face-to-face platform would be more select for providing support to a student and managing the overall outcome. An important aspect of the best practices will need to address possible changes in how difficult news needs to be delivered carefully and deliberately in a virtual format.
    - v. While the development and implementation of the remote defense was necessitated in response to the pandemic, the analyzed data collected from the surveys has provided a better understanding of the experience from the perspectives of faculty and students. The provided data clearly supports the continuance of an online defense option, subject to the advancement of best practice recommendations and ultimate policy-making to ensure better an ideal experience that does not compromise academic integrity in unintended ways.
    - vi. Though it might be viewed an equity issue, decision-making outcomes between student and the mentor, advisor, committee chair and department would take precedence over upholding the remote defense should the Graduate College make this an option. Students and faculty could disagree about what is best option for them depending on their views concerning the role and purpose of the defense.
    - vii. Additional talking points noted for future consideration before further policy and best recommendations are advanced included: the diversity currently in career goals and outcomes for graduate students (i.e., for those pursuing a career outside the academy, is there a need to defend in the same way to demonstrate competency, proficiency and mastery) and the need to learn further from council members, based on their varied collegiate representations, the variations across departments in how defenses are structured and managed and what the experiences are like for their students.

#### 4) Update on Graduate College DEI Efforts (Lara)

Elizabeth Lara, Director of the Graduate College Office of Diversity Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) shared updates on the office revisions, undertakings and the status of current DEI efforts following her appointment in the spring semester 2019, beginning with familiarizing the council with student demographics and underscoring the importance of the data platform (student populations, trends, colleges, departments) when discussing UI graduate student populations and how they are served.

- **Student Type (Updated figures as of fall 2020)**  
Total Graduate Students, 5173; URM, 1760; URM Percent, 34.0%; Non URM, 3413, Non URM Percent, 66.0%; URM to Non URM Ratio 0.52.
- **URM Status (Students/Percentage of Total)**

International, 862/48.98%; Hispanic/Latino(a), 328/18.64%; Asian, 208/11.82%; African American/Black, 201/11.42%; Multi-Racial, 146/8.30%; Alaskan Native/American Indian, 13/0.74%; Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 2/0.11%.

- **Curricular College (Students/Percentage of Total)**

CLAS, 679/38.58%; COE, 205/11.65%; Bus, 202/11.48%; GC, 175/9.94%; CoE, 149/8.47%; CPH, 139/7.90%; CCOM, 81/4.60%; CON, 52/2.95%; PHAR, 39/2.22%; Dent, 32/1.82%; UC, 7/0.4%.

- **Overview of the [Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion \(DEI\)](#)**

- i. The office name was changed (formerly known as the Office of Graduate Inclusion - OGI) to follow the diversities leadership with the paradigm shift from “diversity” to “diversity, equity and inclusion”, along with online messaging, in order to be more direct and clear about the student populations served—underrepresented minority students, students with disabilities, first generation students, students with families, students from different faiths—so that more students felt comfortable engaging with the office and using their services.
- ii. The Recruitment focus moved to active engagement and retention efforts and providing hands-on, direct student support services to improve the campus climate through either students reaching out personally one-on-one, the campus inclusion team or as a result of faculty in need of support with classroom student situations.
- iii. Expanded campus partnerships with both the [Division of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion](#), and the [Division of Student Life](#) in order to offer more services and programming to our graduate students and Graduate College representation.
- iv. DEI training as part of a division and at the request of faculty and staff in graduate programs and as well to help graduate students who are seeking to implement the trainings in their programs.
- v. A Graduate College Strategic Plan and as a result establishment of a DEI Implementation Team with several colleagues.

- **Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP)**

One of the larger programs overseen by the Graduate College’s DEI Office is the [Summer Research Opportunities Program \(SROP\)](#), a [Big Ten Academic Alliance \(BTAA\) Initiative](#) at the University of Iowa designed to prepare underrepresented undergraduate students for graduate study through intensive research experiences with faculty mentors and enrichment activities. The goal of the program is to increase the number of underrepresented students who pursue graduate study and research careers.

The director participated in the program as an undergraduate (2011) and later evaluated the program’s curriculum during the summer of 2019 while on boarding. Early work was directed to revitalizing the curriculum for the summer 2020 program to include several new campus partners and exposure to more parts of the campus and Iowa City area through tours, setting up a graduate student and peer mentoring program, collaborating with [Iowa Center for Research by Undergraduates \(ICRU\)](#) and arranging campus housing in Peterson Residence Hall adjacent to the [UI Cultural Centers](#).

- **Program Admissions/Application**

Through the BTAA, approximately 5000 applications are received from students across the country interested in doing research at the fifteen affiliated institutions and about fifteen hundred of those applicants select to come to Iowa, which has led to the greater partnership formed with ICRU given the recruitment initiatives of the other research programs on campus. Twenty students are then selected to receive first-hand exposure to the graduate school experience at the University of Iowa and scholarly research through being paired with a faculty mentor whose work is closely related to their academic interests and career goals.

- **Summer 2020 – Program Alterations (Coronavirus Pandemic)**

Due to the occurrence of the pandemic the summer 2020 curriculum development was redirected to online programming in collaboration with BTAA and the creation of a graduate discovery program to assist the student scholars interested in pursuing graduate education. Through the program BTAA institutions provided resources via online modules to aid students in areas of graduate school (graduate school identification, application, and selection processes). The seminar developed at Iowa was on “Social Identity and Your Search” with a keynote presentation by Dr. Denise Martinez, Associate Dean,

CCOM. The curriculum also included online GRE test preparation, virtual meetups, and community hours.

- i. The admitted students who were not able to attend due to the cancelled an on-campus program will be offered early admittance to the 2021 program.
  - ii. Council members were invited to serve as program mentors and to view the website listing of current [available SROP mentors](#) where students can access, identify faculty and learn of their research.
- **Current Graduate Student Programming, Recruitment and Retention Efforts**

The following Graduate College DEI efforts were noted in the areas of recruitment and retention.

Recruitment Efforts Focused on UI Undergraduates

    - i. GRE preparation course partnership with the [Center for Diversity and Enrichment \(CDE\)](#).
    - ii. [Iowa Edge Program](#) - Graduate College Interest Fair. Included 30 attendees and served to raise awareness of the DEI Office's dedicated support and services offered.
    - iii. [UI Cultural Centers](#) partnerships with heritage month celebrations, action weeks and affinity graduation events.
    - iv. SROP/GRAD-DEI presentations to internal and external programs.

Retention Efforts

While citing a limited capacity to promote retention efforts, a focus has been aimed at creating a climate for graduate students to feel welcomed.

- i. Expansion of "Connecting Communities: Creating Space for Underrepresented Graduate Students" (formerly "...for Students of Color") programing designed for creating time and space for graduate students to connect with peers and mentors, learn about navigating the academe and to prepare for graduate life at Iowa. Session themes have included disclosing invisible identities (disabilities, first generation status), teaching at Iowa, navigating the advisor relationship and included a fall orientation welcome program inviting new students to celebrate fellowship and build relationships.
- ii. GRAD-DEI Advisory Board comprised largely of members from amongst graduate student organizations but as well students for whom DEI services are intended to serve.
- iii. CDE-DEI Emergency funds to support underrepresented students' needs that arose from the repercussions of the pandemic.
- iv. Development of Affinity Spaces in association with the Division of Student Life to promote more graduate student representation.

It was commented that interdepartmental partnership-building has helped to expand services, outreach and direct support to graduate students. By providing logistical and outreach support, graduate students in turn have been enterprising in building upon and creating their own action steps that foster success, such as creating their own affinity spaces and dissertation writing groups.

- v. Black Lives Matter statement issued last summer in which the Graduate College was intentional about establishing action items and making them a priority in leading their DEI Implementation Team, and which included an outlet for students to submit feedback.
- vi. Gold Rush: Tech Equity for Grad Students. Assisting underrepresented students in the procurement of essential technological tools for succeeding as the UI moved to online instruction.
- vii. [Lulu Merle Johnson Fellowships](#) (recruitment) and [ACT Scholars Program](#). Two preeminent internal fellowships serving underrepresented students noted amongst the fellowship programs discussed earlier by Associate Dean Shelly Campo (Graduate Council Meeting, 10/29/2020).
- viii. Guest Lectures at Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) Fall 2020 Meetings. National leaders asked to facilitate discussions related to racial and social justice in graduate education.
- ix. DEI Focused Challenge Grants (Spring 2021). Projects that can further DEI recruitment and retention efforts.
- x. DEI Implementation Team. Composed of faculty, staff and students (20+) to facilitate implementation of the Graduate College strategic plan's four goals in the areas of recruitment, retention, campus community training, and capacity building. General body and subcommittee meetings have focused on identifying and prioritizing action items (approximately 30 per goal), needed resources and information in leading toward the paradigm shift. Related discussions have included the comparative climate data sets from surveys conducted in 2018 and 2020.

- xi. Training sessions in both implicit bias and microaggressions have been scheduled for the staff and faculty in the Graduate College and academic units. Both have been well attended and received.

Dissemination of information on DEI internal fellowships, resources and services has largely been through updated marketing materials, the DEI website and directly to students via the DEI listserv. Raising awareness of the DEI office, resources and services amongst the ranks of faculty, advisors and staff is an important point at issue; on an essential level the Graduate College is entrusting serving members of the Graduate Council, Director of Graduate Studies, Graduate Faculty, Associate Deans for Graduate Education and program coordinators for conveying delivered information within their own units and departments.

The support, commitment and collaboration amongst the Graduate College leadership and staff underlying the many achievements summarized was acknowledged and enthusiasm expressed for maintaining the momentum moving forward.

The meeting adjourned at 9:32 AM

### **Upcoming Events**

Joint Graduate Faculty/DGS Meeting Wednesday, December 16, 2020 @ 4:00 PM – Live virtual meeting

### **Future 2020-21 Graduate Council Meeting Dates**

2020: December 3

2021: January 28, February 11, 25, March 11 April 1, 15.