Davis Division Academic Senate

Request for Consultation Responses

The Graduate School Proposal

March 3, 2011

The Davis Division leadership seeks your input concerning a proposal to reshape Graduate Studies at UC Davis. There are two proposals enclosed for review as "The Graduate School Proposal: 1) UC Davis Graduate School Proposal, and 2) Graduate Education Administrative Team. The proposals have been merged into a single document as the two seem to be interdependent.
RE: RESPONSE TO ACADEMIC SENATE RFC: The Graduate School Proposal

The College of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences (CA&ES) Executive Committee joins in Graduate Council's reaction to the proposed combining of a number of staff dealing with graduate students into some larger units. We too think it a bad idea. EC feels strongly that graduate program staff should be physically near to the particular students and faculty involved with that graduate program. Of course, if several programs find it convenient to combine, that should be their choice.

CA&ES Executive Committee further endorses the examination of current processes for efficiencies in the interest of reducing total costs dealing with graduate admissions and students. Every member of the Executive Committee had some suggestion about delegating more decisions to the local level, for example, admissions or oral exam committees or fellowships accounting. For every example, however, someone related an incident in which Graduate Studies' control of the process had been helpful. The question remains whether the occasional help in catching an incorrect orals committee, say, is worth the extra layer of administration.
We are skeptical that the pair of proposals for reconfiguring Graduate Studies will prove to be cost-effective and broadly useful. With increasingly tight funding, we prefer to see money channeled directly to graduate student support per se, rather than spent on peripheral activities such as "engaging faculty in reflection" by bringing "invited speakers from other institutions, including graduate deans ..." as just one example. We view these and many other proposed activities as likely to have relatively minor impact on overall graduate training at UC Davis. We echo and endorse the overall concerns raised by Graduate Council. In particular, we note that Biological Sciences established a graduate group administrative cluster many years ago, supported and operated from within the College. This cluster is expressly referenced in the proposal as a model to be implemented campus-wide. A critical aspect of the cluster's success, not noted in the proposal, is the fact that it is overseen directly by CBS faculty and administrators, which ensures that it meets the needs of our programs. Thus, we fully endorse the sentiment that "Graduate Council is greatly troubled by [the proposal] that administrative resources are consolidated under the control of the Dean of Graduate Studies." We also echo and endorse the concerns raised by the Chair of the Biochemistry, Molecular, Cell & Developmental Biology Graduate Group: "Every graduate group is different and every professional track is different. [Training and education activities] should be done on the local level and grad studies should [only] provide the necessary resources for each cluster to carry out their own program." Finally, we do agree with the overall observation that Graduate Studies is in need of new thinking, new administrative practices and perhaps a new structure. However, we feel that optimal planning and implementation is likely to come from outside Graduate Studies per se, particularly from experienced stakeholders, rather than from within.
No response at this time.
Council of School & College Faculty Chairs (MEDICINE)

February 27, 2011 11:44 AM

The only concern from the perspective of the Faculty of the SOM is that we have appropriate representation on any newly constituted committees, groups, teams, etc.
The new “College” proposes to offer some programs that are already being offered: the “existing professional development series”. If these were to become courses for academic credit, they could and would be reviewed by Graduate Council and then COCI. It seems clear that the primary immediate effect of this change is to reduce the personnel and budget in the Office of Graduate Studies. We are concerned by the use of the word “college” in the new title. At some other universities, membership in the graduate college is a rather special privilege and controlled centrally. We would want to be clear about all the implications of forming a college when by-laws and regulations are drafted. It should be recognized that any member of the professor series at UC Davis would automatically be a member of the Graduate College.

Rather than stick courses that have broad appeal for graduate students in an EDU 298 class it is better to create a series of graduate school classes that are well defined and have some oversight by the Graduate Council and COCI. Certainly it would benefit students knowing what sorts of classes are available so they could request that they be offered at convenient times rather than waiting until a special topics course is offered and poorly advertised. Also, this would allow the courses to be more standardized so that from offering to offering there is, at least on paper, some similarities between the courses.
There are two apparent problems with the proposal from the standpoint of rules and jurisdiction.

1. The power of the Executive Director of the Graduate Education Administration Team must be spelled out. The proposal refers only to having "considerable autonomy in the operation of the Graduate Education Administration Team." Davis Division Bylaw 80 allows the Graduate Council to delegate to the Dean of Graduate Studies functions that would probably be executed by the Executive Director. Thus, the Executive Director may not be delegated authority to make decisions that are the responsibility of the Graduate Council, unless Bylaw 80 is changed to allow such delegation.

2. The use of the word "school" to designate one of the units is inappropriate. Established usage reserves the word 'School' for professional schools, a contrast to colleges. The entire Bylaws of the Academic Senate contains numerous references to "college or school," which would become ambiguous if "The Graduate School" were to stand as a title.
Faculty Welfare

March 14, 2011 4:18 PM

The Academic Senate, Davis Division, Faculty Welfare Committee voted unanimously that the following language is its response to The Graduate School Proposal.

The Committee does not support the recommendation/The Graduate School Proposal for the following reasons: 1) there does not appear to have been adequate faculty input; 2) there is potential for administrative bloat without concrete benefits; and 3) there is blurring of the boundary between academic and administrative responsibilities that could usurp Senate authority. The Committee does support the concept of clustering related graduate programs to increase efficiency and collegiality (e.g. such as those in the College of Biological Sciences).
The significant growth in graduate education during the last decade at UC Davis has occurred in a period when department resources have decreased due to diminishing state resources. Fundamentally, this growth occurred because the economic shift has placed greater importance on graduate education, especially in a research university. This growth could not have occurred without the Graduate Council and the Dean of Graduate Studies playing significant supporting roles.

In the last decade, Graduate Council and the Dean of Graduate Studies have relentlessly promoted increases to graduate resources for our faculty, our students and their graduate programs. The resource revenue streams between the campus and UCOP are critically reviewed by Council members to ensure optimum impact on graduate programs. In a period of severe campus budget cuts, the allocation of block grants to graduate programs has been protected. This effort has resulted in strategic investments by the Provost to promote graduate education that are unique to the Davis campus (e.g. Non-resident Tuition Fee Reduction on Grants and the HArCS/Social Science Student Support Augmentation Plan). If, in the future, the Funding Streams proposal succeeds in implementing the basic principle that “all funds generated on a given campus be retained by that campus with a flat assessment on all funding sources to support central functions,”[1] the expected transparency that should result could allow Graduate Council additional opportunities to promote the allocation of resources directly to graduate programs; this would allow faculty to direct the investment of these resources in the manner that best promotes excellence in graduate education.

The two proposals put forth by Dean Gibeling make clear that the existing graduate administrative support structure no longer serves the needs of a growing graduate population, particularly in a period of diminishing state resources. Dean Gibeling proposes transformation to a “culture of graduate education oversight at UC Davis to reflect a new focus on academic activities that promote excellence in graduate study and postdoctoral training.”[2] A companion plan is proposed for the administration of routine transactions regarding graduate education. Although presented in two separate documents, the proposals are linked by the change in ultimate administration of graduate education each presents. Before commenting on the proposals, we comment on the role of the Academic Senate and the role of faculty oversight in the administrative graduate functions that serve their needs.

The Academic Senate has given the Graduate Council authority to:
- grant certificates of admission to qualified applicants for graduate status;
• admit qualified students to candidacy for degrees to be conferred on graduate students; and
• appoint committees in charge of candidates' studies, who shall certify for every candidate before recommendation for a higher degree that the candidate has fulfilled the requirements of the University pertaining to that degree. 

Along with this authority comes oversight and regulation. The manner in which these functions are undertaken is at the discretion of the Graduate Council functioning as an agency of the Academic Senate. In exercising authority, a unique partnership is formed with the Dean of Graduate Studies, since Graduate Council “delegate(s) to the Dean of Graduate Studies administrative decisions related to the academic regulations and policies of the Graduate Council.” Graduate Council formalized the delegation of certain duties to the Dean of Graduate Studies in 2005; the unintended consequence of this decision was the creation of an administrative support structure that is now a distraction in meeting the more important objectives of graduate education.

A common complaint from faculty about graduate administration over the past several years is that it is unnecessarily cumbersome. The two proposals from the Dean deliver a similar message, albeit from a different perspective, which is that the Dean of Graduate Studies must be able to focus on priorities that are much more important than transactional matters. While maintaining the Dean’s supervision over such matters, the two proposals include a less prominent role in oversight and regulation for the Dean. The message has now been heard clearly from the campus and the administration that a change in the manner in which Graduate Council discharges its authority regarding administrative decisions is required. Graduate Council is willing to respond after further consultation with the faculty and administration.

Graduate Council supports a resource allocation model that solicits active involvement of the faculty. At UC Davis, graduate administration must account for activities of departmentally-based graduate programs and graduate groups. First and foremost, the department is the fundamental administrative unit of the University. Departments produce robust graduate programs organized by traditionally recognized disciplinary principles and serve graduate education very well. This is because deans of colleges and schools are allocated resources that they distribute to departments, primarily in the form of faculty full time equivalent (FTE) appointments, although funds are also distributed for teaching activities (including teaching assistant and lecturer funding) and support functions. At UC Davis, the faculty also choose to organize graduate programs into groups that offer graduate degrees in areas transcending the disciplines of their departments. This combination of departmentally-based graduate programs and graduate groups offers a rich intellectual environment for graduate students to pursue multidisciplinary research. Yet, no appointment to a position carrying membership in the Academic Senate may be initiated without a departmental vote, and therefore FTE allocations are exclusively made to departments; despite
this fact, faculty have been able to evolve graduate groups to national and international prominence, even in the absence of coordinated campus planning. Often, successful graduate groups are ones that have received substantial support from one or a small number of departments based on faculty interests and commitment to the program. The organic evolution of the graduate group structure has resulted in some fundamental flaws [5] that are becoming increasingly apparent as campus resources are reduced. This is resulting in an undesirable tension between department-based programs and graduate groups. Additionally, an important consequence of this method of distributing faculty FTE is that individual faculty members can influence the investment of FTE and other resources only within their departments.

As a consequence of the “Proposal to Reorganize Administrative Services for Graduate Education”, we fear the investment of non-FTE resources that departments now are willing to make in graduate education (because it serves their specific interests) will be reduced or eliminated if resources are consolidated under the control of the Dean of Graduate Studies. Graduate Council is greatly troubled by this particular aspect of the proposal.

We believe that faculty members understand the importance of graduate education and will continue to promote investments by their departments in graduate education, regardless of whether the program in question is a large graduate program that can operate independently, or a smaller graduate program that operates in cooperation with other small programs. Differences across graduate programs are substantial, and require a variety of solutions. Imposing a “one size fits all” solution will inhibit, rather than enhance, excellence. It is in the departments where faculty can participate in innovative solutions to meet the challenges posed by increased graduate enrollment and diminishing campus resources, regardless of whether the graduate program in question is a departmentally-based program or a graduate group. Indeed, it has been the departments that have led in creating larger roles for staff coordinators which has resulted in a staff that is much more professionally trained than a decade ago. It is important to realize that departments did this on their own prerogative not at the behest of a central body. Further, the investments that have been made to do this are departmental investments, not new resources that were provided from central administration or other fund sources.

In the context of graduate education, the staff support structure that faculty created goes beyond purely transactional services. In many graduate programs, the graduate staff coordinators are in social and emotional proximity to “their” students and provide essential support. They counsel and listen to students’ everyday concerns – issues that never make it to their faculty advisors and mentors. Reducing the more organic, cultural value of graduate staff to students based on a purely bureaucratic, transactional value would be a mistake. It would, in the opinion of Graduate Council, diminish one of the clear advantages we have in our campus culture. Clearly there is a balance of responsibilities to be upheld, yet with clear expectations regarding the division of
administrative responsibilities between faculty and staff, such an approach offers great advantages, including protecting the non-administrative services provided by graduate staff. Council will oppose any effort to remove resources from the departments that could be invested by the faculty in the core activities of graduate programs. Removing resources from departments and dedicating them to a specific, transaction-based, administrative purpose is counterproductive.

Therefore, Graduate Council does not support the resource reallocation initiative in the “Proposal to Reorganize Administrative Services for Graduate Education”. It requires the diversion of funds from teaching, mentoring, and advising, the core activities successfully undertaken by faculty. These core activities at the program level create the intellectual environment needed for successful graduate education. Council has not been convinced that the “Proposal to Reconstitute the Office of Graduate Studies as The Graduate School at UC Davis” will increase either the current resources available for the core activities in graduate programs, or direct future resources to fund centralized activities undertaken by The Graduate School at the expense of graduate programs’ ability to conduct core activities.

The “Proposal to Reconstitute the Office of Graduate Studies as The Graduate School at UC Davis” serves an important role in defining the priorities of the Dean of Graduate Studies that are required to advance graduate education and advance the progress of the evolving activities of his office. The general priorities expressed in this proposal are consistent with the views held by Graduate Council. We specifically recognize the leadership of Dean Gibeling in initiating the Mentorship During Critical Transitions program on campus, with external funding secured by his office, to enhance the direct involvement of the faculty. Such programs and other professional development programs for students (e.g. Professors for the Future, mentoring workshops for students and postdocs, the Professional Development Series for students and postdocs, etc.) promote an environment that serves the intellectual needs of students that are not met by individual graduate programs.

Graduate Council strongly supports efforts to “provide information to guide strategic decisions (resource allocations, enrollment management, program review)” Additionally, the transition to an electronic applications process has streamlined the admissions process. We support Dean Gibeling’s ongoing efforts to develop additional information systems that will provide annual statistical summaries for graduate programs, and manage admission and students records in a manner that is compatible with existing campus information systems; these are key in creating opportunities for the Graduate Council to carry out its authority in a manner that does not overburden staff and faculty. Also, these information systems will permit routine transactions to occur at the graduate program level.
Such streamlined information systems, along with Graduate Council’s review of its policies to ensure administrative feasibility, should allow the Dean of Graduate Studies to concentrate on development, on career counseling and professional development activities, and on larger issues that cannot be handled by individual graduate programs, and meet the general objectives described in “Proposal to Reconstitute the Office of Graduate Studies as The Graduate School at UC Davis”.

It is the intention of Graduate Council to address the articulated needs of both the graduate programs and the Dean of Graduate Studies through intentional consultation and careful planning. By facilitating the changes that are obviously needed, Graduate Council will be fulfilling its responsibility for fostering excellence in graduate education.


[2] Proposal to Reconstitute the Office of Graduate Studies as The Graduate School at UC Davis


[6] Faculty across campus have informed Council of their strong opposition to the proposal. For example, extensive written comments opposing the basic idea was presented by the graduate program chairs Robert Bettinger, Anthropology; George Barnett, Communication; Robert Feenstra, Economics; David Biale, History; Patrick Farrell, Linguistics; David Copp, Philosophy; John Scott, Political Science; Debra Long, Psychology; Vicki Smith, Sociology; Ken B. Kaplan, Biochemistry, Molecular, Cell ular and Developmental Biology graduate group; Sashi Kunnath, Civil and Environmental Engineering; and Roland Feller, Chemical Engineering and Materials Science.

CPB has discussed the “Proposal to Reconstitute the Office of Graduate Studies as The Graduate School at UC Davis” and the “Proposal to Reorganize Administrative Services for Graduate Education” and the response of Graduate Council dated 2/7/11. CPB strongly endorses the response from Graduate Council. In addition, at this time, when the campus is facing severe budget challenges, it seems that a more strategic level of planning is necessary. Instead of expanding administrative bureaucracy, it would be more appropriate to seek improvement in function and/or efficiency. For example, would it be possible to eliminate the position of graduate dean and delegate the functions of the office? Could the administrative functions of Graduate Studies be consolidated with the VC-Research or another office? CPB feels that there should be an analysis/review of this matter conducted within the broad context of enhancing graduate education at UC Davis. We recommend this action to the Provost.