

DOCUMENTS AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE GRADUATE ASSEMBLY
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
April 23, 2008

Chair Pauline Strong called the fifth Graduate Assembly meeting of the 2007-2008 academic year to order at 2:15 PM in the Harry Ransom Center 3.206, the Tom Lea Room.

Faculty Members Present: Carter, Dean-Jones, Doty, Edgar, Golden, Heinzelman, Henry, Hess, Hull, Kachelmeier, Murray, Neikirk, Odell, Ovando, Parker, Sprinkle, Strong, Wilson

New Faculty Members Present: Bias, Dangel, Garcia, Horwitz, Lindstrom, March, Sylvie

Faculty Members Absent: Browning (excused), Cline, Gamkhar (excused), Haunschild (excused), Kinney, Kwallek, Lauderdale, Loukas, Markovits, Mehdy, Popova, Slawek, Stout

Student Members Present: Carpenter, Ferguson

Student Members Absent: Gatten (excused), Jones, Marlantes, Witherspoon

Ex-Officio Members Present: Rodríguez

Representatives from the Office of Graduate Studies: Bancroft, Belinoski, Collins, Ellison, Kahn, Mattos

Visitors: Janet Dukerich, Katherine Haenschen

Order of Business

I. Welcome of new and re-elected members of the Assembly

Chair Polly Strong welcomed the newly elected and re-elected members of the Assembly, and they briefly introduced themselves.

II. Approval of the minutes of the March 26, 2008, meeting

The minutes of the March 26, 2008, meeting were unavailable, and the Assembly deferred their review of the minutes until the first meeting in fall 2008.

III. Report of the Graduate Dean

Graduate Dean Victoria Rodríguez began by thanking Polly Strong for her service as chair of the Assembly for the past year, a sentiment echoed strongly by the members of the Assembly.

Dean Rodríguez had four elements in her report. She mentioned the Graduate School awards, specifically identifying winners of some of these awards and thanking the members of the Assembly who served on the selection committees.

The second item in her report was the announcement of the time and new place for the graduate convocation.

The third element of her report was Assistant Dean Tom Belinoski's discussion of the legislation passed by the Graduate Assembly this academic year. The Assembly's standing committees approved thirteen items, and eight of those thirteen have earned final approval at either the UT System or the Coordinating Board.

The final element in the Dean's report was her summary discussion of SACS re-accreditation, an effort led by Neal Armstrong in the provost's office. SACS approved the graduate component of UT's re-accreditation based on the graduate school's coming into compliance with requests from the re-accreditation process. Particular academic units' assessment plans are under discussion with SACS and will be resolved over the next few months.

IV. Report of Chair

Assembly Chair Polly Strong began by expressing her pleasure in serving as chair and thanking those members completing their service in the Assembly. The first part of her report involved two items pertinent to both the Faculty Council and the Assembly: (1) the honorary grade of A+ for undergraduate courses that the Council will not vote on given the Graduate Assembly's lack of interest in a similar grade for graduate courses and (2) the potential revision to the Handbook of Operating Procedures so that the grievance process for teaching assistants and assistant instructors is largely parallel to that for faculty members.

The last item in the chair's report involved the election for the offices of chair-elect (and thereby the chair of the Academic Committee) and secretary of the Assembly for the 2008-2009 academic year. The nominating committee consisted of Sue Heinzelman, current chair of the Academic Committee, and Philip Doty, secretary of the Assembly. The committee nominated Paula Murray for the chair-elect and Mona Mehdy for secretary. There was no response from the floor to Chair Strong's requests for additional nominations for either position. The Assembly voted first for Murray as the new chair-elect for the 2008-2009 academic year and then for Mehdy as secretary for the two-year term, 2008-2010 academic years.

V. Academic Committee (Susan Heinzelman)

Chair Heinzelman reported that the committee had reviewed the Option III MBA programs in Houston and Dallas, programs for working professionals that are 48 credit hours long and last two years. The committee approved the programs as currently constituted.

VI. Administrative Committee (David Hull)

The Administrative Committee had no report.

VII. Admissions and Enrollment Committee (Karen Browning)

There was no report from the Admissions and Enrollment Committee.

VIII. Graduate Student Assembly

Bradley Carpenter, incoming President of the Graduate Student Assembly (GSA) introduced himself and incoming External Vice President Katherine Haenschen. Carpenter thanked the Assembly for giving graduate students generally and the Graduate Student Assembly specifically a voice in graduate affairs at UT. Carpenter also thanked outgoing GSA President Brian Gatten. Carpenter then mentioned the two themes that will particularly animate the GSA's work the coming academic year: increased participation of graduate students throughout the campus, especially on various committees; and the establishment of relationships with graduate student organizations at peer institutions.

IX. Business from the floor

In response to the chair's question about any business from the floor, one member specifically mentioned grave concern about the teaching load of teaching assistants (TAs), especially those in large undergraduate "service" classes. A ratio of one TA to more than one hundred students is not unheard of. Another member of the Assembly noted similar concern, particularly about grading by teaching assistants. There was informal agreement from many members, including the representatives of the Graduate Student Assembly. Dean Rodríguez expressed her awareness of this problem; and partially in response to questions from the Assembly, she and Associate Dean Kahn offered a brief explanation of how funds for TAs are distributed through the independent actions of the deans and departments of the various academic units. Given the University president's and the provost's commitment to graduate education and to the use of financial incentives to attract the best graduate students possible, Dean Rodríguez ended the discussion with a commitment for the graduate school and representatives of the GSA to explore this problem together with the Graduate Assembly in the next academic year. She indicated that perhaps some research will begin this summer.

X. Adjournment

After inviting members of the Assembly to an informal reception immediately following the meeting, Chair Strong adjourned the meeting at 3:10 PM.

Philip Doty, Secretary