

**MINUTES OF THE 314TH GRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME
SEPTEMBER 17, 2008**

Members present: Greg Sterling (chair), Panos Antsaklis, Robert Bernhard, Philip Bess, Sunny Boyd, Tam Chantem, Greg Crawford, Sandra Gustafson, Mary Keys, Peter Kilpatrick, John LoSecco, Rebecca McCumbers, Dan Myers (for John McGreevy), Mark Noll, John Robinson (for Patricia O'Hara), Cyril O'Regan, John Welle, Bill Westfall, Gay Dannelly (for Jennifer Younger)

Graduate School representatives present: Terry Akai, Barbara Turpin

Guests present: Sheila Bonde, Dean of the Graduate School at Brown University
Lew Siegel, former Dean of the Graduate School at Duke University
and current Dean-in-Residence at the Council of Graduate Schools

Members absent: Peter Burns, Laura Carlson, Umesh Garg, John Renaud, Pit-Mann Wong, Carolyn Woo

Reporter: Mary Hendriksen

Prof. Sterling opened the meeting at 3:35 p.m. by welcoming all members and beginning a round of introductions.

1. Approval of the minutes of the Graduate Council meeting of February 6, 2008:

After clarification of the *ex officio* status of the GSU president, the minutes of the meeting of the Graduate Council meeting of February 6, 2008, were approved without amendment.

2. Graduate School News Items: See Appendix A for the announcements/news items distributed to Graduate Council members before the meeting.

3. Election of the executive committee of the Graduate Council: Ms. Hendriksen conducted elections for the Graduate Council's executive committee. The committee's function is to develop the agenda for Graduate Council meetings, advise the dean of the Graduate School, and recommend the formation of subcommittees to address areas of concern. Members elected were: Profs. Sandra Gustafson, John LoSecco, Peter Kilpatrick, and Ms. Rebecca McCumbers, GSU Co-Vice President.

4. Report on Demographics of the Graduate School's Incoming Classes: Drs. Akai and Turpin reported on statistics for the Graduate School's incoming class for each of the Graduate School's four divisions (Engineering, Humanities, Sciences, and Social Sciences). They provided data for the last four years on the number of applications received, percent of applicants who are admitted (selectivity), and the percent of those

admitted who chose to matriculate at Notre Dame (yield). Ideal numbers show low selectivity percentages and high yield.

Dr. Akai said that the data show that more intense recruiting of domestic students is needed in science and engineering as well as for underrepresented minority students. (Students from underrepresented minorities comprise 7.5% of Notre Dame's total graduate student population, or 11% if international students are taken out of the total, as is standard.) This figure has been as high as 14%, although according to national measures of percentages of minority students in fields represented at Notre Dame, our incoming classes should be composed of between 17-20% minority students. Notre Dame's percentage of Hispanic students, however, is better than the national average. Dr. Akai attributed the overall characteristics both to religious affiliation and geography, as the Midwest does not always have the draw of either coast. He said that the Graduate School's recruiting efforts for underrepresented minority students may be more fruitful if they are targeted within the Midwest.

Ms. McCumbers asked about selectivity measures. Dr. Akai responded that admissions decisions are holistic—that is, they extend beyond grades and GRE scores. One of the main factors is fit of the potential student with a current Notre Dame faculty member. Prof. Sterling pointed out that all admission decisions are initially made at the departmental level; the Graduate School recruits students and processes applications but does not itself select students for admission.

Prof. Kilpatrick observed that science and engineering have experienced a drop-off in applications over the last few years as well as lower yield numbers. He wondered if this might be attributable to the level of stipends offered at Notre Dame. Dr. Akai said that Notre Dame's stipend level might correlate with yield—particularly in Biology and Chemistry—but not with the number of applications received. He does not believe that prospective students typically examine stipend levels at the point of application.

Prof. Antsaklis asked about the level of international students in science and engineering. Members discussed the effect of Homeland Security measures on this number, with Prof. Sterling pointing out that 29% of the University's incoming 2008 class are international students, consistent with our 30% international population overall. Dr. Akai said that the percentage of international students in our graduate population has held steady the last several years; it is the applicant pool that has shrunk in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Because of more demanding visa requirements, two years after the institution of more stringent security measures, there was nearly a 50% drop in international applications, particularly from China. In the last few years, Western European and Australian universities have absorbed many students who might have previously applied for admission to American universities.

Prof. Sterling said that there will be an increased effort within the Graduate School to recruit internationally. Agreements are now underway with universities in Ireland and Puerto Rico and with the government of Chile. He intends to ask each department or program administered by the Graduate School to name at least three

institutions with which they will target recruiting efforts. This should be a very good way to encourage applications.

5. Graduate School Initiatives for the 2008-2009 academic year: Prof. Sterling outlined three initiatives he will undertake this year in the Graduate School:

(a) Completion of degree: Nationally, nearly 40% of students who begin doctoral programs fail to complete them. The problem of attrition is as serious at Notre Dame as elsewhere. Thus, Prof. Sterling announced that he will appoint a joint committee of Graduate Council members and representative Directors of Graduate Studies (DGSs), with Dr. Turpin as the Graduate School liaison, to examine the issue of degree completion at Notre Dame. The cost of attrition is high to students personally who spend a number of years of their lives in programs that they do not complete; it costs faculty a significant amount of time and energy; and it is staggering financially to the institution. With the help of the Graduate School, Prof. Sterling will ask every program to set a target for completion rates and mean time of attrition.

Dr. Bernhard cautioned about the complexity of this kind of study. At his previous institution he participated in a time-to-graduation study. Numbers were significantly biased by specific social situation of students. They also found that the reasons for attrition were often different than administrators had believed. In some cases, there were relatively easy solutions to the problem.

Prof. Kilpatrick also offered words of caution. Some programs identify all students as Ph.D. students; however, in fact, many students enter intending only to earn a master's degree. Numbers are skewed as well by students who take a position before finishing their dissertation, and consequently extending their time to completion.

Prof. Sterling said that all possible solutions should be on the table and examined creatively. Some suggestions he has heard mentioned might be earning a master's degree only when a Ph.D. is granted or requiring part of the doctoral examination after the first year of course work. Another option to encourage completion might be to provide increased stipend levels for students who successfully move through their program.

Dr. Siegel said that the measuring of completion is always difficult. He emphasized that data must be collected field by field. That aside, he explained that a series of low-budget round-table discussions at Duke led to a few changes that had dramatic results. The most important was raising stipend levels. Duke also found that establishment of childcare subsidies had a huge impact—nearly doubling the completion rate for women in engineering. He noted that the childcare subsidies were implemented at the request of the students, who realized that they might be put into play at the expense of possible stipend rate increases.

Prof. Sterling said that an excellent and comprehensive CGS report on best practices in the area of completion is online at <http://phdcompletion.org/index.asp>. The full report is available for purchase at: <http://phdcompletion.org/information/book2.asp>

A question by Prof. O'Regan led to a discussion of the actual number of students who fail to attain their Ph.D. degree and the importance of time of students' attrition—that is, whether early or late in a course of study. Prof. Sterling said that this number varies greatly by department. Prof. O'Regan then asked about the relation between selectivity and/or yield rates and attrition rates. Prof. Sterling said that this is an aspect of the study the committee will examine.

Ms. McCumbers suggested that the committee examine the findings of the survey of graduate and professional student life at Notre Dame, conducted two years ago. Students identified factors in the survey that they believed impeded progress towards degree.

Ms. Chantem made three points. First, she observed that one impetus to finishing a degree can be a level base stipend. After five years, a student's original base stipend is unlikely to keep pace with expenses. Second, she did not support the idea of awarding a master's degree only when the Ph.D. is awarded. Third, she noted that all students enter wanting to finish their degree. If they hesitate, the cause is likely to be feelings of unpreparedness or inexperience.

Dr. Akai pointed out that it is important to pinpoint, by program, why students leave. Reasons might be gender bias or failure to socialize into the program. Given the many variables involved, it might take a decade to figure out what works and what does not.

Prof. Myers urged careful attention to nuances in attrition metrics. For example, it is not clear that a decrease in yield is bad—it might actually indicate that a program is beginning to compete for students at highly rated institutions. The same might be true of time to attrition. Early attrition is only good if a program is weeding out those who will not finish at any rate.

Dean Bonde pointed out that at Brown, they have *not* found a strong correlation between student satisfaction and completion. The correlations are between clear messaging, clear milestones, etc. They are trying to identify reasons for leaves of absence as well, as reasons for leaves might correspond with reasons for attrition. Finally, she said, it is important to distinguish between “good” attrition and “bad” attrition—for example, when a student is given a plum position in industry, there is no failure.

Prof. Crawford noted that while there may be attempts to correlate attrition with childcare, healthcare, etc., in the STEM disciplines, attrition correlates best with the economy.

Prof. Sterling thanked members for their input. The committee will come back to the Council with recommendations at the end of the year.

(b) Budgets: The second committee will explore the area of stipend allocation. Prof. Sterling said that this committee would develop some kind of calculus for allocating funds for graduate student stipends. Some factors that might come into play: the quality of students, as measured by metrics; the number of students externally funded; faculty participation; and the quality of program administration.

(c) Size of the Graduate School: Given our resources, academic strengths of programs, and the importance of programs to the strength of the University, the third proposed committee will explore the proper size of the Graduate School. Dr. Akai will be its Graduate School liaison.

7. Discussion of the Vision of Graduate Education: Prof. Sterling explained that he had circulated various readings and statements on the vision of graduate education because a national discussion is occurring on whether doctoral education is achieving its aims--preparing individuals to enter the academy, industry, government, or other area. A recent Carnegie study [<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/programs/index.asp?key=29>] examined this issue in depth.

In Prof. Sterling's own vision of graduate education [posted at <http://graduateschool.nd.edu/about-the-graduate-school/dean/deans-vision>], he advocates emphasis in four areas:

- Training students to be first-rate researchers;
- Training students in their own discipline and how it fits into the larger landscape of intellectual inquiry, so that they can enter into multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary endeavors;
- Training students to be prepared to think through issues raised by their research and to weigh important implications within value systems, including normative value systems;
- Ensuring that are students are professionally well prepared, particularly in pedagogy.

Prof. Sterling said that his aim is not to institute a large number of requirements; rather, the goal is broaden training and make it holistic. In this way, a transformation will occur in doctoral students. They will be transformed from a student of a chosen discipline to a steward of that discipline—an academic or professional who uses his or her considerable knowledge and skills to enter the arena of public discussion on pressing contemporary issues, to help solve the world's problems, or to contribute to a greater understanding of our humanity.

Prof. Kilpatrick said that perhaps some ways of delivering this broadening experience to graduate students may dovetail with other efforts—for example, initiatives to improve doctoral completion rates. For example, if it is found that a prime cause of

attrition is students' failure to integrate socially with peers and faculty, then extra seminars, professional development opportunities, and the like can help with this.

Dr. Bonde mentioned a program she instituted at Brown titled *The Academy in Context* – a dinner seminar to which graduate students are invited. A speaker sparks the discussion, but the point is to have graduate students discuss pressing issues of the day with each other. Some topics have been plagiarism, animal rights, and stem cell research.

Members agreed in the general points of Prof. Sterling's *Vision of Graduate Education*.

There being no further business, Prof. Sterling adjourned the meeting at 5:00 p.m.

Appendix A: News Items from the Graduate School

Graduate Council Meeting of September 17, 2008 News Items

(1) Graduate Council meetings for the 2008-2009 academic year:

Wednesday, September 17, 3:30-5:00, Room 100, McKenna Hall

Wednesday, November 12, 3:30-5:00, Room 100, McKenna Hall

Wednesday, February 11, 3:30-5:00, McKenna Hall Auditorium

Wednesday, March 25, 3:30-5:00, Room 100 McKenna Hall

(2) DGS Orientation: On August 21, 2008, the Graduate School held its first orientation session for new DGSs, to assist them with a number of issues. Eleven of the twelve new DGSs attended. The day-long session was well received. See agenda, attached.

(3) Council of Graduate Schools Consultation: From September 17-18, two consultants from the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) will visit the Graduate School to assess its current internal administrative structure and advise on how to make it most effective. It is especially important to think through our structure now that we are an independent unit. The consultants are: Dr. Sheila Bonde, Dean of the Graduate School at Brown University, and Dr. Lew Siegel, former dean of Duke University's Graduate School and current dean in-residence at CGS. Drs. Bonde and Siegel will meet with Dean Sterling, other college deans and associate deans, representative DGSs, and Graduate School staff.

(4) Grant and Fellowship applications: The Graduate School will begin to heighten the emphasis for doctoral students on obtaining a grant or fellowship during some portion of their graduate studies. As part of this initiative:

- (a) **Fulbright Information Session:** On September 25, Joanne Forster of the Chicago office of the Institute of International Education will speak at 2:00 p.m. in McKenna Hall, Room 210, on the application process for graduate students for Fulbrights. Both graduate students and their advisers are welcome to attend. The session will be useful both to students with applications currently in process and those who are interested in applying in the future.
- (b) **Other Workshops:** Next semester, Prof. Dan Myers, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Letters, will hold a workshop for social science students on grantwriting; Prof. Gregory Crawford, Dean of the College of Science, will run a session for science and engineering students. Dates of both workshops to be announced in the next month.
- (c) **Grantwriter:** The Graduate School and the College of Arts and Letters have agreed to hire a grantwriter to help students with proposals for fellowships and grants. The new hire will be housed in the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts (ISLA) but will serve students in all disciplines.

(5) **New Website:** The Graduate School will launch its new website in September, with an emphasis on prospective students and the reasons they should chose Notre Dame: academic excellence, financial support, and a vibrant intellectual/social/cultural community. In addition to application materials, the site features short profiles of faculty members, current students, and recent alumni. Its extensive calendar organizes all workshops/meetings/events on campus related to graduate education. Four front-page news boxes highlight events and news items. The site collects all publications, policies, and forms used by current and prospective students, faculty, and staff.

(6) **A night of entertainment/fellowship for new graduate students, DGSs, Graduate Council members, and Graduate School staff: Friday, October 3, at the DeBartolo Performing Arts Center.** The Graduate School has purchased 400 tickets to *The Hot Club of San Francisco*, billed on the Center's website as "an amazing multimedia trip back to a time [1920s Paris] when there were no bounds to expressing your imagination: Silent Surrealism, an evening of silent films accompanied by live swinging jazz. ...The Hot Club of San Francisco is one of the most cohesive and entertaining swing bands in the United States."

We are inviting all first-year graduate students, DGSs, Graduate Council members, and Graduate School staff. A reception will follow the performance. *To reserve tickets for you and a guest, please call Laura Highberger, 1-8052, lhighber@nd.edu*

(7) **New Graduate School staff**

Matt Emmons, Recruitment and Admissions Manager
Tracy Zielke, Administrative Assistant

The search is underway to replace Jarren Gonzales, assistant dean of admissions, who left the Graduate School this August to teach in California.