Graduate Council 2023-2024
April 4, 2024

Members present: Ahmad Fakhoury, Andrew Wilber, Ben Richardson, Bethany Rader, Carroll Walker, Courtney Simpkins, Dean Murray, Farhan Chowdhury, Hale Yılmaz, Heidi Bacon, Iraklis Anagnostopoulos, Jennifer Spreng, Jeremy Allen, Jonathan Bean, Karen Jones, Kelly Bender, Khaled Ahmed, Kym Morgan, Liliana Leficariu, Lisa Brooten, Mandeep Redhu, Mark Pease, Matt Young, Michael Timm, Nwamaka Anaza, Rasit Koc, Satya Harpalani, Sheryl Tucker, Tobias Merriman, Tomas Velasco, Xiaoqing Liu

Executive-Officio: -

Guests: Dean Liu

Meeting started at 8:00 AM

Consideration of the minutes of the previous meetings:
The minutes of Mar 7, 2024, meeting Vote:
Approved (Majority-0-0)

Remarks from the Chancellor: Austin Lane
- Absent

Remarks from Provost: Sheryl A. Tucker
D2L Announcements Update
- Tucker announced that starting from the next semester, D2L announcements would be restricted exclusively to academic content. The decision comes in response to feedback that students were struggling to distinguish between essential academic announcements and other types of communications, such as events and activities from student organizations.
- An advisory committee has reviewed this issue and helped develop a strategic plan to ensure that important academic notifications are prioritized in D2L communications.

Coordination of Student Communications
- The university is working on a coordinated plan to manage all student announcements more effectively. The goal is to ensure that when students receive communications from the institution, they recognize these as important and worthy of their attention.
- Tucker mentioned that alternative platforms and strategies are being considered for broadcasting non-academic activities to maintain student engagement with essential academic information.

Survey and Software Management Improvements
- There is an ongoing effort to consolidate the numerous surveys students are asked to complete at the end of each term. The university aims to streamline these to reduce redundancy and focus student attention on the most critical surveys from institutional and accreditation perspectives.

- Tucker also discussed efforts to better coordinate software purchasing and management across the university. This involves centralizing the budgeting for software to ensure efficiency and potentially securing site licenses for widely used programs to reduce costs.

Inquiries

- Jones asked whether the new policy on D2L announcements would affect how resolutions and minutes for the Graduate Council are communicated, as these are currently shared via D2L. Tucker clarified that academic-related uses of D2L, like those for courses or faculty-led groups, would not be affected. The changes primarily target non-academic announcements to reduce clutter and ensure students do not opt out of important academic notifications.
- Bacon expressed concerns about how the new policy might impact the visibility of certain activities, such as study abroad programs and student group announcements, which are also significant for the academic and extracurricular engagement of students. Tucker reassured that alternative communication strategies are being considered to maintain visibility for these programs without overwhelming students with information in their academic portals.

Remarks from Vice-Chancellor for Research/Dean of the Graduate School: Costas Tsatsoulis

- Absent

Remarks from Associate Dean & Director of Graduate School: Karen Jones

Midwest Association of Graduate Schools (MAGS) Involvement

- Jones reported that Costas is attending the MAGS meeting where SIU students are contenders for awards. The meeting will also feature regional 3-Minute Thesis competitions and announcements of outstanding thesis and dissertation awards.

Launch of Online Programs

- Jones discussed the recent launch of new online programs from the College of Business, marketed as "fast track programs." These are designed as eight-week courses targeted at online students who are not attending face-to-face classes.

Academic Partnerships

- The new programs were developed in partnership with a group called Academic Partners. The launch represents a significant effort involving extensive meetings and coordination across campus to integrate systems like Slate, Banner, and AIS for efficient management and promotion of these programs.

Graduate and Professional School Fair

- Jones reminded the council about the upcoming graduate and professional school fair, which will feature 30 programs from SIU and other institutions. She encouraged faculty to promote this event to undergraduate students to expose them to advanced study opportunities.

Enrollment Updates

- Jones provided detailed enrollment statistics:

- Summer Enrollment: Slight decrease with 508 applicants compared to 813 the previous year.
- Fall Enrollment: Increase with 2,212 applicants compared to 2,034 last year, including a notable increase in admitted doctoral students which is critical for maintaining SIU's R1 research activity status.

New Academic Initiatives
- Jones highlighted that the council had approved course-only master's degrees last December, encouraging faculty to consider this option for non-traditional pathways in their programs.

Communications and Voting
- Jones also mentioned ongoing efforts to encourage faculty participation in Graduate Council elections, noting the importance of faculty input in these decisions.

Remarks from Dean of Library Affairs: John Pollitz – Jennifer Horton

Open Educational Resources (OER) Initiative
- Politiz mentioned that the state library has allocated $3 million for the development of open educational resources, which are aimed at reducing the cost burden on students. The university applied for three projects totaling about $150,000:
- Josh Daniel from the English Department is creating a free textbook for English 101.
- Sean Boyle from the Automotive Technology program is working on a project.
- Jenny Huang is developing an open educational resource for architecture.

Library Enhancements
- Politiz discussed plans to improve access to the library's study areas and compact shelving. The library intends to implement a system using battery packs to allow selective access to shelving sections, facilitating physical browsing by graduate students and faculty.

Honorary Degree and Alumni Engagement
- An honorary degree in arts will be awarded to Jimmy Wright, an alumnus and former adjunct professor in the Art Department during the 1970s. Wright, who recently had a show at the university, will host a celebratory event for alumni in the New York area, fostering community engagement and celebrating his artistic success.

Funding and Support for Graduate Students
- Politiz is working on securing additional funding to support graduate students, acknowledging the efforts of Mandy, an advocate for increasing graduate student scholarships and financial aid.
- Additionally, there is an ongoing collaboration with the History Department to employ a graduate student for digital projects in special collections, funded through a growing endowment.

Report from Council Chair: Scott Collins
- Absent

Report from GPSC: Myla Burton - Jermy Allen

Health Insurance Requirements for International Students

- Allen reported a proposed change concerning the health insurance requirements for international students by the Student Health Center.
- He expressed concerns about the potential financial impact of this change on international students, indicating that the new requirements might impose an undue financial burden.
- The situation is still under review, and the Graduate Professional Students Council is working to fully understand the implications of the proposed changes.

Additional Legislative Matters

- Allen mentioned that there are other matters pending discussion, specifically referring to one of the proposed amendments. He opted to reserve his comments for the discussion on that specific amendment.

Report from Council Vice-Chair: Tomas Velasco

- No Report

Report from Dean's Council: Vacant

- Absent

Report from the faculty Senate: Bethany Rader

Changes in Faculty Emeritus Status Criteria

- Rader reported that the Senate has passed a resolution to change the conferring of faculty emeritus status from automatic to application-based. This move aims to streamline the process and ensure that the status is awarded appropriately.

Program Eliminations

- The Senate approved two resolutions for elimination based on low or nonexistent enrollment:
- BA in Mathematics - This program was eliminated due to lack of enrollment.
- Respiratory Therapy Specialization in the BS in Healthcare Management - Also eliminated for the same reason.

Committee on Artificial Intelligence

- A university-wide committee has been created to explore policies regarding artificial intelligence. This initiative reflects the growing importance of AI in academia and its implications across various disciplines.

Cost-Reducing Digital Materials Initiative

- Amy Turpin presented a program aimed at providing digital materials to students at a reduced cost. This pilot program is set to begin in the College of Business and Analytics this summer, which could significantly lower the financial burden on students for course materials.

Sustainability in University Curriculum

- Undergraduate student Tegan Carpenter gave a presentation on implementing sustainability in the university curriculum. This initiative highlights the university's ongoing efforts to integrate environmental and sustainability issues into academic programs.

Upcoming Resolutions and Committees

- Rader outlined items scheduled for discussion in the next Senate meeting:
    1. RMA for Material Science and Engineering Specialization within the BS in Mechanical Engineering - This addition aims to expand the curriculum and offer more specialized knowledge in material science.
    2. RE for the Center for Virtual Expression - Expected to enhance digital and virtual capabilities for creative expressions.
    3. Creation of Ad Hoc Committees:
        - One committee will review instructor course evaluations to potentially refine the evaluation process.
        - Another will address high rates of DFW (Dropped, Failed, Withdrawn) grades and how these data are reported, aiming to improve academic outcomes and reporting transparency.

Report from Educational Policies Committee: Andy Wilber

Resolution to the Graduate Catalog Language Describing Transfer Credits for Master's or PhD Degree

Presentation of the Resolution

- Wilber introduced the resolution by explaining its purpose: to ensure that degrees awarded by SIU retain a significant proportion of credits earned directly at SIU, thus maintaining the quality and distinctiveness of the university's degrees.
- Current Transfer Credit Rules Recap
- Wilber detailed the existing policies:
- For Master's degrees, no more than half of the credits required for the degree may be transfer credits.
- For PhD programs, at least 67% of credits must be completed at SIU.

Debates and Concerns

- Allen expressed concerns about the financial impact of the new rule on international students, who often rely on transferring credits to reduce their course load and financial burden. Allen highlighted the importance of considering these students' unique challenges.
- Point was raised on how the rule would apply to students who might transfer between programs within SIU, particularly from a Master's to a PhD program. Jones responded to this query by emphasizing that once a degree is conferred using certain credits, those credits cannot be reused for another degree. She clarified that credits used for a conferred degree are considered "spent."

- Allen further discussed scenarios where students might transfer from a discontinued program at another university, questioning whether the policy could accommodate such exceptional cases.
- Jones reiterated that the university has provisions for exceptional circumstances and that each case could be evaluated on its own merits through a process that might conclude in her office.

Resolution Approval Process

Resolution Approved (18-1-0)

Resolution on Faculty Emeritus Criteria

Concerns About Policy Clarity and Consistency

- Wilber raised a question about how current retirees with emeritus status would be impacted by the new resolution. Rader clarified that the general consensus from the Senate was that current retirees would be grandfathered in, ensuring they do not lose their status due to the new resolution.
- Bacon expressed concerns that there was a misunderstanding or lack of clarity about the grandfathering provision, mentioning previous information suggesting the need for reapplication.
- Tucker noted confusion regarding the historical absence of a formal emeritus policy, questioning the legitimacy of current titles if there was no established policy previously.

Specific Cases and Examples

- Bacon discussed a specific case where a long-time faculty member was granted lifetime emeritus status, which allowed him to continue serving in significant roles without leading committees.
- Jones discussed the informal practices related to emeritus status in her department, highlighting a lack of formal criteria for obtaining this status.

Policy Revision and Approval Process

- There was a debate on whether the criteria for emeritus status should be revisited and clarified. Multiple participants indicated the need for a clear, consistent policy that could be equitably applied across the institution.
- Brooten and Nwamaka Anaza advocated for allowing colleges to have significant input in the determination of emeritus status, ensuring that those who have contributed significantly are recognized.

Table Resolution

- The resolution was ultimately tabled for further discussion and refinement. The council agreed to revisit the discussion in future meetings to finalize the resolution.

Table Approved (19-0-0)

Report from New Programs Committee: Heidi Bacon

Resolution for RME for Eliminating Mining and Mineral Resources Engineering Concentration

Presentation of the Resolution
- Bacon revisited the resolution tabled last month due to concerns about coal mining and energy raised by graduate council members. The resolution concerned the elimination of the Mining and Mineral Resources Engineering concentration.
- Dean Lou was invited to address the council about the resolution and the current state of the RME program.

Historical Context and Current Status
- Liu outlined the historical decisions affecting the mining program, noting that it stopped taking undergraduate students in 2017 and graduate students in 2019, before his tenure began at SIU in 2020.
- He mentioned that the mining faculty had been reduced to one member who had transitioned to another department during a reorganization, leaving the program with no departmental support and only one remaining student.

Discussion and Queries
- Bacon expressed skepticism about the utility of the discussion, given the cessation of the department and program, but opened the floor to questions.
- Lefticariu questioned the impact of not having a mining program on funding opportunities and workforce preparation, especially given recent interests in critical minerals and rare earth elements.

Industry Trends and Opportunities
- Bacon responded by mentioning the rise of new mining programs in the U.S. and Canada focused on critical minerals, indicating a national trend but questioned SIU's capacity to participate given the lack of faculty in mining.
- He pointed out that although some faculty members at SIU are involved in related research, their efforts are not under a mining faculty umbrella, suggesting that SIU is not positioned to leverage these opportunities effectively.

Decision-Making Considerations
- Liu further explained the logistical and financial impracticalities of maintaining the mining concentration, citing the need for more faculty and the difficulty of attracting graduate students without an undergraduate feeder program.
- He argued for the elimination of the concentration, given the current constraints and the strategic direction of focusing resources where SIU can build competitive strengths.

Resolution Vote and Conclusion
- Following the discussion, Bacon confirmed that there were no changes to the resolution except for the additional context provided during the meeting.

Resolution Approved (18-0-1)

Resolution to Establish a Center for Virtual Expression

Introduction of the Resolution
- Bacon introduced the next agenda item, which was the resolution to establish the Center for Virtual Expression with temporary status.
- She recapped the previous meeting where Apap Dunston explained the rationale behind granting temporary status to the center, noting that this explanation was already provided.

Addressing Concerns and Amendments
- Bacon acknowledged that there were initial concerns from Graduate Council members regarding support from the College of Arts and Media.
- She confirmed that several professors from the College of Arts and Media were involved in the Center for Virtual Expression.
- Following these discussions, it was determined that a letter of concurrence from the Dean of the College of Arts and Media was necessary. Bacon noted that this letter had been received and the resolution had been amended accordingly to include the Dean's endorsement.

Approval by the New Programs Committee
- Bacon reported that the New Programs Committee had reviewed and voted to approve the slightly revised resolution. She then presented the amended resolution to the council for any further discussion before the vote.

Discussion and Voting Process
- Velasco opened the floor for any comments or questions. Lisa Brooten expressed gratitude for the collaborative efforts and stated her satisfaction with the outcome.
- Following no further comments, Velasco proceeded with the voting process. There was a minor typing error which he corrected while typing out the resolution for the virtual vote.
- Voting Outcome
- Velasco directed council members to vote on the resolution concerning the Center for Virtual Expression. The votes were cast via chat, with members expressing their approval.
- The resolution was overwhelmingly approved as indicated by the chat logs, with numerous council members, including Brooten, Lefticariu, Young, Redhu, Bacon, and others, voting to approve.

Conclusion of the Resolution Discussion
Resolution Approved (18-0-0)

Resolution for Out of Region Coop PhD Historical Studies

Introduction of the Resolution
- Bacon described the resolution to add this cooperative PhD program involving both SIUE and Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC). She outlined the objectives of the program, which are to train scholars, journeymen, and teachers of history.

Program Details and Academic Structure
- Bacon explained that all graduate courses offered by the two universities would be reciprocally recognized, applicable towards the doctoral degree as required for an individual student's program of study and approved by their advisor.

- She mentioned that admission to candidacy requires completion of a qualifying exam and 24 hours of course credit. The committee overseeing this will include at least four faculty members, with a requirement that two of the four must be from SIUC.

Inter-Institutional Cooperation
- The cooperative nature of the PhD program allows for courses to be offered face-to-face, online, or over Zoom between the two campuses. Students from SIUE will be evaluated the same as those from SIUC.
- Bacon highlighted the partnership with SIUE's Institute for Community Justice and Racial Equity, emphasizing the program's support for sustainability and equity.

Administrative Details and Approval
- Bacon noted that there was a Memorandum of Understanding between SIUC and SIUE signed on September 29, 2023. The faculty vote in the School of History and Philosophy was unanimously in favor of the program.
- The Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and the New Programs Committee also supported the resolution, with the committee voting unanimously to recommend approval.

Discussion and Clarifications
- Allen raised a question about the administrative handling of student grievances, particularly whether students are considered to be from Edwardsville or Carbondale for such purposes.
- Bean and Yılmaz discussed the longstanding existence of the program and its operational details, noting that there had been no grievances in its history.

Amendments and Voting
- There was a discussion on whether to table the resolution to further clarify the grievance policy. However, it was decided that an amendment could be added to address this without needing to table the resolution.
- Jones proposed that a comprehensive grievance policy covering all cooperative programs be developed and presented at an upcoming cooperative meeting with Edwardsville.

Final Approval
Resolution Approved (15-0-0)

Resolution PhD Mechanical Engineering
Introduction and Background
- Bacon introduced the resolution to transition the existing PhD program to a standalone PhD in Mechanical Engineering. She highlighted the consistent enrollment of about ten students per year in the current program and noted a decline in enrollment despite increased external funding.

Rationale for the Transition
- The transition aims to increase the attractiveness of the program by aligning the degree title with common industry expectations. The program anticipates that changing the degree title to Mechanical Engineering could potentially triple enrollment from 10 to 30 students per year, positively affecting student placement and enhancing research productivity and visibility.

Program Details and Logistics
- The proposed PhD program will be housed within the School of Mechanical, Aerospace, and Materials Engineering and will be delivered on campus. The existing faculty workloads will not be affected immediately, although an increase in faculty may be necessary as enrollment grows.
- The curriculum will remain largely the same as that for the current Engineering Science program, with courses offered in formats that include face-to-face, online, and via Zoom.
- Current students in the Engineering Science program will have the option to transfer to the new PhD program in Mechanical Engineering, with assurances that their progress towards degree completion will not be adversely affected.

Financial and Administrative Considerations
- A reallocation of existing graduate funding is anticipated to support the expanded PhD program, potentially requiring additional support from the college, provost, and vice chancellor for research.

Discussion and Clarifications
- Allen raised concerns about whether students were consulted about the transition and if they had any objections. Liu responded, reassuring that students could continue in the original program if they chose, but the expectation was that most would prefer to transition due to the degree's enhanced marketability.

Voting and Approval
Approved (18-0-0)

Report from Program Review Committee: Iraklis Anagnostopoulos
- Anagnostopoulos informed the council that the review of the Geological Sciences program is in progress. He mentioned being in communication with Dr. Dunstan to finalize the review process. Although there was a small delay, he assured the council that the reviewers have been identified and that he is actively working to complete the review by the end of the semester.

Report from Research Committee: Liliana Lefticariu

Research Committee Meeting Update
- Lefticariu shared that the research committee met with the Vice Chancellor for Research (VCR), Chessler, to discuss criteria and processes for funding requests aimed at purchasing, upgrading, or repairing major research equipment and facilities.
- She noted that the meeting was productive in clarifying the criteria to be used for funding decisions and allowed both the committee and the VCR to gain a better understanding of each other's perspectives regarding which types of proposals should be prioritized and related issues.
- The committee also reviewed the latest batch of proposals and forwarded their recommendations to the VCR.

Academic Grievance Policy Discussion
- Lefticariu mentioned that the committee had planned to discuss the academic grievance policy but postponed this due to student concerns that needed to be integrated into their considerations.

- To better address these concerns, the committee reached out to the legal office at SIU to discuss ideas for establishing a standing committee specifically for grievance policies.