

UNL Graduate Council Agenda
February 3, 2022
2:30 p.m. via Zoom

Present: Jennifer Clarke, Andrew Donesky, Geoff Friesen, Adam Houston, Laurie Lee, Xu Li, Laura Munoz, Eric Rodene, Kara Viesca, Brenda Wristen. Meeting conducted by Dean Debra Hope. Associate Dean of College of Arts & Sciences and Professor of Practice, June Griffin and Vice Provost, David Jackson attended as guests.

Proposed changes in Graduate Faculty Requirements at System Level

Dean Hope provided background on proposed changes to the requirements for Graduate Faculty status. The four Graduate Deans within the University of Nebraska system have met with Provost Jeffrey Gold and Vice Provost David Jackson to discuss amending the definitions of graduate faculty status. Some of the motivation for the discussions is 1) UNMC has some challenges with faculty status on their campus, especially around courses for professionals seeking additional credentials and 2) on-boarding new hires, especially professors of practice on the UNL campus into graduate faculty status if they are being asked to contribute to graduate programs. Occasionally professors of practice do not meet the graduate faculty requirements that include having a terminal degree in their field or sufficient scholarly activity. Their allocations often have little to no time for research and creative activity as these are primarily teaching positions.

Dr. Griffin was asked to give her perspective as a Professor of Practice.

She chose not to speak to terminal degree but did address those professors of practice who have been hired due to their teaching expertise. She noted that the criteria for the positions may not truly reflect the expertise of the professor of practice. There was some discussion of creating another category that better fits the professor of practice position. Dean Hope noted that scholarship of teaching restrictions previously interpreted as being ineligible for Graduate Faculty status are being relaxed in the new proposal. Also, pedagogy courses may not require graduate faculty status for instructors in the proposed definitions. Dr. Griffin noted that many Professors of Practice are doing exactly what Tenure-line faculty are doing. There was additional discussion that any time we have differential ranks such as differences between tenure-line and professors of practice for graduate faculty status, it can make those in those positions feel less valued and fighting for status is demoralizing. Dr. Griffin indicated that some of the proposed changes are a good step.

Graduate Council members questioned whether changes to more fully include professors of practice in the graduate faculty may inadvertently encourage the hiring of professors of practice instead of tenure-line faculty. The concern is that we exploit them and move away from tenure-line faculty. Many of the academic colleges hire more tenure-line faculty; they do not hire as many POPs due to the focus of the positions (research vs teaching focused).

There was further discussion on efforts to recognize the contributions of those without terminal degree but work in the discipline. Perhaps we need to draw a line that if you are going to work with students you must have at least the degree of the student is seeking. This may impact programs who hire in fields that most institutions do not offer the more advanced degrees. (i.e. creative writing or emerging disciplines).

VP David Jackson:

Dr. Jackson described the proposed changes in graduate faculty definitions as follows: The changes to the policy and process are attempting to be more inclusive so that students can benefit from all expertise. Three changes can help accomplish this goal. First, graduate faculty status will not be required for teaching graduate courses with content primarily about the practice of the discipline. Second, the timeframe for Graduate Faculty Associate status will change from 4 years without renewal to the possibility of a second 4 years. The 8 years is to give them more time to build their scholarship record. The program should provide them the opportunities to build this, perhaps by including scholarship and creative activity in their apportionment. Third, programs with a primary function of preparing students for the practice of a discipline can be designated professional programs and graduate faculty status would not be required of any faculty.

Dr. Jackson noted that those who have hired POPs to teach graduate courses without getting them eligible for graduate faculty status are not following the currently established rules. If professors of practice are being hired to contribute to graduate programs, then they need an apportionment for research and creative activity to allow them to develop a record to qualify for Graduate Faculty. In the mean time, they can be Graduate Faculty Associates.

The Council discussed whether these changes may impact academic freedom. Dr. Jackson noted that academic freedom is for all faculty. Protections may appear stronger for tenure faculty due to their continuous appointment. It is incumbent upon graduate chairs and departments to help protect academic freedom for all faculty, including professors of practice who may be engaging in scholarship and creative activity and/or graduate teaching.

Dr. Jackson indicated that another proposed change in Graduate College Handbook will be the guidelines regarding departing faculty who wish to retain their graduate faculty status to complete their students' programs. These applications will require approval and such faculty will not be allowed to take on new students.

There was general discussion that hiring documents should reflect the intent of involvement for graduate education.

Dean Hope noted that there is variability in how graduate faculty definitions are handled in the Big 10. The increased designation of professional programs is more consistent with many of our Big 10 peers.

Next steps:

1. Graduate Councils on each campus are reviewing the document and providing feedback to Deans.
2. Dr. Jackson will make edits. In parallel, campus specific rules are being reviewed so they align in the NU Graduate Handbook.
3. Mid-to-late semester there will have a vote by campus graduate faculty. The hope is to have something for BOR by June after clearing remaining levels of approval.

Professional programs:

UNL will need to identify which programs to designate as professional programs per the new policies. Office of Graduate Studies will lead this process. The resulting list will be reviewed by Dr. Jackson, relayed to Provost Gold and then acted on. As new programs are proposed, they will be designated as graduate programs or professional programs.

Approval of Minutes from December 2, 2021

A motion was made to accept the minutes of December 2, 2021 meeting. Motion passed.

Discussion of Course Proposals

Dr. Bachman reported that 193 courses have been processed this year and there are currently 13 new ones to be sent for review or are out for review.

Dr. Clarke reported that she has been in discussion with the Department of Psychology about coordination of teaching for statistics courses.

Graduate Student Assembly Report

The GSA reported that a bill passed at the February meeting last week to require program representatives request information from their departments on stipends.

Mr. Donesky presented a report about minimum assistantship compensation across the Big 10 that was mined from their websites. He can provide copies of the report open request. UNL is on the lowest end of all the Big 10 stipends. There was general discussion about costs of education for graduate students and the ways in which they contribute to the university and graduate programs.

The GSA is advocating that UNL graduate programs be more transparent at the time of admission about the costs of graduate school, especially for students on assistantships. Perhaps external work could be allowed as long as assistantship and academic progress are not impacted.

There was general discussion that our ability to recruit top graduate students is reliant on our ability to pay them in many programs. Some colleges have cut GTA lines as part of budget reductions. A lot of colleges are concerned about assistantship stipends are not competitive to recruit the best candidates. Dean Hope noted that it will be important to distinguish between the minimum stipend required to have a tuition waiver and the amount most graduate students are making. Dean Hope noted that there is project underway to create a cost calculator on the web site that would aid in transparency about costs. Purdue has a good example of such a calculator. Graduate Council also briefly discussed the amount of work required on assistantships.

Announcements

Dean Hope announced that OGS has changed the processing of admission applications. Applications are being distributed to departments once they are screened as appearing to meet minimum admissions criteria. The full review will occur only for those applicants recommended for admission by the program. One implication is that occasionally programs may recommend a student who is not ultimately admissible. However, the changes allow programs to see applications sooner and OGS gains efficiency in not fully evaluating applications that are not ultimately recommended for admission by programs.

Adjournment: 5:00 pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Eva Bachman, PhD