

CGPSP Meeting Minutes
October 21, 2020
3:30 – 5:00 pm

Present: Madlyn Frisard, Karen DePauw (ex officio), Nancy Bodenhorn, Coy Allen, Richard Vari, Anurag Mantha, Barbara Hoopes, Lujean Baab, Pengtao Yue, Paul Emmons, Montasir Abbas, Nathaniel Porter, Awad Abelhalim, Emily Burns, Rachel Holloway (ex officio), Robert Sumachrist

Absent with Notification: Marcia Feuerstein, Maruf Hoque, Hannah Parks, Ashley Shew, Gabriela Carillo

Absent without Notification: Tyler Walters, Lesa Hanlin, Sarah Karpanty, Cliff Shaffer, Hypatia Alexandria

Visitors and Invited Guests: Janice Austin, Bill Huckle, Kevin Edgar, Cathy Grimes, Bryan Hanson

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 3:34. A quorum was not established, so approval of the agenda and minutes were moved to later in the meeting.

Approval of the Agenda

The agenda was approved as presented.

Approval of the Minutes

The minutes from the October 7, 2020 meeting were approved as presented.

Committee Reports

Graduate Curriculum Committee – Bill Huckle

At the September 24, 2020 meeting two new courses were approved as-is (HNFE 5304, HD 5324). Five courses were approved pending minor revisions (CSES 5634, CEE 5454, HD 5224, WATR 6004, NEUR 5844), and BMES 5234 was tabled for further discussion. The Science, Technology, and Engineering in Policy (STEP) certificate modifications were approved effective Spring 2021 with Spring 2021 as the first available term to graduate.

Graduate Student Appeals Committee – Karen DePauw

There are no open appeals at this time.

Degree Requirements, Standards, Criteria, and Academic Progress (DRSCAP) Committee – Barbara Hoopes

DRSCAP split into subcommittee meetings last week to further discuss their three priorities for this year.

- Retirement of Presidential Policy Memorandum (PPM) 194: Members are researching the original reasoning behind the policy when it was established. A draft resolution will be presented at the November 4 meeting.
- Posthumous Graduate Degree Procedures: The subcommittee collected example procedures from peer institutions. From these examples, key considerations for a new policy were identified, including student status, credits, and GPA, identifying who can initiate a request, special circumstances that may need to be considered, how/what information should be included on the degree itself, and the need for fee waiver procedures.
- Goals of Doctoral Residency: The committee continues to review the current ten goals of residency. Current policy does focus primarily on PhD students, but the committee aims to address EDD, VetMed, and Med students. Karen DePauw added that EDD students are often held to the same standards as PhD students, but part of this review is to make sure each degree has its own specific requirements. VetMed and Medical students are mentioned in current policy, but have different requirements. Barbara clarified that there are some issues with the catalog description of residency, which lists all four degrees, but then only discusses PhD. More consistent and inclusive language is needed.

The next meeting of DRSCAP is on October 28th.

Old Business

There was no old business to discuss.

New Business

Ombudsperson Annual Report – Bryan Hanson

Bryan Hanson joined CGPSP to present his annual report from the Office of the Ombudsperson. The report covers August 2019 – July 2020, and identifies trends and recommendations moving forward.

There was a spike in activity in April and May due to Covid-19 concerns, but during this time Bryan also identified a higher level of communication between students and departments, and more mindful review of working relationships. Higher availability of video conferencing was also identified as a positive, as students may feel more comfortable with this format. Video conferencing may also account for the higher percentage of non-Blacksburg campus involvement.

Even with Covid-19, demographics of Ombudsperson referrals have stayed fairly steady, with roughly 70% of visits coming from students, 20% from faculty, and 10% from other parties. The concerns visitors wish to address are also fairly consistent, with a focus on relation building, fair compensation, and supervisory effectiveness. There was a raise in concerns related to academic progression and expectations, as well as a higher focus on communication at an organizational level.

Bryan sends out an optional survey each semester for those who have used the Ombudsperson as a resource. From this survey, he had 72 participants. Many report less stress as a result of their visit.

Recommendations for departments and administration include:

- Increase open, consistent, and authentic communication with students. Identify successful communication, and focus on building trust.
- Solidify access to mental health resources in Northern Virginia
- Normalize opportunities to check in on working relationships
- Establish an initiative for departmental commitments to confront academic bullying.

Madlyn asked for further guidance on how departments might improve and better evaluate working relationships. Bryan emphasized the need for regular conversations, allowing students to speak up instead of running on assumptions. Often students are hesitant to raise concerns, sometimes because they are simply focused on doing their work, or because they are afraid of souring the relationship. Departments should also integrate annual review processes into their regular procedures, but for these to be effective the intention of the review must be clearly communicated and supported.

Bryan was thanked by the committee for his consideration of Northern Virginia students, and for his continued support of all graduate students.

Academic Bullying Initiatives

Bryan then presented his proposed action plan and intention to begin a working group to expand efforts on disrupting academic bullying. Broad goals of the action plan and working group include:

- Provide guidance to build a culture that actively disrupts academic bullying
- Identify and eliminate systematic barriers to addressing academic bullying
- Increase support capacity
- Create a non-defensive environment to discuss and identify actions that may create intimidating or hostile environments
- Identify advocates and ways to acknowledge and encourage departments who actively participate in creating inclusive and affirming communities.

For those who do participate, Bryan would like to develop awards to display in offices or common spaces, a dedicated page on the website with a roster of participants (also referred to as a Registry of Fellows), as well as digital badges and/or email footers for personal use. Participation would be prompted by a request form, which would be filled by an individual wishing to be part of a Fellowship Registry. Participating departments/fellows would then have facilitated dialogue to help them develop action plans. Bryan also shared a draft of a commitment pledge, which would be refined by his proposed working group.

Once action plans are established, departments would be expected to maintain their commitment by championing Fellowship Registry members, evaluate and assess their efforts on a regular basis, integrate materials into orientation for students, faculty, and staff, continue training, and facilitate ongoing dialogue.

Discussion focused on how to disrupt bullying when the attitude may be coming from a department head level. Bryan affirmed that this is part of the difficulty, and emphasizes the need for a cultural shift and for structured, University-wide expectations to be set to ensure concerns are not dismissed and members of the academic community do not feel disenfranchised. This requires the support of college deans, and it was suggested that Academic Affairs Committees and the Faculty Senate be invited to join the working group. It was agreed that the working group should be broader than the commission. Awad asked for student participation in feedback, as often issues with academic bullying are tolerated because students fear losing their research, funding, or even immigration status. He also emphasized the need for clear avenues to raise concerns and pursue action.

Incentives were also discussed, although the commission emphasized that setting a mandate may be a better approach (which would provide structure and support) than an entirely voluntary effort. Montasir suggested a VT News item that would include the roster of participants. Nancy also mentioned the annual exemplary department awards, and suggested that a future theme reading academic bullying may help to build incentives.

If you would like to be involved in the working group, please contact Bryan at bryanh76@vt.edu. His office is in the GLC, room 114.

AT this point, a quorum was reached and the agenda and minutes were approved.

Graduate School Update – Karen DePauw

There were no academic changes to report.

Updates:

- Candidacy status will be on the Board of Visitors agenda in March. This was pushed back from the original date, as more discussion was needed. They still plan to implement changes in Fall 2021.
- The Mental Health Graduate School Report will be posted soon, with updates on the website regarding recommendations and actions.
- The Graduate Program Directors have requested a new forum on Slack. If you would like to join, please contact Roxanne Kehr.
- With the changes in the Spring Break schedule this year, Dean DePauw is drafting a statement to ensure these “micro-breaks” are honored by departments, and to set clear expectations for instructors. This will be coordinated with the Provost’s announcement.
- Virginia Tech’s Sesquicentennial will be celebrated August-December 2021. Any ideas for celebration are welcome. A time capsule has already been suggested.

- The search for Dean DePauw's replacement is underway. The University is currently identifying a search firm to conduct the search. Once one is appointed, the commission will be asked to contribute to and review the job description, and a search committee will be formed. The goal is to have the new hire in place in late Spring, to allow overlap before Dean DePauw's departure in August 2021.
- Anurag was prematurely thanked for his service to both CGPSP and the numerous other commissions and committees on which he has served. Anurag's final meeting with CGPSP will be on November 4th. The search for a new GHS chair is ongoing.

Constituency Updates

Graduate Student Assembly – Awad Abdelhalim

No updates to report

Graduate Student Honor System – Anurag Mantha

The search for a new Chair is underway. There are currently 2 open honor system cases.

University Library Committee – Nathaniel Porter

No updates to report

Faculty Senate – Montasir Abbas

The Office of Sponsored Programs currently has a survey out to improve the contract management.

Student Government Association – No representative

Board of Visitors – No representative

University Council and Commission Updates

University Council – Madlyn Frisard

University Council is discussing a resolution to approve the 2020 Climate Action Plan. At their next meeting (Monday), Kevin Edgar will present the Task Force Report on Graduate Education, with a press release to follow on Tuesday. AT this point the report will be made available to the commission.

Commission on Administrative and Professional Faculty Affairs – Representative absent

Commission on Student Affairs – No representative

Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies – Rachel Holloway

No updates to report, although Rachel affirms that they continue to approve courses.

Announcements and Discussion

None

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:51.

Respectfully submitted,

Roxanne Kehr

On behalf of Karen P. DePauw, Ph.D.

Vice President and Dean of Graduate Studies