Remote Participation Report

Summary of Informal Emails

Marty Fiske:
There are a couple things to think about on the remote participation form.

One is the survey that the Graduate Council requested the Graduate School do to determine if departments and graduate faculty at exams had any issues with remote participation. I looked at those surveys as they came in and there were a few participants that said the remote participation impaired their ability to evaluate the student. This was a small number of responses, ~1%. We could stop conducting this survey. Bruce may not know that I reviewed these forms and what the outcome was.

The other form is the one that informs the department chair that there will be a remote exam and, I think, requires the chair’s signature, to allow it. It also has the list or requirements for remote participation that were set up by the Graduate Council. The Graduate Council Rep is supposed to affirm that the requirements have been met and return the form with the exam paperwork. I think this form is still needed. Bruce is sure to be on top the details related to this reporting.

Bruce Rettig:

Staff members I talked with were not aware that they should be giving them to me. I have not researched this thoroughly, but I think the forms may have been scanned into student records and then shredded. However, the staff members I talked with confirm Marty’s impression that most reports include no comments. The most frequent comments relate to inconvenience when a telephone or Skype connection was broken and time was needed to restore the link.

On the other hand, communication with staff reveals that many faculty and students need guidance and ask questions about what they need to do and how they should be proceeding. If you examine the form at http://oregonstate.edu/dept/grad_school/Survival_Guide/Graduate_Forms/Remote.pdf, you will see that it includes notification of seven conditions for the examination: advance agreement by student and committee members, two-way audio-video unless major professor approves and audio only when student is at remote, advance distribution of visual aids and other materials, all parties participating for the full duration of the meeting (exam), major professor agreement to oversee logistics, student or program responsible for any costs required, and a public presentation by the PhD student of dissertation findings even if the final examination itself takes place by distance. Also, the form insures that the department head or graduate program director is kept informed of the frequency of remote participation.

It may be helpful to recall that the current policy/arrangement has been in place for approximately two years. It was last approved on January 22, 2010, announced publicly later that year and began to be used at an increasing rate as that academic year went by. See http://oregonstate.edu/senate/committees/gradcncl/min/2010/20100122.html. The minutes did record Theresa Filtz’s suggestion that the policy be tried for one year and then made permanent or modified. At the end of one year, Marty was to report his survey results and the Council could decide on any changes that are appropriate (See Theresa’s motion for approval). For a variety of reasons, Marty did not have the opportunity to report to the Graduate Council. I agree that the current process is widely accepted and that the Council would be likely to either make it permanent or amend the policy. Perhaps Brenda has heard complaints about the process. None have come to me. My suggestion would be to continue operating without change until the Graduate Council has an opportunity to review the policy.

I will leave it to Brenda and Carolyn whether changing this policy should go on the Graduate Council agenda this spring or whether this is an issue for the Graduate Council to take up next year. Finally, the language approved by the GC did include the sentence “Appeals for exceptions to this policy may be
addressed to the Dean of the Graduate School.” This provides Brenda the flexibility to experiment with alternative approaches while waiting for the Graduate Council to pick up the issue.

Theresa Filtz:

I agree that it is time for the GC to re-examine the issue and consider making remote participation more of a normal mode. My sense of the GC at the time was that the approvals were part of the pilot project and intended to be re-examined.