

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

**Present:** Baesu, Bearnese, Boudreau, Dawes, Eklund, Kopocis, Lott, Minter, Shrader, Tschetter, Vakilzadian, Zuckerman

**Absent:**

**Date:** Tuesday, January 30, 2024

**Location:** 203 Alexander Building

**Note:** These are not verbatim minutes. They are a summary of the discussions at the Executive Committee meeting as corrected by those participating.

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### 1.0 Call (*Kopocis*)

Kopocis called the meeting to order at 2:30.

### 2.0 Dean Deb Hope, Graduate Studies

#### 2.1 Orientation/Onboarding for Graduate and Professional Students

Dean Hope stated that she reached out to meet with the Executive Committee to address some items that she saw in the Executive Committee minutes from a previous meeting. She reported that there has always been onboarding for graduate students but pointed out that graduate programs are very decentralized and there have been some incidents where a PI on a grant required the student to work during the time the onboarding session was occurring. She stated that Graduate Studies is now coordinating things with the departments and is creating a master calendar to make sure the onboarding sessions do not overlap with other functions. She noted that the Graduate Studies website has an updated welcome page <https://graduate.unl.edu/welcome>, [Graduate Studies Dates Events](#) and an [Orientation Canvas Modules](#) website that graduate students can visit which will provide them with information. Zuckerman reported that most of her students are distance graduate students and are all online, she asked what is available for them. Dean Hope stated that the Orientation Canvas Modules should be able to provide information, noted that the office is still trying to grow the website and is working on identifying and meeting the needs of online students. She said that if anyone has any suggestions for improvements to please let her know.

Vakilzadian asked what is being done to improve international student recruiting. Dean Hope pointed out that universities across the country suffered a loss in international students when the pandemic hit, but there is a lot of interest from international graduate students and some programs at UNL are starting to see an increase in enrollment of their international students. Vakilzadian stated that he had heard that part of the problem is due to problems with obtaining visas. Dean Hope stated that this really varies by country. She noted that the State Department has made some commitments to have an increase in the number of visas awarded and is improving the speed of processing them.

Minter stated that recent increases in international student fees at UNL make it difficult for students who are financially restricted. She pointed out that international students get taxed on their assistantship and along with the student fees they often see their first assistantship payment going towards these costs. Dean Hope stated that her office is looking at other universities to see how they prepare their graduate students on what to expect once they come to campus. She noted that fees are a burden for many graduate students, even for domestic students.

Shrader asked if we get many graduate students from South and Central America. Minter reported that we did have a significant number of students from Brazil, but she does not know what their numbers are now. Dean Hope stated that she does not believe any Latin American countries were listed in the top ten funnel report she receives. (After the meeting Dean Hope reported that Brazil and Columbia are in the top 13 list of countries, she sees in application funnel reports each week. As of 2/2/2024, there were 14 applications from Brazil and 13 from Columbia out of 2,236 applications from international students.

Vakilzadian stated that he has heard that the number of faculty members for the Programs in English as a Second Language (PIESL) unit are being cut in half. He asked if Graduate Studies could do anything to prevent this from happening. Dean Hope reported that English proficiency is something her office is working on consistently. There are a number of issues around testing, required courses, and the need for fair and objective standards. She stated that she has a meeting later this week to discuss the PIESL services and when it should be required, what happens when a student doesn't pass the program, and trying to figure out what we can do given that we are in a difficult budget situation. Bouma reported that students taking the English 887 course, Academic Writing for Graduate Students, are pretty happy with the course although it is not a course designed to improve their English language skills and she, as a faculty member of PIESL, has seen some students who have real difficulty with the language skills.

Zuckerman noted that there has been some turnover in Graduate Studies, and she has received a message from the office saying to please allow one month for the processing of paperwork. She asked if the open positions will be filled. Dean Hope reported that as part of the budget reduction process Graduate Studies had to give up one of the open positions, noting that the loss of any position is going to have an impact on the Office's workload. She stated that Director of Graduate Student Support and Associate Registrar Eva Bachman has had an adjustment in her job responsibilities to take over some doctoral paperwork. Lisa Cordonier, Administrative Coordinator, is also adjusting her duties to process supervisory committees and full-time status requests. There was some delay during the change in personnel in December, especially because it fell at the same time as commencement. She pointed out that Bachman is heavily involved in coordinating graduate student graduation ceremonies so May, August, and December there could be some slowdown on getting paperwork processed.

Zuckerman asked if the Graduate Studies Office is using more automated processes. Dean Hope responded that the Office is integrating into the OUR systems, and the

graduate certificates are getting set up for degree audit processing. Many master's programs could be moved into the system, but it will take some time. Zuckerman stated that putting drop down menus in the forms would be helpful. Dean Hope stated that her goal when she became Dean was to make Graduate Studies more integrated into UNL and there are now people in the Office that have joint appointments with the Office of the Registrar and Graduate Studies. She stated that graduate chairs and support staff should be on the external Microsoft team which would help people get updates and noted that Zuckerman should send an email message to get added to the Team.

Tschetter pointed out that there is still a lot of confusion about Graduate Faculty Status and what Professors of Practice and Lecturers can do. Dean Hope stated that someone who gets a faculty graduate associate status can do everything except chair a dissertation. They must have a terminal degree in their field and they can be reappointed infinitely. She noted that there are still some details that need to be worked on when a Professor of Practice is hired that does not have a terminal degree, and pointed out that some of them are being assigned graduate students. She pointed out that we made considerable progress with the Graduate College in providing Professors of Practice with faculty graduate associate status but there are still some things that need improvement. She noted that anyone with questions should contact Lisa Cordonier, the Administrative Coordinator in Graduate Studies.

Tschetter stated that it is not clear to Graduate Chairs who can serve on a graduate committee. Dean Hope noted that graduate faculty status is part of personnel records. She added later that each program receives a list of their graduate faculty from Lisa Cordonier each semester or so. Dean Hope reported on the new option of "practice of the discipline" status that can be applied to specific course through a course modification in CIM. Faculty really need to look at their classes and if someone has a particular expertise and is the best person to teach a course, but they are not graduate faculty, then perhaps this course could be designated for practice of the disciplines. Details of practice of the discipline course are available at <https://catalog.unl.edu/graduate-professional/policies/graduate-credit>.

## **2.2 Options/Resources for Student-Mentor Problems**

Dean Hope stated that on the agenda is to create a taskforce to coordinate graduate student services and part of the taskforce's job is to see what we do have in place and what is needed. She stated that she thinks we should have an Ombuds person for graduate students because someone outside of the department is needed to help resolve issues and she is invested in having someone trained as an Ombuds. She noted that currently a graduate student should go to their graduate chair or the department chair and then speak with someone in the Office of Graduate Studies.

Minter stated that in her work with the Graduate Student Assembly, there were a lot of graduate students from across the campus who said they couldn't comment on the quality of the training of the mentoring they received. Dean Hope stated that this can vary by department. Zuckerman pointed out that there is no mechanism for a graduate student to say anything, especially if they feel intimidated by a faculty member. Dean Hope pointed

out that it is very uneven in how departments take care of these situations, and she hopes Graduate Studies will create some options for these students.

Minter stated that some graduate students are being asked to work more than the .49% they are supposed to work. Dean Hope stated that this is the other piece to the problem. She noted that if a research assistant is on a research assistantship and they are signed up for research credits and if everything is going well it shouldn't be a problem. However, it needs to be sorted out with how many hours go towards the student's assistantship and how many hours are for allowing the graduate student to do their research credit.

### **2.3 Strategic Directions for the Office of Graduate Studies**

Dean Hope stated that some of the directions for the Office is creating more integrations between Graduate Studies and the rest of the campus and working on modifying processes, so they are timelier and more efficient. She noted that in terms of growth the largest increase is with online programs. She stated that she has been working frequently with AVC Shriner on online graduate courses and programs.

Zuckerman pointed out that students are working to further their academic career, but noted that it is so cumbersome to figure out how many courses they have already taken. She stated that if it were easier for a student to go from a master's degree to a doctorate program that would be helpful in recruiting more students.

Vakilzadian stated that it can be difficult getting graduate certificate programs approved. Dean Hope noted that Graduate Studies controls part of the approval process and the Office is trying to move proposals through quickly, but once it leaves Graduate Studies it goes to the EVC office and then central administration. Minter pointed out that there is so much scrutiny on proposals and suggested that the process needs to be nimbler. Dean Hope stated that if anyone hears of any proposals being held up in the Graduate Studies Office, they should contact her.

Kopocis asked if there will be more online graduate programs. Dean Hope stated that AVC Shriner has a lot of knowledge and knows the landscape very well for online graduate programs. She stated that he is very happy to work with units to let them know what kind of competition they would have with an online graduate program and what would need to be done to improve its chance in the market. She stated that she sees a lot of opportunity, but faculty may need to help understand the online models, including what application items are needed. Dropping letters of reference, for example, can make a program more efficient and competitive but this a decision that needs to be made by the faculty.

Tschetter asked if Graduate Studies is seeing an uptick in the number of scam applications. Dean Hope stated that the Office catches a lot of them before they go to the department. She noted that applications are reviewed to see if the student is genuinely eligible to enroll before it goes to the department. If a department wants to accept a student or offer an assistantship a much deeper dive on the applicant is conducted.

### **3.0 Announcements**

#### **3.1 Meeting with AVC Marks**

Kopocis reported that she and Griffin recently met with AVC Marks and one of the topics of discussion was how to inform the public what the life of a professor is like and how long it can take to conduct research. She noted that AVC Marks suggested that it might be best to start by educating the students. She stated that it was a good meeting and that AVC Marks would like to meet with the Executive Committee.

### **4.0 Approval of January 24, 2024 Minutes**

Kopocis asked if there were any further revisions to the minutes. Hearing none she asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Minter moved and Zuckerman seconded approving the minutes. Motion approved by the Executive Committee.

### **5.0 Unfinished Business**

#### **5.1 Update on EM 16 Committee**

Shrader reported that the Committee has a lot of data to go through and it is currently being coded by Professor VanderPlas. He stated that he would report back in a few weeks once the data has been reviewed.

### **6.0 New Business**

#### **6.1 Including Instructional Continuity Policy in the Senate's Syllabus Policy**

Kopocis reported that Director Monk from the Center for Transformative Teaching noted that the Instructional Continuity Policy is not on the Faculty Senate Syllabus Policy and asked if it could be included to avoid confusion for faculty members, especially new ones. She pointed out that the policy just requires faculty to describe what method of communication they will use to notify students if there is an Instructional Continuity Day.

Minter moved that the Syllabus Policy be updated to include language of how an instructor would contact their students in the event of an Instructional Continuity Day as called by the University. Tschetter seconded the motion. Motion approved by the Executive Committee. The proposed revisions to the Syllabus Policy will be presented to the Faculty Senate for approval at the February 6 meeting.

#### **6.2 College Curriculum Committee – Are they appointed by the Dean or elected by the faculty?**

Kopocis reported that she was contacted by a faculty member who raised concern about members of curriculum committees being appointed by the Dean rather than elected by the faculty, noting that the curriculum belongs to the faculty. During the discussion it appears that some colleges elect curriculum committee members and in other colleges the Dean appoints the members. Tschetter pointed out that proposed new courses are considered by a number of different bodies before they even reach the level of the University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. Kopocis stated that she would contact the professor to see if there are any specific problems that needed to be addressed.

### **6.3 February 6 Faculty Senate Meeting**

The Executive Committee reviewed the agenda for the February 6 Faculty Senate meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:04 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, February 6, immediately following the Faculty Senate meeting. The meeting will be held in the East Campus Union, Great Plains Room A. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Signe Boudreau, Secretary.