

Graduate Council Report  
Academic Year 2012-2013  
Submitted by Sara Hodges, Graduate Council Chair

The Graduate Council met regularly throughout the academic year 2012-13. As in other years, we dealt with many routine and recurring items, as well as with several items of business that were specific to this particular year.

Annual recurring activities included the selection (by subcommittees of the Graduate Council) of recipients of the highly selective Graduate School awards and fellowship (3 recipients of the UO Doctoral Research Fellowship; 3 recipients of the Margaret McBride Lehrman Fellowship; 10 recipients of the Gary E. Smith Professional Development Award; 2 recipients of the UO Public Impact Fellowship; and 2 recipients of the Donald and Darel Stein Graduate Teaching Award). In addition, members of the Graduate Council helped the Graduate School to publicize, recruit participants, and put on several Graduate School events. These included the Graduate Research Forum; the call for proposals for Innovations in Graduate Education; and a new event this year, the 3-Minute Thesis Competition, which challenged graduate students from all disciplines to compete against each other by giving the most compelling presentation of their thesis research that they could fit into 3 minutes.

Much of our discussion time during Graduate Council meetings was split between the very concrete task of vetting and making decisions about graduate programs, and the much more abstract task of developing ways to provide more useful services and opportunities to graduate students. Regarding this first task, the Graduate Council considered two varieties of new programs: Graduate Specializations and Graduate Certificates. Four new Graduate Specializations were approved (in some cases with requests for the specialization to address certain issues despite granting overall approval): Graduate Specialization in Prevention Science (in the College of Education); Graduate Specialization in Sustainable Business Practices (in the Lundquist College of Business); Graduate Specialization in Neuroscience (College of Arts and Sciences); and Graduate Specialization in Food Studies (College of Arts and Sciences). Graduate Council members were given descriptions of the programs to read in advance of a meeting with faculty representatives of the proposed specializations. In some cases, these faculty representatives were asked to provide follow-up responses to questions that arose about the proposed specializations. Recurrent themes were concerns about how the programs would be staffed and evaluated, and details about ways to ensure meaningful intellectual and practical experiences for students in the specializations. Programs that already existed (e.g., Neuroscience and Sustainable Business Practices) and were thus requesting that a program already in place be granted the new "Graduate Specialization" status tended to evoke fewer concerns than more novel programs. The Graduate Council also considered and approved one new "Graduate Certificate" in Online Learning (in the College of Education).

Another program issue that arose was a request to move the master's program in Historic Preservation (part of AAA) from Eugene to Portland. There were obvious advantages to this move (chief among them the fact that Portland offers a much larger "urban laboratory" for these students). However, the move also raised some concerns – notably about how faculty based in Portland and Eugene would communicate with each other and how the graduate program would be integrated with undergraduate offerings in historic preservation (which will continue to be offered in Eugene). In addition, it was noted that not only does the program have a high number of adjuncts among its teaching faculty, but the adjuncts were largely concentrated among those who would teach in Portland, whereas tenure-related faculty were based in Eugene. The motion to approve the move was passed but with a caveat

recommending a 5-year review, and a reminder that the current collective bargaining agreement for faculty may affect adjunct faculty that are part of this program.

One final program item of business was the currently existing “Interdisciplinary Studies: Individualized Program” (IS:IP), an interdisciplinary master’s degree program that requires candidates to pick academic advisors from and take courses in three different departments. The program is one with great potential: as an incubator for new interdisciplinary programs (e.g., the master’s program in folklore grew out of the IS:IP master’s program) and as a contributor to the UO’s reputation for offering interdisciplinary courses of study. However, it faces issues in terms of financial support (students in this program currently don’t “count” in the budget model. Furthermore, because students don’t have a single home department, GTF positions are hard for them to obtain. There is also the potential for diffusion of responsibility among the three advisors in terms of advising students and across the entire university in terms of evaluating the effectiveness of the program. The Graduate Council recommended consulting with Oregon State University about their IS:IP program, thinking about ways that IS:IP students could coalesce as a “cohort,” and continuing to discuss the program in the next year.

The Graduate Council also began tackling two broader issues this year that will almost certainly reappear in our discussions next year: recruitment and professional development. Our discussions about recruitment allowed us to share and compare what we knew various programs on campus are already doing for graduate recruitment (e.g., “visiting weekends”). We also discussed building on programs such as “Preview Oregon” (targeted at prospective graduate students from underrepresented groups); combining various graduate recruitment events or combining recruitment events with other grad activities (such as research forums); and developing more recruitment-related activities that may target students before they actually apply to graduate school (for example, programs designed to bridge between undergrad and grad education, such as students doing research with current faculty during the summer).

The other issue, professional development was an agenda item in part because this aspect of graduate training received generally low marks in the Graduate School’s survey of graduate students (discussed below) and in part because of concerns about how to give career advice to graduate students given the perennial shortage of “good” academic jobs for graduates upon completion of their degrees. The Graduate Council discussed a number of possible strategies to improve professional development, such as inviting successful graduate alumni (particularly those with careers outside academia) to talk to current grads; providing more grant writing workshops; making it easier for faculty to become familiar with the UO’s Career Center’s resources (e.g., allowing faculty to see resources on Career Center’s website without creating a “profile”); and following up the graduate student survey results by talking to graduate students in departments about what they would find useful in terms of professional development.

As a follow-up to one of our main foci from last year – graduate school policies, particularly those surrounding requirements – the Grad Council considered a request from the College of Education to allow non-tenure-related research faculty to chair dissertation committees. Arguments in favor of allowing NTTF to chair dissertation committees included the fact that many non-tenure-related research faculty in the College of Education are experts on topics that graduate students study in their dissertations, and that several NTTF have expressed a desire to chair dissertations (and in fact find it somewhat demeaning that they cannot currently do so). Arguments against allowing NTTF to chair dissertations included the possible exploitation of NTTF (chairing dissertations is not part of what they are evaluated on or paid for) particularly in departments outside of the College of Education where NTTF

are paid substantially less than tenure-related faculty; a future potential reduction in tenure-related lines (brought about because one responsibility traditionally limited to tenure-related faculty could be done by NTTF); and challenges in identifying and evaluating which NTTF are qualified to serve as dissertation chairs. Ultimately, the issue was tabled, with the knowledge that a) last year's revisions to dissertation policy allow graduate students to petition to have an NTTF as their dissertation committee chair and b) the collective bargaining agreement currently being negotiated for faculty may have an impact on this issue.

Two special sources of information related to graduate education were provided to departments this year: The results of last year's graduate student survey (conducted by the Graduate School) and the data from "Academic Analytics" (which more broadly encompassed information about departments' research productivity and prestige). The Graduate Council discussed ways of framing the delivery of these reports (some of which contained clear evidence of areas that needed improvement). We advised the Graduate School on a letter that accompanied the results, encouraging departments to review the results, to think about ways to address weaknesses, and to consider the Graduate School as a resource in these activities.

Looking ahead, the Graduate Council will almost certainly revisit and/or delve more deeply into the following issues in the future: the budget model and compensation to departments and programs for graduate education; UO's low percentage of graduate students and its AAU status; and above all, how to address these issues and others listed above, given the Graduate School's limited budget.