

Special Graduate Council Meeting
August 26, 2014
226 University Hall
Meeting Minutes

Graduate Council Members Present:

Roger Anderson, David Barker, David Bowers, Prosper Boyaka, Anne Carey, Holly Debelko-Schoeny, Russell Fazio, Amy Ferketich, Rob Greenbaum, Michael Lisa, Jeff Parvin (representing Joanne Groden), John Walters

Graduate School Staff Present: Patrick Osmer, Scott Herness, Ann Salimbene, Susan Reeser (recorder)

Dean Osmer began the special council meeting by apprising members about the numerous e-mails they and university administrators had been receiving from Boris Mityagin, professor, Department of Mathematics, and graduate faculty representative (GFR) on the Ph.D. final oral exam of Mary Sebenoler. Dean Osmer said that the situation occurred when the only negative vote on the final oral exam came from Professor Mityagin necessitating a review by the Graduate School as described in section VII.11 of the *Graduate School Handbook*.

Dean Osmer reported that the Graduate School began an immediate review and requested and received comments from all committee members and the report submitted by the GFR. Dean Osmer met with the Office of Legal Affairs and with Provost Steinmetz about the case. Based on the committee members' comments and the GFR report, the Graduate School found that there were fundamental differences in the evaluation of the student's written and oral work by the three subject matter experts and the GFR. The Graduate School concluded that for an outcome to be reached without prejudice to the student, the oral examination must be rescheduled with a new GFR.

Associate Dean Scott Herness served as the GFR on the rescheduled exam. This was not a second exam because the student hadn't failed the first exam, it was rather an incomplete exam. Dean Herness said that he read the entire dissertation and outlined the process for the rescheduled exam. He reported that he asked many questions during the exam including those that Professor Mityagin had contested. Dean Herness reported that the exam was conducted in a rigorous manner and that the student demonstrated extensive knowledge of the subject and competency of the research. The student received unanimous satisfactory votes and passed the exam. She will graduate end of semester and will be able to walk at commencement on December 21.

Council asked what the responsibilities of the GFR are. Dean Osmer said that the GFR is to 1) participate fully in the examination (including reading the dissertations) to make an independent assessment of the candidate's competence, and to vote for the student to pass or fail, 2) ensure that the conduct of the exam conforms to Graduate School rules and is appropriate for a doctoral degree, and to 3) halt the exam (no vote taken) if a concern arises that cannot be resolved in the exam setting. Dean Osmer said that Professor Mityagin should have halted the exam and contacted the Graduate School immediately and not waited until the end of the exam. Further, Professor Mityagin never informed the student's advisor either prior to or during the exam that he judged the dissertation to be unsatisfactory or incomplete.

Professor Boyaka discussed Professor Mityagin past GFR service and noted that he was removed from another exam in April 2013. Council asked why Professor Mityagin was asked to serve again as a GFR. Dean Osmer said that there is a flaw in the GFR selection process that will be addressed going forward to ensure there is a fair process with consistent standards in place.

Dean Osmer said that he was assured by Legal Affairs and Provost Steinmetz that as dean he had the authority to remove Professor Mityagin as GFR on the exam. He said that the proceedings were devastating to the student, that the Graduate School had procedures in place to protect students, that the system worked, and that the student was not unfairly penalized. Council agreed that Dean Osmer handled the case fairly and efficiently and that the case was now closed. Dean Osmer said that Professor Mityagin has made a public records request which the Graduate School is working with Legal Affairs in order to comply.

Council continued to discuss the GFR policy and process. The topic may be discussed at a future meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 p.m.