Graduate Council Meeting Summary
Tuesday, November 5, 2019
1:00-2:30 PM
Perkins Administration Building 311

Graduate Council Committee Members
(x) In attendance

Mark Chancey – Dedman I		Daniel Millimet – Dedman II	
Amy Freund - Meadows	x	Anthony Petrosino - Simmons	X
Kevin Hofeditz - Meadows	x	James E. Quick - ORGS	X
Alan Itkin - ORGS	x	Dinesh Rajan - Lyle	X
Duncan MacFarlane - Lyle	x	Johannes Tausch – Dedman III	X
Renee McDonald - Dedman	x	Paul Yovanoff - Simmons	X

Approval of the summary of the October 22 meeting:

The Graduate Council meeting came to order with approval of the summary of the October 22 meeting. Dean Quick asked the Council to send any comments or corrections they would like to make after reading the summary to Assistant Dean Alan Itkin. It was recognized that Duncan MacFarlane recommended a change to the summary of the discussion of the "**Administrative Functions of the Graduate School with Regards to Ph.D. Students**." Dr. MacFarlane stated that he recommended an additional sentence to make sure the summary captures a concern about whether the graduate school could provide an adequate level of service for time sensitive issues. Dean Quick emphasized that the process we are engaged in at this time is not to push a particular agenda for how the graduate school is going to interface administratively with the other schools. Dean Quick stated that the council needs to take into account the current practices and culture of each school in considering this issue.

University Ph.D. and Mustang Fellowship selection process:

Dean Quick talked about the current process for selection of University Ph.D. and Mustang fellows: In the past, the University Research Council (URC) has reviewed the nominations for these fellowships that came from the departments. Dean Quick explained that the University Ph.D. Fellowship is a top off award and that the student must be receiving a stipend already. The top off award offers an additional amount, up to $10,000 per year, as a fellowship, which is tax exempt. Dean Quick said that all of the schools with Ph.D. programs have had these fellowships, but said that we need to have more fellowships with full stipends for five years.

Paul Yovanoff stated that Simmons has encountered some scheduling problems, and it was very challenging getting their nominations in by the deadline for review. Dr. Yovanoff asked if other schools have encountered this issue. Dean Quick stated that he understood that there is a challenge balancing departments' needs to complete their review of applications and nominations for these fellowships and the need to get these enticing offers out to students as early as possible. Dean Quick emphasized that these are competitive fellowships meant to attract the best students to SMU regardless of discipline.

Dean Quick suggested to the council a fundamental change in the review process for University Ph.D. and Mustang fellowships. Dean Quick explained that the Mustang Fellowship is a diversity fellowship that provides a full $30,000 stipend per year for up to five years, and that nominees are expected to write a statement as to why he or she brings diversity to that program. Dean Quick noted that these rationales may be different for each program. Dean Quick said that are meant to increase diversity at the graduate level—SMU has been successful in increasing diversity at the undergraduate level, but this remains a challenge at the graduate level. Dean Quick said that the nominations are currently due in early February, and are then reviewed by the URC.

Dean Quick said that, looking forward, he feels that the Graduate Council should handle review of these fellowships and any other similar fellowships granted by the graduate school in the future. Dean Quick explained that the review process will take some time as there will be many nominations for these fellowships. Dean Quick asked the Graduate Council if they would be willing to take on this responsibility.

Graduate Council members asked about the composition and charge of the URC—which schools are represented and what is their explicit mandate?

Dean Quick explained that the URC has members from each of the seven (7) schools plus Dean Quick. He said the URC deals with two (2) proposal cycles per year, with approximately forty (40) proposals per year. The URC, up to now, has also been tasked with reviewing the University Ph.D. and Mustang Fellowship nominations. Dean Quick said he believed that the Graduate Council would be the appropriate bodies to handle this process going forwards. He stated that not all of SMU's faculty are involved in Ph.D. education, nor do all of the schools have Ph.D. programs. However, the Graduate Council presently and going into the future will include faculty who are involved in Ph.D. education.

Renee McDonald expressed her agreement that the Graduate Council was the right body to review these fellowship nominations. Dr. McDonald stated that, since the Council currently includes representatives from school dean's offices, there might be concerns about the dean's offices being involved in the selection process. However, she said she also felt that the dean's offices have important perspectives or information that faculty reviewers might be lacking.

Amy Freund said that she thinks that the faculty who are advising and teaching Ph.D. students have a good understanding of what it takes to be successful in a Ph.D. program and therefore are well-qualified to judge the nominees. Dr. McDonald agreed but reiterated that there are occasions when the faculty do not have information that would be helpful in making sure the fellowships are awarded in a way as to serve the interests of the university.

Dean Quick expressed his understanding of both views. He suggested that faculty members (not representatives of the school dean's offices) review and rank the nominees and present their rankings to the committee as a whole, so that the members in administrative roles in their school dean's offices can add their perspective on other important factors to be considered. Dean Quick stated that review by the faculty members is important to ensure that the students awarded have credentials worthy of the fellowship.

Dinesh Rajan raised the issue of the timing of the review process. Dr. Rajan said that there have been cases where excellent candidates came up later in the spring and that, in this case, there is no option for nominating and awarding these applicants University Ph.D. or Mustang Fellowships. Dr. Rajan asked if there is a way to consider these applicants for these fellowships. Assistant Dean Itkin asked how much competition there is for applicants who may be admitted for the spring term. Dr. Rajan answered that there is not a large number, but there are sometimes exceptional applicants the department might want to go after. Dean Quick said that fellowships cannot be awarded on an ad hoc basis—there must be a process in place if the graduate school is going to award fellowships off-cycle. Dean Quick

recommended that, subject to the availability of unused funds in the fellowship budget, a Graduate Council member could bring an off-cycle nominee to the attention of the Graduate Council for review. Dr. Rajan asked if it would be possible to nominate a student going into their second year for the fellowship, if they were admitted too late to receive it in their first year. Dean Quick stated that this would be counter to the purpose of the fellowship, since it is intended to entice applicants to accept an offer of admission. It would be better, Dean Quick said, to have a process in place to nominate a truly stellar applicant outside of the usual review cycle to receive the fellowship starting in their first year at SMU.

Dinesh Rajan asked a question about Dean's Dissertation Completion Fellowships: Would having a University Ph.D. or Mustang Fellowship preclude a student from being awarded one of these fellowships? Assistant Dean Itkin said students usually do not hold both simultaneously, because a lot of Dean's Dissertation Fellows are in their sixth year. Dean Quick explained that these fellowships are really intended for students whose funding from other sources has run out but who still need some time to complete the dissertation. He also mentioned that we do sometimes grant "safety net funds" when there is an unexpected shortfall in a student's support from a grant. We have implemented a process to review requests for these funds. These safety net funds are also limited and only available if there is left over funding in the budget. Dr. McDonald asked if it would be possible to give a topping up award to students who did not receive a fellowship upon admission but who have performed exceptionally well in their first few years or up to their qualifying exams. Dean Quick agreed that this was an idea worth pursuing.

The Council asked how we calculate time to degree for doctoral students. If a student has two years of graduate work at another university, and five years of Ph.D. work at SMU, is this a seven year Ph.D. or a five year Ph.D.? Assistant Dean Itkin said that the Survey of Earned Doctorates only counts time working towards a master's as part of a doctoral student's time to degree if that master's was done in the same discipline at the same institution. Any other graduate work does not count as time towards the doctorate.

Dean Quick recapped the discussion so far on the issue of review of fellowship nominations and asked if all were in agreement with the following proposal: the faculty members on the Council who are not also administrators will form a subcommittee to review nominations; then the ranking of nominations will be presented to the whole Council for validation. Dr. McDonald suggested a different option: the review could be done by the whole Council together, but the administrators on the Council would be ex officio, non-voting on the ranking of the nominees.

The Council asked how the URC has conducted the review. Dean Quick stated that they review important parts of the application—letters of recommendation, GPA, GRE scores—as well as nomination letters from the department that describe what makes the nominee an outstanding applicant. Dean Quick said that the applicant's statement of purpose is also an important aspect of the review: the URC looks for applicants who have a clear idea of why they are entering a Ph.D. program and how the Ph.D. fulfills their goals. Amy Freund asked if the URC take direction from the administration on which programs they should be aiming to support through these fellowships. Dean Quick stated that the URC has not taken direction from the administration in this way and reiterated that the fellowships are meant to be awarded to the most outstanding applicants regardless of discipline.

Kevin Hofeditz and Dinesh Rajan said they felt that there should not be two levels of review in the Graduate Council. Rather, they proposed that each dean's office should be able to review and weigh in before the faculty on the Graduate Council review and rank the nominees. Dr. MacFarlane stated that he thought it would not be appropriate to have the dean's offices set priorities for the reviewers that are not based on the quality of the applicants. Rather, if the goal is to bring the best applicants to SMU, the faculty on the Council should be able to do that without input from the dean's offices. Dr.

MacFarlane also expressed concerns about the Mustang fellowship. He said that the applicants should apply for that fellowship separately from their graduate programs. Dean Quick said he thought this was a good idea, because it would prevent departments from nominating students for both the University Ph.D. and Mustang Fellowship at the same time.

Dean Quick asked for a vote by a show of hands as to who believes the Graduate Council should be the body that reviews University Ph.D. and Mustang Fellowship nominations. There was unanimous support of this proposal. The following options were put before the committee: 1) the Council as a whole reviews nominations with the administrator members ex officio and therefore not voting; 2) only the faculty members (non-administrators) on the Council review nominations as a sub-committee of the Graduate Council; 3) the school dean's offices review nominations and then pass on their reservations and recommendations to the faculty members of the Graduate Council, who subsequently review and rank nominees with this input from the school dean's offices. Assistant Dean Itkin added that there is a quick turn around on this review. He stated that the fewer levels of review, the faster the process can go, and the earlier the nominees can find out if they were awarded these enticing fellowships.

After further discussion, the Graduate School concluded that they would decide between options 1 and 2 above at a later date but not pursue option 3.

Reports on administrative functions for Ph.D. students in the schools:

Representatives of each school described how the following administrative functions are performed for Ph.D. students in their schools:

- Final review of Ph.D. applications and release of offer letters
- Review of registrar forms, approval of candidacy
- Review of leave requests
- Review of timeline extensions
- Dissertation formatting guidance and checks
- Approval of graduation, collection of graduation surveys
- Awarding and disbursing dissertation completion fellowships
- Working with ISSS to process international student paperwork

The processes for review of Ph.D. applications and release of offer letters varied most significantly from school to school. Since faculty members in Lyle often provide the funding for their graduate students from research grants, for example, individual faculty members play an important role in review of applications. On the other hand, the preferences of the faculty member need to be carefully balanced by checks by the department and school to ensure students meet appropriate standards. In Meadows, on the other hand, where funding is not provided by faculty members' grants, this issue of balancing faculty members' interests against appropriate standards for the programs and the school are not as pressing.

Administrative functions of the graduate school with regards to Ph.D. students:

Assistant Dean Alan Itkin quickly reviewed some additional information in the slideshow about reasons for the graduate school to take on additional administrative functions for Ph.D. students and about how the graduate schools at peer institutions handle these functions (see slides 8-10 in the attached PowerPoint presentation). Dean Quick proposed that the Graduate Council return to this topic at the next meeting.

Postdoctoral Appointments:

This item was not discussed at the meeting, but Dean Quick did mention it briefly in closing: he stated that the Council will need to help SMU streamline the onboarding of postdocs, figuring out how to minimize HR hoops to advertise positions and bring postdocs on board as quickly as possible. Dean Quick stated the graduate school has the opportunity to change how this is done and to make it easier for PIs to bring someone onboard. Dean Quick asked the Council to think about ways to facilitate postdoctoral hiring and onboarding.

Action item: **

The Council is to consider ways the postdoctoral appointment process might be made more expeditious.

Meeting adjourned at 2:30pm