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Academic Policy Committee Report - September 5, 2019

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REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING
Thursday, September 5, 2019
3:30 – 5:00 p.m., 111 Student Services Building

Committee members present: Maria Stehle (Chair); Eric Boder, Julie Bonom, Lars Dzikus, Luis Finotti, Freida Herron, Rudy Santore (proxy for Mohammed Mohsin), David Willis (GSS President).

Other attendees: Sara Bradberry, David Patterson (Graduate Council Chair), Dixie Thompson, and Catherine Cox (Graduate Council Liaison)

Maria Stehle called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. As this is the first meeting of this academic year, Dr. Stehle asked that we introduce ourselves.

Agenda Items:

1. Academic Second Opportunity

Proposal presented by Sara Bradberry.

Undergraduates have the Academic Second Opportunity program. This program gives undergraduate students who were unsuccessful previously to petition to come back and earn their bachelor's degree. Currently, graduate students do not have such an option.

As you are aware, every grade counts forever in the graduate GPA. If a student began their graduate program and for whatever reason had a couple of bad semesters, those D's and F's will forever be calculated in their graduate GPA. Now, a few years later this student is in a good place in their life and wants to earn that graduate degree. Because of the low GPA this student has, it will take him/her many, many hours of earning A and B grades to dig themselves out of this low GPA. This opportunity would allow such a student a fresh start.

This idea came about because of a situation recently with a former student. This student applied for spring 2019 admission. His previous attendance was in 1993 and he was very unsuccessful at that time. He was never put on probation, he never withdrew or dropped his courses, nor was he ever dismissed. He just kept registering, taking courses and making F's. Fast forward 25 years later, this young man now works on campus and is in a completely different place in his life, and wants to come back and earn a graduate degree. He applied to the Graduate School; but, with a GPA of 1.5, he was denied admission. Hours were calculated to determine how many hours he would have to take to dig himself out of this hole to reach a 3.0, and it was almost double the program hours. Dr. Thompson asked Dr. Bradberry to meet with the student to discuss his situation. Dr. Bradberry reported that this young man had great recommendations, has a positive attitude, he works for the state, and the program we have that he wants is the only program offered in the state. We admitted him as a non-degree student for spring and he made an A.

His situation made us wonder what other graduate schools were doing in these situations. A list serve question went out from CGS where we got feedback from schools outside our peers. We also did research and looked at peer schools, inspirational schools, and other SEC schools. We discovered not many schools offer a second opportunity. None of our aspirational schools has such a policy. Institutions that do include Clemson, North Carolina State, South Carolina, University of Arkansas, Mississippi State, ETSU, Ball State, and University of Texas at Tyler. However, maybe UT can think differently. Dr. Bradberry communicated she has handouts of the research results from the information received from the various schools. Dr. Bradberry created a draft of the *Graduate Restart Program* policy for our review. Before we even consider such a policy, we need to think about the following:

1. What would be the minimum GPA we would consider for the Restart Program?
2. This "second opportunity" would be a one-time offering.
3. What would be the submission process?
4. What would the transcript look like? The previous failing grades would be changed to "W's" with the comment, "Graduate Restart Program" or whatever comment we determine is best.
5. How would we evaluate the student?
6. How long does the student have to out to be eligible?
7. Departments can choose to opt out. They would add that comment in their admission text in the catalog.
8. An endorsement letter must come from the department. The student would talk first with the department and prove that he/she has grown and is at a good place emotionally, academically, financially and physically to come back, do the work required, and earn the degree. The student would prove to the department first that they are a good risk to earn this fresh start.

9. If department approves and submits an endorsement letter, then the student would submit a readmission to the program.
10. If a student is readmitted to the Restart Program, there will have to be some mentoring and monitoring.
 - i. The student would meet with the Assistant Dean of the Graduate School each semester to actively monitor the student's academic progress.
 - ii. The student must be in Good Standing (minimum 3.0 GPA) each semester or the student could be subject to academic dismissal.
 - iii. The student would have a mentoring meeting with the DGS or faculty advisor each semester.

This policy change shows that we are student-focused. This gives us the ability to be conscious of the circumstances that people sometimes find themselves in, but with time and growth can get out of – which then may bring about a decision to come back and earn their graduate degree.

APC decision: APC will take this proposal to Graduate Council for further discussion. After the discussion from Graduate Council, we will bring it back to APC for final discussion.

2. Attendance Confirmation

Proposal presented by Sara Bradberry.

Currently graduate students do not confirm their attendance with the Graduate Council. Therefore, we have no idea of how many students have accepted and plan to attend. It is not until they enroll or the first day of classes that we can get numbers. Some programs have a seat-fee, but most do not. Is this something we want to think about for all programs?

A minimal deposit of maybe \$100.00 would be required. The deposit would not be lost. The deposit would go toward their tuition and fees after they are enrolled. With an attendance confirmation:

- This will give us a good idea of how many graduate students truly plan to attend UT. Currently, we have no idea how many students are attending until the 14th day report.
- We could target our communications only to those students that have confirmed and are truly coming to UT. This will be beneficial with our New Student Orientation. Currently, we send emails to all applicants with many asking why they are getting our emails when they communicated to their department that they would not be attending UT. With the confirmation of attendance, we would only send the invitation to those that confirmed. Sometimes even within the departments there is a breakdown of communication. The DGS, department head, and business manager may not know that a student is coming, because they have only been talking with the faculty member.
- This would not affect programs that already require a seat free and/or deposit.
- The deposit would be lost if the student does not attend.
- This may help us develop over time a graduate enrollment plan.
- May help us be strategic in how to grow in different areas or manage growth in different areas.

This would not change the April 15 offer letters. The attendance confirmation is from a “central place” – are you coming to UT? Maybe with a confirmation deadline date of June 1. Then on June 2, the Graduate School would communicate to the departments who has confirmed. Some things to think about:

- Let's benchmark this idea and see what other graduate schools are doing.
- What is a date that makes good sense for us?
- What is a fee that makes good sense for us?

With no negative feedback, Dr. Bradberry will gather data and we will discuss this idea again at our next meeting.

Dr. Stehle thanked everyone for the good discussion of these two items. We will review and discuss these two proposals again at our next meeting, which is October 31, 2019.

Meeting adjourned at 4:25.

Respectfully submitted,
Catherine Cox
Graduate Council Liaison