Graduate Council Meeting
December 03, 2020

Present: Professors: Badovinac, Cwiertny, Doucette, Forbes, Gardner, Gfeller, Greyser, Hoffmann, Huber, O'Shaughnessy; Graduate Students: DeYoung, Gabriele, Piegors, Waldstein; Graduate College Personnel: Arbisi-Kelm, Campo, Keller, McKibben, Meintel, Teitle, Varga. Presenters: Hartley, Kemp.

Absent: Professors: Butali, Hribar, Kang.

The meeting was called to order by Dean John Keller @ 08:15 AM.
1. **Approval of the November 12, 2020 Meeting Minutes**
    No revisions to the distributed minutes were offered, a motion for approval was presented (O'Shaughnessy), seconded (Gfeller), and unanimous consent obtained.
2. **Announcements and Updates from the Graduate College**
    i. A joint Graduate Faculty/DGS virtual meeting will convene on Wednesday, December 16, 2020 at 4:00 p.m. Electronic voting will be invoked on three items that have been deliberated upon previously by the council and all Graduate Council members are welcome to attend:
        1. Program approval to Create Master of Science (MS) in Sustainable Development.
        2. Consideration of Language to allow a "Support person" at formal grievance hearings.
        3. A change to the membership s pertinent to adding a Graduate College faculty representative to the Graduate Council.
    ii. The completion of the grassroots crowdfunding campaign of the Graduate College, entitled Tech Equity for Grad Students, surpassed its original financial goal of ten thousand dollars, nearing twelve thousand dollars. one hundred and eighty-nine applications for assistance were received. Eighty-five of the aggregate comprised domestic students (physical disabilities and BIPOC), sixty of whom were approved; totaling approximately thirty-seven thousand dollars supported through combined private funds and CARES Act resources. International students, comprising the remaining one hundred four applicants, will be supported through the Graduate Student Senate's gracious re-allocation of funds.
    iii. The Graduate College fall 2020 doctoral and masters virtual commencement ceremony will be held on December 18, 2020. Currently there are seventy-four master students and sixty-two doctoral students registered to participate in the planned event.
    iv. Spring semester 2021 the Graduate College will participate in the gradSERU (Graduate Student Experience in the Research University) survey, a national endeavor spearheaded by the University of Minnesota in which graduate students can provide confidential feedback about a variety of graduate related issues.
    v. Quantitative analysis of collected data on the success rate of defense exams was appraised following Assistant Dean Heidi Arbisi-Kelm's presentation to the Graduate Council on the Remote Thesis Defense (11/12/2020). It was reported that for the last four years the failure rates for the exams varied only between one-point one percent and two-point eight percent indicating thus far that there appears to be little difference between the two exam platforms in terms of success or failure rates.
    vi. Assistant Dean Jennifer Teitle presented a quantitative review on fall 2020 nationally competitive graduate fellowship applications, including program years, represented graduate programs and fellowship/grant programs.
        a. Year in Program: Year one, 11 (18.3%); Year two, 24 (40.0%); Year three, 6 (10.0%); Year four, 8 (13.3%); Year five, 4 (6.7%); Year six, 7 (11.7%).
        b. Top three most frequently represented grad programs: Neuroscience (6), Chemistry (5), Anthropology (4).

c. Eighteen different fellowship/grant programs (ordering together Fulbright variants and separating NIH F31 from NIH F30).

d. Top five most frequently represented graduate fellowships: [Graduate Research Fellowships Program (GRFP)](#), [Fulbright](#), [Mellon/American Council of learned Societies (ACLS)](#), [National Defense Science and Engineering Graduate (NDSEG)](#), [American Association of University Women (AAUW).](#)

In recognition of the significant training value derived from submitting a nationally competitive fellowship application, [Fellowships Incentive Program](#) awards are bestowed to UI graduate students in the monetary amount of four hundred dollars.

vii. The first University of Iowa presidential search committee will convene on December 04, 2020. Documents and announcements pertaining to the University of Iowa Presidential search will be posted on the Board of Regents State of Iowa website, University of Iowa Presidential Search and on the [University of Iowa's website](#).

3. **MSW Degree: A Case Study for Curricular Redesign**

Associate Professor Carolyn Hartley and Program and Admissions Administrator Kathleen Kemp from the School of Social work presented highlights on the development of a curricular revision based on a "backward" design" model for the Master of Social Work (MSW) degree. Relevance to the [AAU](#) PhD education initiative project undertaken by the Graduate College was noted (i.e., outcomes and expectations; Graduate Council meeting 10/01/2020).

- **Backward Design** is a method of designing an educational curriculum beginning with identifying the learning goals students are to achieve at the end of a course and then designing backwards content based on the selected end-goals.

- **MSW Degree Program**
  The design model was applied to the entire MSW curriculum, starting with determining the end-point skills to be attained and essential learning to promote on-going professional development as social workers; what students needed to know and master to be future competent social workers and the most important content needed in courses. Accordingly, after integrating extensive evaluative data (student exit surveys and instructors' input), developing further three sequential / progressive steps:

  i. Formulating underlying "Enduring Understandings (EUs)" of the discipline (i.e., synthesizing what students should understand and not just what they need to know, do or be familiar with) which include elements to lead the design process. In the case of MSW program, there are five components: Social Justice, Ethics, Systemic Perspective, Critical Thinking and Use of Self.

  ii. Each EU component has a set of non content, provocative essential questions (EQs) that expand more in depth the EUs and promote other important questions specific to the discipline.

  iii. The third step is an evidence-based demonstration on the part of students of multiple and distinct ways of thinking and learning (types of evidence: explanation, interpretation, application, role play, empathy, reflectivity) which will also help in the curriculum design to identify the developmental learning processes of students as they cope with with the EUs and EQs. Progressively in the MSW program the EQs were mapped along the developmental continuum of four semesters of a two-year program (admission includes students with and without a B.A.); identifying first the EQs, then designing backwards, grouping and placement within the core structure of the courses in order to identify the desirable core competencies (learning outcomes) to be performed upon degree completion.

  The process also led to evaluate, collectively with the faculty, the core content of the MSW curriculum, a new course design and structure that resulted in plan of study changes, concentration and name changes and program credit hour requirements (the sixty-hour program reduced to fifty-four hours and the forty-one hours accelerated program—combined summer and two semesters—to thirty-six hours).

Currently steps are being taken to finalize new course descriptions, develop master syllabi for new courses focusing on course objectives and learning outcomes, new student competencies assessment methods for their accrediting body and the feedback interlacing between EUs, EQs and course objectives (learning outcomes in relation to enduring understandings and essential questions).

- **Noted Considerations**
  The planning process demands time (currently in the third year of designing; will admit first cohort under the new curriculum fall 2022), requires consistent leadership (institutional memory needed), departmental faculty engagement throughout each step (i.e., buy-in) and a qualitative process analyzing data themes.

- **Q&A**

i. The impetus for undertaking the process began with recognizing that there had been a considerable interval in the revision of the MSW curriculum, identified deficiencies in student knowledge and preparation by field instructors, along with student requests for content that was not currently in the curriculum and which also coincided with the start of an eight year span until the next accreditation.

ii. It was clarified that evidence-based demonstration on the part of students has a process component separate from evaluating competency measurements; learning process activities to engage students, which assist them to contend with EQs separate from the assessment evaluation of gained competencies.

iii. In guiding the direction of the MSW program curriculum redesign, consultation occurred with the Office of Teaching, Learning & Tecnology and resulted in beneficial insights and strategies toward beginning the process and for faculty buy-in. In addition, it was anticipated that the progressive development of the curriculum, in particular intertwining the EUs, EQs and learning outcomes, would lead to collaboration with the UI Oberman Center for Advanced Studies given their related programing (i.e., online workshop series "Reimagining Graduate Education as Preparation for Navigating Crises" and "Liberating Structures"). Intentional evaluation is also being focused on ways the current curriculum in the School of Social Work is replicating structures of white supremacy and how to develop an anti-racist curriculum.

iv. The intellectual and personal demands of the endeavor, along with balancing the separate elements of professional development, was acknowledged and for that reason the importance of resourcing and release time for faculty endorsement.

4. **Review of Summaries from CGS Mental Health and Wellness Project**

As an active member within the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) affiliated institutions, the UI Graduate College responded to a call for a pilot project on graduate student mental health and wellness. Stating interest in the views of a variety of different affinity groups on our campus, the Graduate College's submitted proposal was approved and included a request from CGS to target and work with UI veteran students given the University's distinction among the list of Military Friendly Schools. Moreover, it was recommended to invite the participation of a graduate student in the planned student listening sessions and the project's overall evaluation, which resulted in the selection of Adriana Swancy, a doctoral student in Psychological and Quantitative Foundations (Counseling Psychology Program). The graduate student selection brought noted merit given Ms. Swancy' s current internship at the Iowa City Veterans Administration Health Care System working with military veterans. Twenty-five institutions collaborated in the project.

Dean Keller noted general comments on the project proceedings and findings specific to academic, non academic and interseting variables, including potential action plans, excerpted from his "Summary of Lessons Heard", which aligned with the CGS "Statement of Principles and Commitments of Graduate Deans"; the latter which has been endorsed by the Graduate College.

- **Project Proceedings**

Five listening sessions with UI Graduate Students were conducted prior to a CGS hosted two-day related virtual meeting convened in October, attended by Dean Keller, Adriana Swancy and Associate Dean Shelly Campo.

- **Overall Comments**
  i. There is a tremendous amount of anxiety known to be existing among our graduate students in general and even more exemplified within certain affinity groups at many institutions; the challenges are real and need to be addressed as genuine situations that students are encountering.
  ii. The mental health challenges do not imply or equate to students' inadequacy or their lack of intelligence to do graduate work.

- **Academic Challenges**
  i. Academic concerns center generally on imposter syndrome.
  ii. The greater uncertainty of funding due to the national state of the economy and its impact on institutions of higher learning.
  iii. Technological challenges and the related forced remote working model due to the pandemic.
  iv. Added pressure and stress caused by the federal government legislative proposals impacting international students over the past six months (burdensome to both international students and admistrators).
  v. The varying levels of quality mentoring of students across disciplines and across programs was a critical issue identified. Graduate students felt that being regarded as junior colleagues greatly enhances their chances for success rather than the viewpoint of being employees serving to teach and be a part of a workforce to get research produced.
  vi. The notion of advancing student development type approaches, preparing and encountering graduate school milestones as learning experiences as opposed to "weeding out" mechanisms that lead to attrition, is being promoted and becoming more established (e.g., the early implementation of individual development plans).
  vii. Peer support groups were needed for graduate students to express in open sessions, "failure cafes", the challenges, concerns and failures experienced in their programs.

- **Non Academic (Largely Self-evident)**
  i. Managing Stress and frustration levels surrounding political environments related to DEI issues in academia and civil unrest (racial and social).
  ii. Maintaining work-life balance during the pandemic (recognized as widespread for students, faculty and staff).

- **Intersecting Variables**
  i. Isolation in the midst of social distancing resulting in a disconnect between instructors and faculty with students and colleagues.
     a. Challenges developing communities, especially for new students, with their cohorts, their students and the faculty within their departments or programs; moreover, for affinity groups addressing their respective variant issues.
     b. Overdependence on social media for information and socialization.
  ii. Virtual information (digital) overload via social media, text messaging, emails, courses.
  iii. Work-life balance. A better understanding is needed by students and faculty of the stress and challenges of virtual educaion.
  iv. Need for Mental Health-wellness advisors and counselors offering services especially directed for graduate students.

- **Graduate College Potential Action Plans**
  Collaboration with Academic Leaders
  i. Promote student centric models of education that provide opportunities for students to explore pathways and learning experiences that align with their interests and goals (e.g., curriculum redesign model).

ii. Work to improve mentoring training programs. Based on previous consultation with Associate Professor Lori Adams, National Research Mentoring Network Master Facilitator, and Associate Dean Shelly Campo, pursue a greater exchange of views across campus and submission of a public-private partnership (P3) proposal for funding to establish an Iowa Mentoring Academy.

iii. Emphasize greater the [individual development program (IDP)](#) process to encourage students, support their individual goals and interests, and treat as junior colleagues.

iv. Use each graduate education milestone as a learning experience, not as a go/no-go determinant.

v. Develop and provide safe spaces for engaging graduate students to discuss difficulties or failures.

vi. Collaboration with [University Counseling Services (UCS)](#) Barry Schreier, Director and CGS advisory board member):

    a. Help students and faculty understand the transition from undergraduate to graduate school – "leveling steps" up to their adulthood and professional careers beyond—and the difference and variance among the challenges that may be experienced across the course of the graduate student life cycle; how to act on the specific nature of the challenges, levels of anxiety and "trigger" points to seek help .

    b. Provide as soon as practicable personal face-to- face counseling currently requested by students to supplant the current offering of virtual counseling.

    c. Hire additional counselors, especially a more diverse group of clinicians to meet the life's experiences of our affinity groups. students

Potential Immediate steps

i. Provide appropriate program graduate assistants to UCS as interns to help meet their workload (e.g. MSW or Counseling Psychology students)

ii. Work with UCS to develop a P3 request for their needed infrastructure in their delivery of counseling services.

- **Q&A**

i. It was commented that there may be value to include in the Graduate Student Mental Health assessments, data from among the cohort of students that have contracted coronavirus in light of the phenomenon of experiencing symptoms of the illness many weeks or even months after its contraction ("long-haulers").

ii. It was acknowledged that there remains a challenge influencing faculty who are not readily willing to engage with graduate students on the level of junior colleagues which can have a critical impact on students' mental health within departments. The Graduate College's efforts in sharing best practices, data, information, along with perspectives gleaned through national academic educational partnerships and initiatives (Curricular Redesign Model, AAU PhD Initiative, Innovation in Graduate Education Challenge Grant Awards, etc.,) are influencing an understanding among faculty that the future of graduate education is requiring changes in order to enhance graduate education and student outcomes.

iii. Faculty mentoring training must be specific to the academic setting (i.e., uniqueness and roles) and competency needs to be demonstrated.

iv. Without opportunities (i.e., professional development resources, training programs and experiences) to prepare early graduate students to teach during their time at Iowa and following graduation can add to the imposter syndrome phenonmenon. Paired with this is the stigma surrounding mental health issues which the role of developing peer discussion groups could help serve to address.

v. Currently there is training in [Responsible Conduct of Research](#) and scholaryl activities, including discussion of student/mentor responsibilities in pursuit of scholarly work and intellectual dialogues, for graduate students. Although a federal requirement for scholars funded by NSF, NIH and USDA's NIFA grants, a department, program, and/or principal investigator may also require that their students and postdoctoral researchers complete this training regardless of the type of funding source. The concepts and principles discussed are highly relevant to academic scholars in all discipline areas.

It was noted in addition that many of the edeavors of the Graduate College (Office of Academic Affairs Office and Graduate Professional Development) to aculturate students to our graduate programs and their professioanl development intersect with some of the mental health challenges they are facing and the Graduate College is striving to disseminate its resources and programming in this regard with their graduate educational enterpise.

5. **Review of Graduate College Draft Strategic Plan**

The Graduate College Path Forward Strategic Plan, assembled by the Graduate College Strategic Planning Committee (January 28, 2020) and submitted to the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost (EVPP) spring 2020, was addressed together with the Strength-Weakness-Opportunity-Threat (SWOT) analysis and the Provost's response to the strategic planning efforts.

The planning committee, co-chaired by Graduate Council member David Cwiertny and Associate Vice President for Research Anne Ricketts, engaged previous and current Graduate Council members and as many important stakeholders as possible to ensure the SWOT analysis was representative of their interests and achievable, the latter especially given the Graduate College's mandating parameters which council members were advised to be mindful of in their review.

As a collegiate effort, future recommendations from the Graduate Council members, their faculty, and students were sought in guiding the revisions of the original strategic plan and the completion of a final draft plan by March 1st.

In closing, Dean Keller noted the limitations of resources, energy and available time regarding the additional important work that is attempting to be accomplished and the importance and appreciation for the Council members' assistance with the strategic plan was emphasized in helping the Graduate College's efforts to strategize and prioritize their future work.

The meeting was adjourned at 09:25 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
2021: January 28, February 11, 25, March 11 April 1, 15.