

DOCUMENTS AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE GRADUATE ASSEMBLY
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
January 31, 2007

Chair Randall Parker called the third meeting of the Graduate Assembly for the 2006-2007 academic year to order on Wednesday, January 31, 2007, at 2:20 PM in the Tom Lea Room of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (3.206).

Faculty Members Present: Browning, Cline, Dean-Jones, Doty, Golden, Hull, Kinney, Markovits, McDougall, Mehdy, Neikirk, Parker, Popova, Rubin, Slawek, Sprinkle, Strong, Wilson

Faculty Members Absent: Gamkhar (excused), Haunschild, Heinzelman, Henry, Kachelmeier, Loukas (excused), Murray, Ovando, Peters, Smith, Stout (excused), Wiedemann

Student Members Present: Forestell

Student Members Absent: Cassidy, Guo, Mehrotra, Moody, Rust

Ex-Officio Members Present: Rodríguez

Representatives from the Office of Graduate Studies: Bancroft, Belinoski, Dalton, Grant, Hackert, Kahn, Mattos, Newman

Visitors: Barnes, Polito, Howell

Order of Business

I. Approval of the minutes of the November 15, 2006, meeting

The Assembly approved the minutes of the November 15, 2006, meeting.

II. Report of the Graduate Dean (Victoria Rodríguez)

Dean Rodríguez began her remarks by reporting on the tuition policy advisory committee on which she and Amy Forestell (president of the Graduate Student Assembly) sit. The main focus of this committee this semester will be flat rate tuition for graduate students. Once forecasts and proposals are more fully developed, the Graduate School will present the proposed approaches to the Graduate Assembly. In response to a question, the Dean reiterated that schools and colleges could charge tuitions other than any flat rate established.

Rodríguez reminded the Assembly that the National Research Council evaluation of doctoral programs is continuing and that members of the Assembly should encourage their faculty colleagues to respond to the faculty questionnaire. Associate Dean Marv Hackert said that 58 UT doctoral programs are participating in this evaluation and that 53 of these programs have already submitted their

program questionnaire responses. Hackert and several Assembly members discussed the problems with email distribution of the individual faculty member questionnaires, the use of paper mail forms, passwords, time required for completing the questionnaire, and the like. Hackert also said that a PDF version of the questionnaire as well as the names of the 58 participating PhD programs at UT could be found at the Graduate School web site.

III. Report of Chair (Randall Parker)

Chair Parker invited the members of the Assembly to join the UT Faculty Council for breakfast at the Campus Club on Thursday, March 29, 2007, at 7:00 AM. New University Provost Steve Leslie and new Dean of Undergraduate Studies Paul Woodruff will speak.

IV. Academic Committee (Pauline Strong)

Chair Strong presented the proposal for two MD/PhD programs with the UT Medical Branch at Galveston, one program in Chemistry and one program in Biochemistry. These two programs would join three existing MD/PhD programs supported cooperatively by UT-Austin and the UT Medical Branch in Galveston (Biomedical Engineering, Molecular Biology, and Neurobiology).

- The Assembly unanimously voted to support the proposal for the dual MD/PhD programs between UT Austin and the UT Medical Branch at Galveston in Chemistry and in Biochemistry. The Secretary identified the approval as minor legislation.

The Academic Committee also supported a proposal to create an Option III master's degree program in Advanced Manufacturing Engineering in the department of Mechanical Engineering. Assistant Dean Tom Belinoski explained that Option III degree programs are not formula funded by the state and support themselves by tuition and fees charged, are taught by faculty members as academic overloads, and since they usually target working professionals, are often taught on weekends. Jack Howell and Wes Barnes, director and assistant director respectively of the UT Advanced Manufacturing Center, discussed the origins of the proposed program, its impact on existing programs, faculty workload, and students' credit load. The two-year program would admit 22 students in each annual cohort. In response to concerns about signature authority for the GSC for the proposed program, the original proposal was amended to specify that the graduate adviser for the proposed program would be the graduate advisor for the department of Mechanical Engineering.

- The Graduate Assembly voted unanimously in support of the amended proposal to create an Option III degree program in Mechanical Engineering (Advanced Manufacturing Engineering and identified it as minor legislation.

V. Administrative Committee (David Hull)

Chair David Hull presented a proposal to revise the Graduate Assembly Rules and By-laws to expand the membership of the Assembly from 30 to 31 by creating a seat for the newly constituted Jackson School of Geosciences.

- All members of the Assembly voted in favor of the proposal to amend the Bylaws to create a seat on the Assembly for the Jackson School of Geosciences and deemed it minor legislation.

Hull then presented the Administrative Committee's proposal that the master's program of work be included in the electronic application for graduation, the program would be a formal part of a student's permanent graduate school record, and all students aiming to graduate in any semester should apply for graduation at the beginning of that semester. The program of work would move back up from the local academic unit to the Graduate School, and Associate Dean Kahn said that the degree evaluators at the Graduate School strongly supported the proposal.

- After some discussion of the potential difficulties with such an electronic endeavor, the Assembly unanimously supported the proposal to reinstate the master's degree program of work and identified it as minor legislation.

Committee chair Hull then began a discussion of making 30 credit hours the minimum required for a master's degree from UT-Austin. This would be a change from the present three-tiered system of 30 hours with thesis, 33 with report, and 36 no thesis-no report. The Administrative Committee will present a formal proposal to this end at the next Assembly meeting. The major rationale is that UT-Austin's peer institutions, e.g., UC-Berkeley, the University of Illinois – Urbana/Champaign, the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, and others, have decreased the minimum number of hours required for a master's degree to 30 or fewer and are thereby often more competitive for students. The Assembly discussed the implications of the future proposal on the quality of graduate education at UT and how the Graduate School would examine any proposals to decrease the number of hours quite closely.

VI. Admissions and Enrollment Committee (Karen Browning)

The Admissions and Enrollment Committee had no report, but Chair Browning wanted to note that the committee is continuing its support of the use of electronic letters of recommendation for all graduate programs at the University.

VII. Graduate Student Assembly (Amy Forestell)

Amy Forestell, president of the Graduate Student Assembly (GSA), summarized her remarks by noting that the GSA would sponsor a number of events this

semester with the ongoing theme of developing and maintaining more community and interdisciplinarity among graduate students.

The first week in April is Graduate and Professional Student Appreciation Week, and GSA will have a number of events that week including a research showcase. GSA elections are scheduled for February 27 and 28, leading to new student representation in the Graduate Assembly. Forestell briefly mentioned consideration of flat tuition rate for graduate students mentioned by Dean Rodríguez and dedicated graduate student space in the new student activity center. Forestell encouraged members of the Graduate Assembly and their faculty colleagues to nominate students for the academic awards given by the Graduate School and the Graduate Student Assembly. Nomination is an honor in itself.

VIII. Adjournment

Chair Randy Parker adjourned the meeting at 3:35 PM.

Philip Doty, Secretary