MINUTES OF THE GRADUATE COMMITTEE

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FRESNO

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September 24, 2019

Members Present: S. Church (Chair), K. Capehart, D. Lent, M. Lopez, D. Walker, J. Marshall (ex officio)

Members Excused: N. Wang, S. Tracz

Guests: None

The meeting was called to order at 2 p.m. in TA 117 by Chair S. Church

1. Minutes: MSC to approve the Minutes of September 17, 2019
2. Agenda: MSC to approve agenda
3. Communications and Announcements

S. Church announced he followed up with Melinda Murray and her chair about the interdisciplinary MA proposal that was discussed during our last meeting. The committee's requests, which are detailed in the minutes from last week, were shared with her and her chair.

S. Church also announced plans for our upcoming meetings. During our next meeting on October 8th, representatives of the MA in History program will visit. On October 15th, we’ll review an elevation of the Educational Leadership & Administration option of the MA in Education.

Finally, S. Church and M. Lopez both announced they are applying for sabbaticals and, if those sabbaticals are awarded, university policy may require that they forfeit the rest of their term on the committee. Their leadership would be sorely missed if that happens, the committee concurred.

1. Recommendation for Animal Sciences & Agricultural Education MS Program

Following up on our September 3rd meeting with representatives of the program, our committee discussed our recommendation for the MS in Animal Sciences & Agricultural Education program review.

S. Church noted and the committee concurred that the self-study and other review materials paint a picture that—in many but not all ways—is different from the picture painted by its representatives during our last meeting. Given those differences, S. Church wondered if a resubmission with amendments or even an entirely new set of review materials might be warranted.

One aspect of the program that was the same between the review materials and our discussions with the program’s representatives is that the program has not been graduating at least five students per academic year, as M. Lopez noted and the committee concurred.

That failure to meet the minimum graduation requirement could perhaps warrant a recommendation from our committee to suspend the program, but the committee agreed that a recommendation of conditional continuation would be more appropriate for several reasons. (1.) It would be unusual to recommend suspension of a program that isn’t seeking to suspend itself or that hasn’t already failed to meet the conditions of conditional continuation, as Dean Marshall noted. (2.) The representatives of the program were informed of the minimum graduation requirement during our meeting, they were previously unaware of that numerical target, and they expressed optimism that, now that they know the target, they can achieve it, as S. Church reminded the committee. (3.) The program does seem to have the potential to become viable, as M. Lopez argued.

Agreeing on conditional continuation rather than suspension, the committee discussed the conditions of continuation.

The committee agreed the program needed to reconsider their recruitment plan and, relatedly, their strategic vision for growing the program. The vision for the program as articulated in their self-study and in our meeting with them was commendable in many ways, yet if that vision does not lead to a viable program, then a more realistic vision is needed, as M. Lopez and D. Lent argued. For example, there was a sense during our meeting that the program would ideally like to see strong undergraduates go elsewhere for graduate school, yet that vision conflicts with strong internal recruitment and it would seem to conflict with a viable program, as well as our university’s mission to serve our region.

Formulating a recruitment plan should be done relatively quickly so that it can be enacted during this year’s recruitment cycle, the committee agreed. The application deadline for their program is in Spring 2020, D. Lent noted. The initial success of that plan in recruiting more students can be judged in Fall 2020. And given the average time-to-graduation for the program, whether increased recruitment is leading to graduating enough students can be judged by Fall 2023.

The committee therefore agreed that the continuation of the program should be conditional on achieving the following goals by the following dates.

(1.) By beginning of Spring 2020: Submit to the graduate committee a brief document of up to three pages with: a strategic vision for growing the program; a recruitment plan to achieve those goals; and a timeline for enacting the plan and vision.

(2.) By Fall 2020: Submit a brief accounting of new applications, admits, and enrollees under the new strategic vision and recruitment plan. The number of enrollees should be large enough so that, given the program’s expectations about graduation rates and time to graduation, at least five students would be expected to graduate by Fall 2023.

(3.) By Fall 2023: Submit a brief accounting of enrollment and graduates under the new strategic vision and recruitment plan. Sustained success in enrollment should be demonstrated, and at least five students should be graduating.

The committee voted and approved continuation conditional on those conditions.

1. Preparation for History MA Program Review

M. Lopez of the History department was able to provide a number of points of clarification and emphasis with respect to the self-study and other review materials submitted by the MA in History program.

The program has grown its applicants through efforts such as asking each faculty member to recruit at least one student. Along with that grown in applicants, admits and enrollees have also grown. We can ask: Assuming you see your recent trends in enrollment as successful, to what do you attribute that success? And what are you doing or plan to do in order to continue to sustain or strengthen recruitment? Can the department handle more students, for example, or would that be difficult to do so without more faculty?

Although the program has been successful in terms of increasing enrollment, retaining students and graduating them in a timely manner still seems to be an issue. A large portion do not ultimately obtain an MA in History; students often earn a teaching credential while working towards the degree and then exit with that credential and without an MA in History. Among those who ultimately obtain an MA in History, they often take three to four years to do so, largely because of delays associated with writing their thesis. The Dean suggested that the program should perhaps only allow students to take the zero-unit course HIST 299C “Thesis Continuation” a couple of times before they need approval from the Dean of Graduate Studies to take it again. Earlier interventions such as stronger experiences in History 200A&B, as well as more advising/mentoring in first year as discussed in the program review materials, would presumably be advantageous, too. We can ask: If you see the lack of retention as an issue that needs to be addressed, what have you done—or what do you plan to do—to address that? (They may not see it as an issue, at least for students graduating with a teaching credential.) And we can ask: For those students who do ultimately obtain an MA in History, what have you done—or what do you plan to do—to improve time to graduation? (Does the program need standardization, co-teaching, or other practices to improve HIST 200A&B, more support for the graduate coordinator, more faculty hires for areas that are popular with students or more difficult for students, constraints on number of times History 299C can be repeated, etc.?) If it is not otherwise addressed, we should ask how student concerns about their experiences in HIST 200A&B have been addressed.

Financial support of students may also help with recruitment, retention, and graduation. We can ask: What opportunities are currently available to financially support students and what if any responsibilities come with that support? Currently, there are opportunities to receive scholarships and volunteer to assist teaching General Education and other undergraduate courses, it appears. We can ask: Has the department considered T.A. positions for students? The committee discussed experiences with it in the Biology and English departments. The committee also discussed the relevant collective bargaining agreements. Support from the Dean of the College of Social Sciences and others would likely be needed.

D. Walker asked about why assessment data were not included in the review materials. The committee concurred that we should ask for them to provide that data. Questions may arise in examining that data.

1. MSC adjourned at 3 p.m.

The next scheduled meeting of the University Graduate Committee is Tuesday, October 8, 2019, at 2:00 p.m. in TA 117.

1. Agenda for Oct. 8, 2019
2. Approval of Sept 24, 2019, minutes
3. Approval of agenda
4. Communications and announcements
5. Visit from History MA Program