

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy  
Wednesday, March 2, 2011  
2:00 – 4:00  
238A Morrill Hall**

- Present: Thomas Brothen (chair), Alon McCormick, Robert McMaster, Cody Mikl, Kristen Nelson, Peh Ng, Jane Phillips, Henning Schroeder, Paul Siliciano, Alfonso Sintjago, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Elaine Tarone, Michael Wade, Cathrine Wambach
- Absent: Barbara Brandt, Norman Chervany, Sean Finn, Joseph Kirchner, Peggy Root, Jessica Schroeder
- Guests: Emily Ronning (Office of the Provost); Professor Nita Krevans (ad hoc committee on graduate education policies); Susan VanVoorhis (Academic Support Resources)

[In these minutes: (1) award winners; (2) delegation of authority to Morris; (3) two proposed graduate-education policies]

**1. Award Winners**

Professor Brothen convened the meeting at 2:05 and welcomed Ms. Ronning to present the nominees for the Award for Outstanding Contributions to Graduate and Professional Education. The Committee approved the nominees unanimously; Professor Brothen will call the winners to notify them.

The Committee agreed that it would approve the Morse-Alumni winners by email.

**2. Delegation of Authority to Morris**

Professor Brothen next called on Professor Ng to present a request from the Morris campus.

Professor Ng noted that the policy "Scheduling Examinations, Final Examinations, and Study Days: Twin Cities, Crookston, Morris, Rochester" provides (section D(3)) that "No University-sponsored extra-curricular events, which require the participation of students, may be scheduled from the beginning of Study Day to the end of Finals Week. Exceptions to this policy may be granted ONLY by the Senate Committee on Educational Policy." The Morris campus Scholastic Committee asks that this Committee delegate to the Morris Scholastic Committee the authority to grant exceptions for the Morris campus, with the proviso that it will report annually to this Committee on the exceptions granted.

Professor Wambach said this was a good idea and that it would require amendment to the policy.

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\* These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represents the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

Ms. Phillips inquired how many such exceptions there are; Professor Ng said about one per semester.

Another possibility would be to ask the Scholastic Committee to screen the requests and forward its recommendation to this Committee, Professor Wambach suggested. It is likely that if the Morris Scholastic Committee approved a request, the approval of this Committee would be pro forma. Professor Ng thought that would work. Professor Wambach noted that this Committee has turned down requests from athletic teams on the Twin Cities campus in the past because it believes that participation in an event on Study Day, for example, is distracting not only for the student participants but also for students who might attend the event. (She noted that the policy provides that if an athletic event is in normal progression to a championship under the auspices of a conference or national association, the event is automatically exempted from the policy).

Committee members deliberated whether to propose changing the policy, and the extent to which the Committee wished to be involved in micro-managing events at the Morris campus, and concluded that it would retain the final authority but that would act quickly (most likely by email) upon receiving a request from the Scholastic Committee.

### **3. Two Proposed Graduate Education Policies**

Professor Brothen welcomed Professor Krevans to the meeting to present two proposed policies relating to graduate education. They were as follows (between the \* \* \*):

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#### **Proposed Policy on the Application of Graduate Credits to Degree Requirements**

##### **POLICY STATEMENT**

This policy governs the application of graduate credit to satisfy the requirements for the following degrees:

- Master's Plan A degrees
- Master's Plan B degrees
- Master's Plan C degrees
- Doctoral (Ph.D.) degrees

##### **REASON FOR POLICY**

This policy provides the framework for applying graduate credits toward degree requirements under various scenarios. Graduate programs have the authority to accept or reject any graduate course credits that can be applied to a student's current degree plan.

##### **Applying credits from a baccalaureate degree**

- a) Graduate credits taken before the award of a baccalaureate degree may not be counted toward a graduate degree.

*(Rationale: This reflects national standards and current policy)*

Credits-in-common

- b) A maximum of eight graduate credits may be counted in common between two University master's degrees.  
*(Rationale: This reflects current practice)*
- c) Approved graduate credits may be counted in common between a University doctoral and master's degree. Plan A thesis credits or Plan B credits can be counted only toward either a master's or a doctoral degree, but not both.  
*(Rationale: This provides flexibility for programs and students to accommodate a change of status, for example, from a master's degree to a doctoral degree or vice versa, while acknowledging work that students have already completed at the time of change.)*

Transferring graduate credits from outside the University

- d) Graduate credits earned at other accredited institutions may be transferred to master's or doctoral degree plans subject to approval by the University graduate program and the limits described below. In the case of a transfer from a non-United States institution, graduate credits to be transferred must have been earned in a program judged by the University graduate program to be comparable to a graduate degree program of a regionally accredited institution in the United States. Transfer of thesis credits is not allowed.  
*(Rationale: This reflects national standards and current practice)*
- e) i) For master's degrees – A minimum of 60% of total course credits (not including thesis credits) required for a specific master's degree must be taken at the University. In addition, a maximum of 12 graduate course credits taken as non-degree seeking or non-admitted status may be considered for transfer. Transfer of thesis credits is not allowed.  
ii) For doctoral degrees – Individual programs may determine, on a case-by-case basis, how many transfer credits doctoral students may apply toward their degree requirement. However, doctoral students must take a minimum of 12 course credits at the University. In addition, a maximum of 12 graduate course credits taken as non-degree seeking or non-admitted status may be considered for transfer. Transfer of thesis credits is not allowed.  
*(Rationale: This reflects national standard and current practice)*

Transferring graduate credits from a University graduate program

- f) Graduate credits earned while enrolled in one University graduate program may be transferred to another University graduate program. The number of graduate credits accepted for transfer is determined by the graduate program to which the student is transferring. Master's thesis credit (8777) cannot be applied toward the thesis credit requirement for the doctoral degree (8888) and vice versa.  
*(This is different than item c in that it is much broader in nature. Item c pertains to transfer of credits between a Ph.D. and a master's degree whereas item f pertains to transfer from 1 Ph.D. to another Ph.D. program or from 1 master's to another master's degree.)*
- g) A maximum of 12 graduate course credits from other University registration categories, such as non-degree seeking or non-admitted students, may be considered for transfer once the student is admitted and enrolled in a graduate program.  
*(Rationale: This reflects current practice)*
- h) Graduate programs may accept University's 4000-level course credits as graduate courses. A maximum of nine 4000-level course credits may be used to satisfy the doctoral or master's course credit requirement, but graduate programs may impose a lower maximum.

*(Rationale: This provides a greater degree of flexibility for programs to determine if 4000-level course credits meet their standard as graduate course credits.)*

### **III. Exceptions**

- a) For approved joint or dual degree programs, items a, b, and c do not apply.

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## **Proposed Policy on Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees**

### **POLICY STATEMENT**

This policy governs the credit requirements for the following degrees:

- Master's Plan A degrees
- Master's Plan B degrees
- Master's Plan C degrees
- Doctoral degrees

### **REASON FOR POLICY**

This policy provides a framework for curriculum development that balances coursework, research training, and independent scholarly work.

#### **I. Credit requirements for master's degrees**

- a) Master's degrees must consist of the following minimum credits:  
*(Rationale: align with national norms and reflect the current practice)*
- i. Plan A degrees: 10 thesis credits and a minimum of 20 graduate-level course credits.
  - ii. Plan B degrees: a minimum of 30 graduate-level course credits, including Plan B credits, as defined by each college.
  - iii. Plan C degrees: a minimum of 30 graduate-level course credits.
- b) No collegiate unit or program can require more than 36 credits with a combination of course and thesis or Plan B credits for a master's Plan A or B, and no more than 48 course credits for a master's Plan C.  
*(Rationale: to encourage timely degree completion and to balance coursework, research training, and independent scholarly work for master's Plans A and B)*  
*(Rationale: exception to this item is allowed for Plan C masters, recognizing that Plan C is a coursework degree so the maximum credit allowed is significantly higher but it is still important that these programs consider the time to degree for their students)*
- c) Thesis credits may be taken for the master's Plan A at any time during a student's degree program.  
*(Rationale: Reflects current practice which acknowledges the short time frame for the thesis degree and the need to begin research early)*

#### **II. Credit requirements for doctoral degrees**

- a) Doctoral degrees must consist of a minimum of 48 credits: a minimum of 24 graduate-level course credits and a minimum of 24 thesis credits. Course credits may include such things as directed studies, lab rotations, internships, practica, and colloquia.  
*(Rationale: to provide doctoral students the necessary intellectual and professional foundation for their thesis projects, future career and professional activities.)*
- b) No collegiate unit or program can require more than 72 credits with a combination of course and thesis credits for the completion of the doctoral degree.  
*(Rationale: Timely degree completion; differentiate the required versus actual credits that may be taken by students; individual student circumstances, training and academic background may warrant additional coursework to address foundational deficits identified by the program.)*
- c) Thesis credits may be taken at any time after admission to a doctoral program; programs have the discretion to determine when it is academically appropriate for students to take these credits.  
*(Rationale: Programs are best positioned to determine the appropriate time for students to take thesis credits – some may decide it is appropriate only after a certain foundational knowledge is established and others may not [it is not up to the student to determine the appropriate time to take these credits]).*

#### **IV. Exceptions**

Collegiate deans may request exceptions from the Provost to items Ib and IIb based on accreditation requirements, national standards of the field, interdisciplinary nature of the program or similar arguments.

#### **EFFECTIVE DATE**

New programs are subject to the above requirements. Colleges/departments must revise existing curriculum to comply with this policy by fall semester 2013, or obtain approval for exception (see III above).

#### **Frequently Asked Questions**

1. What is the difference between “required credits” and the “actual credits” taken by students?

Required credits are applied to all graduate students in the program. However, individual student circumstances, training and academic background may warrant additional coursework to address foundational deficits identified by the program. This may result in the actual credits taken by the students to exceed the maximum outlined in the policy.

2. What about students who pursue minor(s)?

Credits taken toward fulfilling the requirement of minor(s) may be applied toward the credit requirement of the major program. Credits taken toward minor(s) that are not counted as credit requirement of the major program do not count as part of the minimum and maximum credit requirements.

3. Is there still a policy on the required supporting field?

No, this policy replaces the policy on the required supporting field. Programs can still require supporting field credits as part of their credit requirements as long as the curricula still conform to the minimum and maximum requirements outlined in this policy.

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Professor Krevans began with the policy on the Application of Graduate Credits to Degree Requirements. She said that it is in line with current policy and with the policies at the University's peer institutions. The basic idea is that if someone is going to obtain a degree from the University of Minnesota, they must take classes here.

The proposed policy sets limits on the number of transfer credits that will be permitted for master's and doctoral degrees and also sets limits on the number of credits that may be counted when a student takes courses before being admitted to the program. As is current practice, students are never allowed to transfer credits for a graduate degree that were used in meeting degree requirements for a baccalaureate degree (with the exception of approved joint-degree programs). They do propose allowing some credits taken before a student is enrolled in a program because one may wish to try a few graduate courses in a program before actually enrolling; what they do not allow is for someone to take all the credits required for a graduate (master's) degree and then enroll and ask for the degree. There was also an inconsistency in University policy in that there were restrictions on the number of credits one could transfer from the University—but not on the number one could transfer from another institution. They correct that inconsistency with this policy, Professor Krevans related.

Professor Nelson asked whether a student who comes in as a Plan B master's student may use any of those credits for a Ph.D. program. The student may not transfer thesis credits, Professor Krevans said, but the course credits may.

Professor Tarone asked if section (f) is a change. It is not, Professor Krevans said. Students have never been permitted to apply master's thesis credits toward doctoral thesis credits, or vice-versa. It is up to individual programs to determine the number of University of Minnesota graduate credits accepted for transfer.

Professor Tarone also asked if section (h) is a change. The limit is a change; the ability of graduate programs to accept 4000-level courses for graduate credit is not, Professor Krevans said; graduate programs may accept 4XXX credits. The policy proposes a limit of nine 4XXX credits, but programs may set lower limits.

Not very much is changed with this policy, Professor Krevans said. They tried to make things more consistent. They talked a great deal about transfer credits, and decided it is inappropriate to string students along by letting them take a lot of credits before admission to a program, because they are not receiving the advising they need—and they may not qualify for admission to the program. It is not fair to the student or the program (i.e., a student should not be able to take two years of courses, enroll, and ask for the degree). They basically decided to permit students to take the equivalent of one full semester's worth of courses (i.e., four 3-credit courses) before enrolling in a program. That would be sufficient, for example, for the student to overcome a low undergraduate GPA and to determine if he or she can do the work.

In response to a query from Professor Wade, Professor Krevans explained that under the provisions of sections (d) and (e), a student transferring from another institution may transfer course credits but not thesis credits. So a student who comes with eight 3-credit courses (24 credits) and ten thesis credits (for a total of 34) may be permitted to transfer all 24 of the course credits (the decision is up to the program), but none of the thesis credits will transfer. This makes sense from an educational standpoint, Dr. Schroeder observed; if someone has completed a master's degree, he or she should be permitted to go directly into scholarship upon entering a doctoral program. Professor Krevans pointed out that thesis credits are given to recognize the effort that went into the master's project or thesis and the faculty time committed to it; she said she knows of no U.S. institution that permits transfer of thesis credits.

Professor Krevans turned next to the proposed policy on Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees. The policy provides that one needs 24 thesis credits for a University of Minnesota Ph.D. and that none can be transferred from either the University or elsewhere—because, as she noted, the thesis credits are a recognition of faculty effort and the thesis credits for a master's degree are credited to the master's program and cannot count for the Ph.D.

So a student could do a master's degree, pay thesis credits, and then enroll for a Ph.D. and pay more thesis credits, Ms. Phillips observed. Professor Krevans said that she would not recommend in her field that they complete a full Plan A master's thesis if they were continuing on for the PhD in the same program, because it tends to add too much time to the degree. But as others observed, it varies by field, and a Plan B master's in my field is often excellent preparation for doctoral work, so it may be worthwhile to do a master's degree before seeking the Ph.D. and pay for the additional thesis credits. Doing so may not slow a student down, Professor Nelson said; Professor McCormick said that in some programs a student needs the master's degree in order to be successful in earning the Ph.D.

This proposed policy does have several changes from current University practice, Professor Krevans said. It sets not only a minimum number of credits for a degree, it also sets a maximum—and that is the most controversial provision. There are exceptions allowed, such as for accreditation requirements, national standards in the field, and the interdisciplinary nature of the field (which could require mastery in more than one subject). The policy also drops the requirement for 6 supporting credits for the master's degree and 12 for the Ph.D., on the grounds that they contort student programs and because most members of the ad hoc committee believed that programs are so much more interdisciplinary than they were in the past that the requirement is outdated. Individual programs and colleges may, however, retain the requirement if they wish.

Without the proposed minimum, Professor Krevans explained, there would be NO minimum credit requirement for a Ph.D. So the ad hoc committee proposes a minimum of 24 credits, 12 of which must be earned at the University of Minnesota. In theory, without this policy, a student with a master's degree earned elsewhere could come to the University and start immediately on the Ph.D. without taking any course credits here. The ad hoc committee believes it is advantageous for a student to be in some group experiences (they need not be traditional lectures) because students learn from other students and other faculty members as well as from their adviser.

Professor McCormick asked about giving credit for something at the University that looks identical to something taken elsewhere but which the student and adviser see as different. There is no

problem with that, Professor Krevans said. Ms. VanVoorhis pointed out that the transcript does not include course-by-course entries for transfer work.

There is a lot of concern about the 48-credit maximum (24 course credits and 24 thesis credits), Professor Krevans said. Many programs are over that limit, but most of those fall within the exceptions allowed. Is it intentional that the requirement is quite broad, Professor Siliciano asked? It is, Professor Krevans said. The program must make the request to the dean and the dean must make the request to the provost. The ad hoc committee has gotten pushback on this requirement; why oppose a maximum? The minimum is easier; without a minimum, it could be charged that the University is lowering its standards comparison with national norms, Professor Krevans commented. While there was not complete agreement on the ad hoc committee about a University-wide maximum, the consensus view is that many programs kept on adding new requirements as new faculty joined it and as new subfields emerged—but the programs did not take any requirements away. A number of the master's programs are sort of "bulky," Professor Krevans said, and while she is not as wedded to the maximum as others, members of the ad hoc committee made a good case that without some mechanism for reviewing the number of credits required, programs have grown with all sorts of barnacles, which is a disadvantage for students.

High credit requirements also do not allow enough opportunities for scholarship, Dr. Schroeder commented. He has spoken with peers at a number of institutions and has learned that the University of Minnesota is "course-heavy." Faculty and student feedback suggests having the limit in the policy will start discussions in programs about the credits they actually need to require. The policy could leave the matter entirely to the programs, he said, but he believes this is a better approach because it makes programs think about what they require. The requirement of 24 credits for the Ph.D. may also make programs think about kind of credits should be required—are they to be classroom, colloquia, tutorials? This requirement is about getting information to students about the cored knowledge of the field; the definition of course credit needs a broad interpretation.

So, Dr. McMaster concluded, the requirement would be for about two years of coursework. Many students transfer in credits from master's programs, Professor Krevans pointed out, so it would not necessarily be two years for everyone.

The other big change in the proposed policy, Professor Krevans said, is not requiring students to wait to take thesis credits until after they have passed their preliminary oral. This policy would allow programs to decide whether to permit students to take thesis credits before the preliminary oral, which could shorten some students' time to degree. Dr. Schroeder observed that the University allows undergraduate students to do research; there is no reason that graduate students should not be allowed to start doing research immediately if they are qualified to do so.

Vice Provost McMaster reviewed the different master's programs: A requires a thesis, B requires a seminar paper or papers, and C is coursework only. For C, what is rationale for requiring 48 credits? That is two years, which is a standard load, Professor Krevans said. Many students are attending full time to obtain their degrees, and for many, their employers are paying for the degree. Professor Wambach suggested adding definitions for the three master's degrees.

Dr. McMaster inquired about the term thesis credits; at the doctoral level, they are usually referred to as dissertation credits. Dr. Krevans said they simply used the current standard University language in the policy.

Dr. McMaster also suggested that exceptions should go to the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Education, not the provost. Professor Krevans said that they were told the provost has to be listed because that office is the policy owner; presumably the provost can delegate the responsibility as he or she deems fit.

Professor Wambach surmised that the most controversial part of the policy will be the elimination of the requirement for supporting credits, because as programs are shrinking, they rely on students from other programs to achieve reasonably class sizes. Professor Krevans said the ad hoc committee had talked about that point and concluded that they were writing an educational policy, not a financial policy. This illustrates how systems work together to create pressure on faculty members to get students into courses, Professor Wambach said, and this proposal would reduce their ability to enroll students. This is a workload issue and a faculty-life issue, she said. A faculty member may not be able to teach a seminar in his or her specialty because there will be not enough students; will that person leave the University? There is much in play here that has nothing to do with students. The idea is a good one but it will have ripple effects.

Professor Krevans noted that (1) colleges may continue to require supporting programs, (2) many courses that would be low-enrollment are already cross-listed, and (3) in some cases, there is a new model for enrollment and workload decisions. In her college, CLA, the model is moving towards a curriculum plan that the department and college agree on and away from course-by-course enrollments. This could be less of a practical problem than may appear, she concluded.

Professor Wade observed that the playing field is not level. In his college, one must generate 230-300 student credit hours or teach two plus two, which is not the case in other colleges. They need to make the playing field level and then they can talk about changes. It could be that the tuition model for graduate students will change because it is so much cheaper to put a postdoc on a grant that departments move graduate students through their courses as fast as they can so they can more quickly achieve a lower-cost status, which may be to the disadvantage of the students. Or they may make students take any credits/courses that are offered to move them along, Dean Schroeder added, so even if it looks like students are taking less time to obtain a degree, that is not what is wanted for students.

Professor Wambach said she believed this to be a good policy with the right reasons behind it. The principles are beneficial for students and will help them complete degrees and specialize in ways that they need to. Professor Tarone maintained it is important that this be an educational policy, not one driven by finances. They want the financial system to align with the educational goals, Dean Schroeder said. Professor Krevans observed wryly that DGSs spent considerable time mediating between student needs and financial systems.

Ms. Phillips inquired about the reason for the tight credit band for master's degrees (plans A and B) compared to master's plan C and the Ph.D. They believed that the Ph.D. needed more flexibility, Professor Krevans said, especially if students come in directly from their undergraduate work and cannot start to do research until after two years of coursework.

Professor Nelson said she perceived a financial driver behind the proposal to allow students to take thesis credits before passing their preliminary oral exam, so that students can fit them in wherever they are able; from an educational point of view, passing the preliminary oral is the point at which the student is said to be ready to do research. Professor Krevans pointed out that any program may say that students may not take thesis credits before passing the oral prelim. Why would some allow it? In programs where students are ready to start their dissertation research but must also work on mastering other work in the field, so are not ready for the oral prelim. She said she could envision students in doctoral programs with two components, such as doctoral research and teacher training, in which they could be ready to do their doctoral research but still need to take the teacher training. Professor Siliciano said that in the biological sciences they like to see if the student will be a good researcher. The proposal is also meant to allow more flexibility, Dean Schroeder said. A number of programs use the oral prelim as an exam but others use it as an opportunity for the student to talk about research plans or to present a portfolio experience. Professor Wade suggested that the word "preliminary" has meaning: a student is not a doctoral candidate before he or she passes the preliminary oral exam, so perhaps the word needs to be changed. If the concern is about teaching, perhaps the Ed.D. should be the degree, because the Ph.D. is about research. Professor Krevans disagreed; the Ph.D. is a research and teaching degree, she said, because in a number of fields the Ph.D. means the student will be teaching, so they need a teaching portfolio. They can become teachers with a Ph.D., Dean Schroeder said, but what they must demonstrate is the ability to do research and make contributions to the field, in addition to showing teaching ability. Professor Tarone said she agreed with Professor Krevans; Professor Wade commented that this is an R1 university, not a T1 university.

This discussion demonstrates why it is good to leave these decisions to the programs, Professor McCormick observed.

Professor Siliciano reported that getting the information about the policies to Directors of Graduate Study can be a problem; in his college, they had not heard of these draft policies. Making sure everyone knows about them requires more effort. Some colleges are more organized than others, Professor Krevans agreed; there are notes on web about the discussions [<http://www.grad.umn.edu/transition/>].

Professor Krevans inquired if there were any provisions in either of the two policies to which the Committee strongly objected. Professor Wade suggested the ad hoc committee needed to be careful about setting minima and maxima; there could be an adviser who might stay to a student that he/she does not care about the number of credits the University says a student must take, "you are not ready." Professor Krevans said they are starting on FAQs and explained that the maximum is what a program can require of all students; it does NOT mean a program cannot tell an individual student that he or she needs more work to be ready.

Professor Nelson inquired if all programs required a preliminary exam. The Graduate School requires a written and oral prelim exam, Professor Krevans said, and that will continue, but programs use them in different ways. Some, for example, use the preliminary oral as a defense of the dissertation prospectus.

It appears to her, Professor Nelson said, that the Graduate School is decentralizing rapidly while undergraduate education is centralizing. Professor Wambach said that people have concluded it

is difficult to have centralization with graduate programs because they are so dependent on student-faculty relationships and because they are so different across programs.

Professor Krevans affirmed that the goal of bringing the two policies to the Faculty Senate on May 5 remains in place.

Professor Brothen thanked Professor Krevans and adjourned the meeting at 3:50.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota