Present: Brauner (Chair), Bird, Bond, Ciuffetti, Feller, Fisk, Francis, Markle, Pedersen, Prucha, Rettig, Sanchez, Watrous

Absent: Collins, Selker

Guest: Don Armstrong, Botany and Plant Pathology

I. Approval of Council Minutes

The minutes of October 24, 2002 Council meeting were approved as corrected. Brauner (Anthropology) announced that David Gobeli has been appointed to represent the College of Business on the Graduate Council.

II. Graduate Admissions Standards Task Force Report

The Task Force on Graduate Admissions Standards, co-chaired by Don Armstrong (Botany and Plant Pathology) and Henri Jansen (Physics) was chartered last year by Dean Francis in response to a recommendation from an earlier Graduate Admissions Task Force, which studied admission procedures, and a request from members of the Graduate Council. As noted in the report:

1. The Task Force conducted a survey of the opinions and concerns of OSU graduate study coordinators relative to current OSU graduate admission standards. (The survey elicited a total of 51 responses, representing a majority of the individual graduate programs on campus.)

2. The Task Force surveyed the graduate admission requirements of 20 universities, including peer institutions, other PAC-10 schools, other Oregon institutions of higher education, and several other land-grant universities.

3. The Task Force met with several individuals representing various areas of expertise concerning the application of graduate admission standards at Oregon State University. Individuals interviewed included Michele Sandlin (Director of Admissions), Margaret Niess (Chair, Graduate Admissions Committee), Roy Rathja (Chair, Undergraduate Admissions Standards Task Force), and Deborah Healey (Director, English Language Institute) and

4. Statistics concerning the operation of the appeal process in graduate admissions were obtained from the Admissions Office and reviewed by the Task Force.

Armstrong summarized the findings and the recommendations of the report (see below), which is available upon request from the Graduate School. Substantial information about each finding and recommendation can be found in the report.
Findings

1. Strong arguments exist for maintaining some form of university-wide minimal graduate admission standards, but care must be exercised that such standards do not inadvertently discourage applications from individuals with qualifications and achievements that transcend the narrow definitions of these standards.

2. The graduate admission standards currently employed by OSU are very similar, and in many cases identical, to those employed by most of our peer institutions and by other PAC-10 schools.
3. A majority of graduate program coordinators on campus view the existing graduate admission standards as satisfactory and appropriate, as long as an efficient and reasonable appeal process is available. Nevertheless, some issues of concern have been identified.

4. The current appeal process for graduate admissions appears to be administered in a manner that is generally sensitive and responsive to the needs and judgments of individual programs, but improvements in the process may be possible.

5. The TOEFL exam may be a useful standard in evaluating some aspects of the language skills of international students, but it is an inadequate guide to the speaking and writing ability of these applicants.

6. The requirement for international students to demonstrate adequate financial resources prior to admission occasionally has unintended negative consequences.

7. The so-called “24-credit rule” occasionally causes student hardships that appear to serve no useful purpose.

8. The Undergraduate Admissions Standards Task Force is exploring the possibility of utilizing a set of behavioral essays to obtain additional information pertinent to undergraduate admission and recruitment goals. Some graduate programs already have imposed somewhat similar structure on the Statement of Purpose that is required of all graduate applicants.

Recommendations

1. University-wide, minimal graduate admissions standards should continue to be employed at OSU, and the current standards should be retained as the basis of the graduate admission process; however, some improvements in the interpretation and administration of these standards can probably be achieved.

2. The Graduate School web-site should be revised to give more detailed, specific, and complete information concerning the interpretation of graduate admissions standards as they apply to international students.

3. The language accompanying the statement of graduate standards in the Graduate Catalog and on the Graduate School web-site should be revised to be more welcoming of applications from ethnic minorities and individuals with nontraditional backgrounds.
4A. The restrictions currently imposed on the ability of conditionally admitted students to hold graduate assistantships, to meet formally with their program committees, and to file graduate programs, should be eliminated.

4B. With the recommended change in the restrictions on conditionally admitted students, the primary function of conditional admission would be to ensure that these students are tracked and receive appropriate attention. Therefore, graduate programs should be required to carefully monitor and report on the progress of these students after completion of their first term (12 credits) of work and quarterly thereafter until conditional status is removed.

5. The Graduate School, with the help of the English Language Institute, should monitor developments in English language testing with the ultimate goal of identifying and adopting a standard more useful than the TOEFL scores currently required. In the meantime, recognizing that it may be some time before a more useful language test than the TOEFL is uniformly available at international locations, international applicants should be encouraged, wherever possible, to submit alternative test scores that include evaluations of written and verbal communication skills.

6. The Graduate School and the Office of Admissions should explore ways in which international students who need evidence of admissibility to secure funding could be identified and (with the support of an interested graduate program) provided with appropriate documentation to accomplish this end.

7. To make administration of the “24 credit rule” less punitive, the Graduate School should consider revising aspects of the rule that are under University control.

8. The Graduate School may wish to explore the utility of imposing structure on the Statement of Purpose required of all graduate applicants or to encourage programs to develop such structure if they have particular concerns that are not addressed by the traditional admission standards.

David Brauner (Liberal Arts, chair of the Council) asked the Council whether they wish to adopt the report, critique it or implement the recommendations. Sally Francis (Dean, Graduate School) answered that the Task Force was appointed by her, but the Council should consider adopting or accepting the report, especially with an eye to implementing the recommendations of the Task Force on basic admission standards for the university. Conditional/provisional admission and the 24-hour rule may be particular areas for further analysis by the Graduate Council before a policy change is considered.

Mary Prucha (Graduate School) reported that she already has made changes to the on-line graduate catalog to make the language more welcoming to minority and international students. Rettig will convene members of the Graduate Admissions Committee, the Office of Admissions, the Office of International Education (OIE), the English Language Institute (ELI), and the Graduate School to discuss this and other recommendations that can be addressed without action from the Graduate Council. Items requiring Graduate Council action will be brought to the Council later in this academic year. A motion to receive the report, with deep appreciation to the Task Force, was made, seconded and approved unanimously.
In response to a question about the recommendation needing the most attention, Dr. Armstrong identified concerns about conditional and provisional admission.

Alex Sanchez (Education) asked what kind of quality assurance would be used to measure the intended consequence of more welcoming language to international and minority students on the OSU web site. Rettig responded that he understood the School of Education has been the most interested in finding ways to recruit more minority students, including students who may have cumulative grade point averages below 3.0, but who may have other information that indicates that they would be successful in their graduate degree programs. He suggested that groups who voiced concern about language would be asked to review the web pages and make suggestions about further improvements. Prucha provided an example of changes in language in the current admissions wrapper, but she noted that the language has not been tested and she asked Sanchez for his suggestion of an appropriate group. Sanchez, noting that the concern about minority applicants was not unique to Education but was shared widely across the university, suggested the OSU Association of Faculty for the Advancement of People of Color. Brauner mentioned older than average students as another group of people whose GPA may understate their achievements and likelihood of strong performance at the graduate level.

Brauner noted that the issues of conditional and provisional admission and of the 24 credit rule are related and both should be reviewed by the Graduate Council. Rettig confirmed that the key restrictions placed on conditionally admitted students relate to assistantships and programs of study. Bird explained that the Graduate Admissions Committee often encourages departments to set provisions requiring that students maintain B or better grades on all their courses (that is, provisions equivalent to the standard conditions) when the department expresses an interest in offering a graduate assistantship to students who otherwise would have been admitted conditionally. This procedure has been used to provide a way to avoid restrictions associated with conditional admission. Rettig commented that the intent of provisional admission is to admit students with grade point averages at or above the minimum required for full admission, but who have deficiencies such as lacking prerequisite courses. Bird agreed that some departments are confused about what the Graduate Admissions Committee is asking for in terms of provisions.

After Francis and other committee members suggested that these issues come before the Graduate Council at a later time as specific agenda items, Bird suggested that the Council consider changes to the appeal process as well. Elaine Pedersen (Health and Human Sciences) suggested more attention to the concerns about alternative means of testing for English language skills. Rettig agreed to include this issue in the discussion with staff from OIE and ELI.

III. Graduate Level Learning Actions

Brauner reported on a Council working session, which was held on November 6, 2002. At that work session, Council members discussed possible policies that the Council might adopt to insure that a minimum part of a graduate student’s courses be “genuine graduate-level learning experiences.” Those who attended that meeting concluded that a policy should reflect the ideas embodied in Recommendation 7 from the recent Accreditation Review Report: “Therefore, the Committee recommends that the University conduct a thorough analysis and evaluation of all bi-
level courses and syllabi and then take appropriate steps to guarantee compliance with the
requirement that a minimum of 50% of all courses in a student’s program be genuine graduate-
level experiences, as articulated in Standard 2.F.4.” The draft motion from that group—that OSU
comply with this recommendation—was approved.

To comply with the recommendation, students would be required to include stand-alone graduate
courses as a minimum of 50% of all graduate work on their programs of study. A motion to this
effect was made and seconded. The motion passed.

Last year, action had been taken by the Graduate Council to eliminate the slash course model,
but to allow as many as 18 credits of 400 level courses on a program of study. At the November
14, 2002, meeting, the Council discussed whether 400 level courses would be allowed on
graduate programs of study under the new policy adopted by the Council or whether this policy
would not be needed with the continuation of the slash course model. Martin Fisk (Oceanic and
Atmospheric Sciences) reported that the National Science Foundation is encouraging
interdisciplinary PhD degrees. Students entering interdisciplinary programs will have
strong backgrounds in at least one discipline, but may have limited training in others. For
example, a student with a strong background in microbiology may need to complete 300 or 400
level prerequisites in an Engineering department. Therefore, Fisk argued in support of permitting
undergraduate courses on graduate programs of study. Lynda Ciuffetti (Science) said that she
would not feel comfortable with allowing a 300 level course on a PhD program. Fisk reiterated
his support for the flexibility of using 300 and 400 level course work on graduate programs. In
response to additional concerns from Ciuffetti, Fisk stated that his research indicated that a
number of peer institutions allowed 300 and 400 level courses on graduate programs.

The question was raised whether the newly adopted 50% requirement was intended to include
only regular courses or to include all courses, including thesis and dissertation. Rettig asked
about non-thesis programs which use research, project, or internship courses as capstone
activities. Markle (Agricultural Sciences) argued that 50% of regular courses is a very different
policy from 50% of all credits. Barbara Bond (Forestry) moved to revise the wording of the new
policy to require 50% of credit hours on graduate programs of study be stand-alone graduate
courses (“courses” were defined to exclude capstone activities such as thesis, research or project
in lieu of thesis, and internship credits). In response to a question about whether the accreditation
committee excluded thesis, research or project and internship in their recommendation, Francis
indicated that the standard referred to by the accreditation committee does not exclude thesis and
research. If theses are not excluded, a master’s student in a thesis program could fulfill the
requirement for graduate-only courses with few or no regular stand-alone courses.

Fisk observed that the ultimate decision makers in terms of deciding what can be used on the
program are the members of the student’s advisory committee. Bond argued that this new policy
offers incentive for departments to offer separate stand-alone graduate level courses. Francis
mentioned that the Department of Exercise and Sport Science offers slash courses in alternate
years; the 400 level is offered one year and 500 the next year. She suggested that the 500
component of a slash course is a stand-alone course if it is offered independently of the 400
component, as is done in Exercise and Sport Science. In response to the reminder that advisory
committees agree on programs of study, Rettig pointed out that the University does not require
that master’s students (except for MAIS students) meet with their advisory committee to plan a program of study. Master’s degree programs are approved solely by a major professor with oversight of the department or program chair. Markle and Ciuffetti reported that Fisheries and Wildlife and Botany and Plant Pathology do require committee meetings.

Because slash courses are not going to be eliminated, Brauner asked what the next steps should be for the Council. Sanchez observed that the issue of slash courses came to the Accreditation Committee because of complaints by students. If OSU is to overcome the objections of these students, fewer slash courses and more stand-alone courses are needed; the way to do that is to stop allowing, or at least limit, slash courses on the program. He noted that the Accreditation Committee recommended review of all slash courses. Although the actions being taken by the Council do not imply that all courses will be reviewed, they provide incentives for departments to develop stand-alone graduate level courses.

The Council was concerned about the possible financial impact of this policy change, given the limited resources and competing needs to teach more undergraduate courses. However, the high visibility given to this issue by the Accreditation Report and the other information available to the Council suggests that resolving this problem must be a priority for the University and that finances should follow the priorities. As an example of the challenge, Ciuffetti cited the difficult decision about offering a 600 level course with six students or an additional section of a 200 level course with 700 students; current budget decisions imply that resources follow the larger course enrollment. Prucha asked for clarification about implementing the policy. Brauner asked when changes to the catalog would be made. The consensus was that the policy should apply only to students who enter Fall 2003 or later, and that changes to the catalog be delayed until the time of year that catalogs for 2003-2004 are issued. Markle voiced concern that Fisheries and Wildlife will not be able to meet the new requirements. He used the example that a 45-credit hour Master's (with 12 thesis hours) and 6 blanket hours would require 11 credit hours of stand-alone graduate level credit. The motion to revise the policy by changing courses to credits passed.

The final motion, as amended, reads as follows:

To comply with the recommendations, students would be required to include stand-alone graduate credits as a minimum of 50% of all graduate work in their programs of study (exclusive of capstone credits: thesis, research-in-lieu-of-thesis, or internship).

IV. Other Business/Announcements

Brauner reported that he, as the representative of the Graduate Council, would have an opportunity to meet with the Chancellor and others seeking input on selection of the interim president for OSU. Brauner asked Council members for their thoughts on that selection. Sanchez mentioned that, because it is important to follow up on current initiatives, the person selected should be cautioned against starting new initiatives. Barbara Watrous (Veterinary Medicine) asked whether it was likely that the Provost is most likely to be selected. Brauner reported that some faculty are reluctant to divert Provost White from his current level of involvement with OSU 2007 for other important work that the interim president must do. Francis stated that there
are many off-campus responsibilities that would take the Interim away from campus, including working with the state legislature and financial donors. Legislative support is needed for graduate studies because the current resource allocation model at the state level has been funded at reduced levels for graduate students, implying that a stronger case needs to be made to the legislature about the value of graduate education. Watrous mentioned that a very important skill is working with the legislature.