

CGPSP Meeting Minutes
November 4, 2020
3:30 – 5:00 pm

Present: Madlyn Frisard, Montasir Abbas, Ashley Shew, Richard Vari, Pengtao Yue, Coy Allen, Marci Feuerstein, Barbara Hoopes, Nancy Bodenhorn, Cliff Shaffer, Paul Emmons, Nathaniel Porter, Hannah Parks, Anurag Mantha (on behalf of Kayla Alward), Awad Abdelhalim, Maruf Hoque, Gabriela Carillo, Hypatia Alexandria, Rajesh Bagchi (on behalf of Robert Sumachrist), Karen DePauw (ex officio), Rachel Holloway (ex officio)

Absent with Notification:

Absent without Notification: Tyler Walters, Lesa Hanlin, Sarah Karpanty, Lujean Baab, Emily Burns, Sabrina Sturgeon

Visitors and Invited Guests: Janice Austin, Bill Huckle, Kevin Edgar

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 3:32 pm. A motion was made and approved for voting to be based on abstentions and votes against, due to zoom limitations.

Approval of the Agenda

The agenda was approved with two modifications. The resolution to PPM 194 was moved from Old Business to New Business, and a vote for the proposed GHS interim chair, Kayla Alward, was added.

Approval of the Minutes

The minutes from the October 21, 2020 meeting were approved as presented.

Committee Reports

Graduate Curriculum Committee – Marcia Feuerstein

The planned meeting was cancelled, as there were not enough proposals to consider. GCC will meet next week.

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 continues to work within three subcommittees.

- Retirement of Presidential Policy Memorandum (PPM) 194: A draft resolution was made and presented to CGPSP later in this meeting.

- Posthumous Graduate Degree Procedures: The subcommittee continues to collect example procedures from peer institutions. From this research, a proposal was made to consider non-degree recognition options for students who do not meet the full requirements of a posthumous degree.
- Goals of Doctoral Residency: The committee continues to review the current ten goals of residency and how they uniquely apply to different programs. The subcommittee affirmed that geographical residency is no longer the primary aim, nor does it necessarily fit the goals of residency.

The next meeting of DRSCAP is on October 28th.

Old Business

Graduate Education Task Force Report – Madlyn Frisard

The Graduate Education Task Force Report was shared with University Council and has since been made public, with one redaction. Members may now access the report, Kevin Edgar’s slideshow on the findings, and recommended steps on the SharePoint. Kevin Edgar reports that the recommendations have been well received, but encourages members to continue to review them and ask questions or offer feedback.

Nancy Bodenhorn raised a question regarding a timeline for candidacy status reform. Dean DePauw had planned to submit the resolution to the Board of Visitors at the November meeting, with a January start date. The Provost and the budget office have both requested more details, and so the resolution will be presented at the March BOV meeting, with an effective start date for Fall 2021. It was clarified that this start date will allow students who have passed their preliminary exams this fall to apply for candidacy status as early as next fall. There was some additional discussion on language, as some departments call a student a “candidate” after they defend, or as soon as they pass their preliminary exams. It was agreed that this resolution only applies to the official candidacy status eligibility and the financial benefits of the status. Language within departments does not need to change. Awad Abdelhalim added that the delay in this process has been frustrating, and long process times in general makes it difficult to engage students in governance.

Awad Abdelhalim was then asked to share his thoughts on the Task Force Report, which emphasized the need for consistent, higher pay for graduate students. Prime concerns were the high impact of seemingly small discrepancies (for instance, when a student is making \$20K and year, a \$1K difference is significant), the outdated assumption that Blacksburg has a lower than average cost of living, tax requirements and the single-earner household for international students, and the continued need for updated research on student’s cost of living. Rajesh Bagchi, who was part of the task force, affirmed that these issues are a known concern along with food security, and were also emphasized in the findings from the Mental Health Task Force. Karen DePauw also noted that Monika Gibson, Lauren Surface, and Shernita Lee are working to create a cost of living calculator, which will allow students to get a clearer picture of their anticipated cost of living and stipend options while also allowing the Graduate School to better track and understand student needs.

The conversation then expanded to funding and stipend levels. Currently, there are over 50 stipend levels which are often influenced by faculty behavior. The goal would be to have less options and more consistency, but the control of this is outside the scope of the task force. Montasir Abbas suggested making stipend incentives for faculty, not just departments, and Gabriela Carillo suggested expanding transparency by posting stipend rates by faculty. This would also allow students to be better informed when choosing their mentors.

While there are recommended actions to increase funding, members were concerned that many of these actions focus on research and disproportionately improve stipends for science and engineering, where humanities tend to offer the lowest stipends. Humanities students often rely on highly competitive grants, which may cost them more than they offer as internal policies may exclude grant students from tuition remission. Karen DePauw and Kevin Edgar both emphasized the need to remove some of these hurdles for humanities students, the need to support and encourage more student-initiated fellowships, and the need for a comprehensive funding structure that benefits all students, not only institutions or students from particular departments.

Karen DePauw then reviewed the immediate action steps identified by the task force, as well as long-term goals that she feels could be addressed earlier.

- Donations for endowment fellowships: Dean DePauw submitted a proposal for a \$75 million multi-approach university-wide campaign, which would benefit graduate students
- Candidacy status: As discussed earlier, this is in progress with an anticipated Fall roll-out
- Expand mentorship to all new assistant professors: There is currently no one leading this effort. The College of Engineering has already expanded mentorship training, and the goal is to expand their program to the other colleges. Most of the work needed at this point is logistics, and the main expense was food for trainings, which can of course be budgeted. Kevin Edgar noted that the College of Engineering has been very passionate about this effort, and would be available to train leadership in other colleges.
- Professional development graduate certificates: Kevin Edgar is currently working on this. The certificate would include activities and professional development focused on transferrable skills such as writing, oral skills, team membership development, elementary statistics, and others. Along with the certificate, they are looking at providing a badge system for individual elements and trainings. Anyone interested in helping develop the certificate program can contact Kevin Edgar at kjedgar@vt.edu
- Stipend rates: As earlier discussed, work is being done to provide data dashboards to present to CGPSP and others, which will allow VT to better compare stipend rates and cost of living between aspirational peer institutions.
- Enhance the role of program review: This effort has already been started with IGEP programs, lead by Bill Huckle. The goal is to integrate program review in a way that allows the Graduate School to have higher involvement in quality assurance without making more work for programs.

Long term goals that can begin action this year:

- Improve phrasing to employ students for multiple years (ongoing effort)
- Increase the number and scope of student-initiated funding
- Improve recruitment efforts (the model won't be in place soon, but Shernita Lee is already working on this)
- Implement 360-degree feedback (Ashley Shew and Montasir Abbas were identified as leaders for this effort, the full report has more details)

Dean DePauw emphasized that she would like to have as much in place for the new Vice President and Dean this coming Spring/Summer.

Montasir Abbas noted that he had previously hosted a workshop for successful faculty fundraisers to share their "secrets" and hopes to continue these workshops in accordance with the task force goals.

New Business

Presidential Policy Memorandum 194 – Madlyn Frisard and Barbara Hoopes

The resolution has been presented for a first reading. Once the resolution is reviewed and sent out to the 4 senates for feedback, it will be revisited for a vote. Bill Huckle is working on a preamble to explain the reason for the resolution and retirement of PPM 194.

Vote for Graduate Honor System Interim Chair Kayla Alward – Madlyn Frisard

Kayla Alward was approved as the interim chair for GHS, replacing Anurag Mantha. Anurag abstained from the vote, as he was attending as a representative for Kayla. Anurag notes that the transition has been very smooth, as Kayla was already a member of GHS.

Graduate School Update – Karen DePauw

There were no updates to report.

Constituency Updates

Graduate Student Assembly – Maruf Hoque

No updates to report

Graduate Student Honor System – Anurag Mantha

No updates to report, as Anurag is no longer the chair.

University Library Committee – Nathaniel Porter

No updates to report

Faculty Senate – Ashley Shew

The Provost attended their last meeting to further explain expectations for the Spring semester. Faculty are encouraged to work with their GTAs when considering in-person instruction, which is not required. Discussion noted that students balancing in-person and online instruction have

had some issues transitioning between courses, as they often only have 15 minutes to get from campus to their apartment or another online access space. Other concerns were raised about student attendance of in-person classes being offered, especially as winter attendance tends to be lower regardless.

Faculty senate may also need to address communication efforts, as there may be gaps when faculty senate representatives do not attend or do not forward information to their departments.

Student Government Association – No representative

Board of Visitors – No representative

University Council and Commission Updates

University Council – Madlyn Frisard

University Council reviewed the Graduate Education Task Force Report as presented by Kevin Edgar

Commission on Administrative and Professional Faculty Affairs – Representative absent

Commission on Student Affairs – No representative

Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies – Rachel Holloway

CUSP continues to approve courses. The undergraduate honor system will be discussed soon, which may be of interest to the commission in the future.

Announcements and Discussion

Many thanks to Anurag Mantha for his service in CGPSP, GHS, and more, and best of luck in his new venture!

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:52.

Respectfully submitted,

Roxanne Kehr

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

Vice President and Dean of Graduate Studies