University Council on Graduate Study  
May 18, 2010  
Minutes  
3:00-5:00 p.m.  
817 CL

Attending: Patricia Beeson (Provost’s Office and A&S, Chair), Stephen Carr (A&S), Nicole Constable (A&S), Samuel Conte (Registrar), Valire Copeland (Social Work), Sudipta Devanath (Graduate and Professional Student Assembly), Amanda Godley (Education), Donald Hoffman (Dental), John Hulland (Business), Robert Parker (Engineering), Sandra Quinn (Public Health), Stephanie Hoogendoorn (Provost’s Office)

Guests: Cynthia Golden and Holly Shiflett

Approval of the Minutes  
The minutes of the December 15, 2009 meeting were approved as written.

Announcements  
Our benefits representative has met with UPMC to discuss the 2010-2011 premiums for graduate students and others with eligible academic appointments to obtain medical and health care insurance. The University is looking at an increase of 3.9% over the current rates. The increase last fiscal year was just over 3%. The University will pay for the increase for the individual premiums. Students who elect to purchase coverage for an adult and/or dependent(s) will have to purchase coverage at the increased premium.

The NRC Assessment of Research-Doctorate Programs has recently announced a change in methodology. The changes, which are not yet final, are likely to divide the main ranking of each program into two separate rankings. One is based on explicit faculty determinations of which criteria matter in given disciplines, and one is based on implicit criteria. Further, the NRC is likely to release ranges of ratings for a 90 percent “confidence level,” not the confidence level target of 50 percent that was in the methodology released last year.

Two Pitt students received 2010-2011 American Council of Learned Societies-Mellon Dissertation Completion Fellowships: Boryana Dobreva from the Department of German and Jonathan Livengood from the Department of History and Philosophy of Science. This is the third year that Pitt graduate students have been recognized by the competition, which is now in its fourth year. This year, 65 fellowships were awarded and of these, about 20 went to public institutions.

Pitt students received 13 fellowship awards from the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program. Of these, six are Pitt graduating undergraduates who will pursue their graduate studies elsewhere and seven are students who are pursuing graduate studies at Pitt. The departments of current graduate students include Applied Linguistics, Bioengineering (three students), Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, History and Philosophy of Science, and Psychology.

Update on the Center for Instructional Development and Distance Learning from Cynthia
Golden, Director, and Holly Shiflett, Associate Director
The Center for Instructional Development and Distance Learning (CIDDE) provides a number of services to support teaching and learning environments, to apply current and emerging instructional technologies, and to deliver professional creative and production services for events and activities. Of these, their efforts are primarily focused on providing instructional and classroom support. Support aimed at faculty members includes the New Faculty Orientation, grant assistance, faculty book club, teaching and technology workshops, one-on-one consulting, and teaching excellence showcase. Since the introduction of Blackboard twelve years ago, the use of Blackboard has steadily increased and as of fall 2009, 86% of Pitt students (about 31,000) use Blackboard. Support for teaching assistants and fellows includes the new Teaching Assistant (TA) orientation, workshops, the University Teaching Practicum, and classroom videotaping and analysis. In fall 2009, the TA orientation included a new session entitled “Dealing with Distressed Students” developed with assistance from the Counseling Center and at the suggestion of UCGS members. Throughout the year teaching assistants and fellows can attend workshops on the topics that include mentoring, teaching a six-week course, teaching portfolio, teaching philosophies, and interview skills to showcase teaching (first offered in 2010). Departments may also request specific workshops to be held for their students as needed.

Through Pitt Online, CIDDE provides instructional and technological support so that programs can offer existing professional graduate programs online under a consistent and supported environment. Pitt Online was launched in fall 2009 with the MEd in English and Communications and the MSN in Clinical Nurse Leader. Three additional graduate programs are currently under review to be offered via Pitt Online. These students are provided with 24/7 technical support and have access to the same advising, library, bookstore, and registration resources as do on-campus students. New student and library orientations are offered online via interactive online conferences. Features of the Pitt Online Web site include an online course demonstration and the “Is online learning for me?” quiz.

Subcommittee Reports
Graduate Procedures, Robert Parker, chair, provided the following summary of activities:

The subcommittee reviewed the current procedure for offering conditional admissions and found that the current practice is effective. They further concluded that a university policy is not needed. According to University of Pittsburgh Policy 09-02-01, conditional admissions are made on a case-by-case basis initiated by a department or program with final approval granted by the Provost or the Provost’s delegate, which is currently Vice Provost Beeson. Students who do not meet the English Language Proficiency Requirements request a conditional admission so that they may obtain a visa to study English for one year at the English Language Institute. Typically these students have funding from their government. Once the student obtains the required minimum score on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System, then they are accepted into the program.

The subcommittee reviewed the minimum required score for the Internet based TOEFL, which is now set at 80 according to University of Pittsburgh Policy 09-02-01. Members agreed that the
minimum does not need to be changed. Additionally members agreed that it is not necessary to require minimum section scores, noting that departments or programs can set their own section minimums as necessary. John Horn from the School of Medicine noted that they interview prospective students using Skype technology; this has been identified as superior to the TOEFL at establishing English language capability.

The subcommittee reviewed and approved the rubric to evaluate assessment matrices with minor corrections to improve the clarity of the document. Members think that the document titled “Examples from University of Pittsburgh Program Assessment Plans” is very helpful for building and revising assessment plans.

The subcommittee discussed the categories of master’s degrees: M.S., M.A., and Professional Master’s in terms of thesis requirements and naming conventions. As professional master’s degrees increase there is some concern as to if the degree type indicates whether or not the degree program requires a research component. Members agreed that it could be more accurate to identify a universal professional master’s degree type such as Master of Professional Studies in [inset major], however such a degree type is not currently recognized. Thus, the issue has been tabled.

The subcommittee discussed the requirement of the external member on the doctoral committee as stated in Regulations Governing Graduate Study. The concern is that the guidelines now state that the external member of the committee is to be: “from another department in the University of Pittsburgh or from an appropriate graduate program at another academic institution, to serve as the doctoral committee.” This language does not include a researcher who may be employed in industry or at a national laboratory who has significant publication record appropriate to the discipline and previous advising experience from serving as the external member of a doctoral committee. The subcommittee is drafting a suggested language change in order to include research- and mentorship-active members of national laboratories or industry as external dissertation committee members.

The subcommittee has begun to review the Guidelines for the Review of Off-Campus/Distance Education Graduate Programs. In particular members agree that some of the guidelines need additional clarification to be more measurable and operational. The subcommittee is presently reviewing and providing draft language of a revision of the Guidelines. Members plan to work with CIDDE in addressing concerns prior to bringing the draft before the full Council.

Student Affairs, Nicole Constable on behalf of Mary Beth Happ, chair, provided a summary of activities for the year.

The subcommittee approved guidelines for the content of TA/TF/GSA and GSR appointment letters. The main sections of the letter include: details of appointment, appointment requirements, health insurance, merit scholarship, response necessary, and policy statement. The 2010 Student Recruitment Seminar for staff and faculty was titled “Best Practices at Pitt for Using Technology for Graduate and Professional Student Recruitment” and was held on May 20, 2010 from 2:00 to 3:30 p.m. in the Martin Colloquium Conference Room. Topics of discussion
included using Social Networking tools (Face Book), online chats throughout the recruitment process (Chat University and WebX), and using Web sites to illustrate and articulate program goals.

The subcommittee discussed using technology for admissions, recruitment, and visibility. Questions raised by the subcommittee include:
- What are creative, smart ways to use technologies?
- What are the benefits of using Social Networking Tools, such as FaceBook, for recruiting and communication?
- How to manage key words to draw people to the Pitt Web site?
- How to effectively incorporate podcasts into Web sites?
- What are the benefits of using message boards during the application process?

Health insurance for Fellows was discussed. Members agreed that:
- All funded students should have health insurance coverage.
- Students should not have to choose between insurance and additional stipend funds. If students have insurance from other sources then they shouldn’t be required to use fellowship funds to purchase Pitt graduate insurance.
- The goal is that insurance for all supported students should be equivalent.
- It was further suggested that it might be time to complete a stipend review benchmarked against peer institutions.

In recent years, the subcommittee has been concerned about the mental health of graduate students. To address their concerns, the Center for Instructional Development and Distance Education (CIDDE) added a session to the TA/TF orientations about mental health. The subcommittee looks forward to hearing an update about the new session from CIDDE at our May 18 meeting.

The Association of American Universities (AAU) has recently recommended an exit survey for doctoral students that will complement the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) survey. The subcommittee will discuss how Pitt might implement this survey at its June meeting. The survey includes questions about program quality, faculty mentoring and advising, and professional development.

The Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (GPSA) submitted a brief proposal suggesting that the University offer awards for graduate and professional students to be presented by the Provost or the Chancellor in the areas of teaching, research, and service. At its October 20, 2009 meeting, the subcommittee discussed the matter of graduate student awards raised by the graduate student members. After lengthy discussion the general sense was that the Arts and Sciences Graduate Student Organization teaching award model was a good one for GPSA to follow. Concerns of the subcommittee also included the value of the awards, vetting at the School level, selection criteria, and the process to evaluate nominees. GPSA submitted revised proposals for Research, Teaching, and Service awards on April 30, 2010. The chair determined that the revised proposals include nomination instructions and composition of the awards selection committees, but further development to address the subcommittee’s concerns, as noted above, is needed before review by the full subcommittee.
The subcommittee did not address using the National Research Council rankings/data of doctoral program because the results have still not been released. The most recent update indicated that the results are expected in summer 2010 but the date is not confirmed.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:50 p.m. The next meeting of Council is scheduled for Tuesday, June 15, 2010, but if no proposals are received then it will be canceled.