MINUTES OF THE GRADUATE COMMITTEE

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FRESNO

5200 N. Barton Ave, M/S ML 34

Fresno, California 93740-8014

Office of the Academic Senate Ext. 8-2743

January 28, 2020

Members Present: S. Church (Chair), K. Capehart, D. Lent, M. Lopez, N. Wang, S. Tracz, D. Walker

Members Excused: J. Marshall (ex officio)

Guests: Ram Nunna (Dean of Lyles College of Engineering), Jesus Larralde-Muro (Associate Dean of Lyles College of Engineering), and Reza Raeisi (Chair of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering)

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 January 21, 2020 with minor edits
2. Agenda: MSC to approve agenda
3. Communications and Announcements
* Forthcoming business will likely include a request from the Communications program to eliminate its GRE admissions requirement
* For two programs currently under review (Educational Leadership and the Industrial Technology), responses by their college’s Deans are due soon, so there may also be forthcoming business related to those reviews
1. Recommendations for Biotech

Following up on our meeting with the representatives of the Biotech program, the committee discussed its recommendations for the program.

The committee noted that the program is relatively sustainable and strong in terms of numbers of students graduating per year and the placement of those students after graduation.

There was broad agreement among the committee that a recommendation of conditional continuation would be inappropriate, given the above-noted sustainability and strength of the program. The committee was also in broad agreement that there are enough issues with the program that it would be inappropriate to approve it with a notation of excellence. The main issues noted during the committee’s discussion were as follows.

The program’s students are largely international with relatively few local or otherwise domestic students. To better serve the Valley, recruitment and marketing plans aimed at local and domestic students may be needed. Emphasizing the program’s strong connections with Agricultural Biotechnology could be part of those plans. Improving the program’s website to celebrate its students, their internships, and their jobs could be part of that plan, too.

Although the program has some processes in place to try to match students with research advisors (e.g., students are supposed to go around and talk to faculty members upon joining the program), more developed mentoring and matching processes may be needed. Earlier, better matches between students and advisors should help accelerate time to graduation.

Although the program continues to build and strengthen connections with Biotech employers in the Bay Area and beyond who may be able to provide internships or jobs, further efforts are likely needed. Continuing to develop an advisory board should aid in that effort.

The cross-department and even cross-school nature of the interdisciplinary program requires strong communication and coordination between departments and schools. Stronger communication and coordination appears to be needed. The faculty and others involved in the program could presumably meet more frequently as both a large group and as small groups in order to address recruitment/marketing plans, mentorship/matching processes, and other issues.

At the conclusion of its discussion, the committee voted to approve the program as one of quality and promise.

1. Change in Mechanical Engineering Admissions Criteria

The Mechanical Engineering program has requested changes in its admissions criteria.

The committee reviewed the program’s current criteria and their proposed changes.

Changes include: dropping a minimum score for the GRE; dropping the requirement that students should come from ABET-accredited undergraduate engineering programs, which should expand the applicant pool; requiring an additional letter of recommendation; and requiring a Statement of Purpose.

After reviewing and discussing those changes, the committee voted to approve the changes requested by the program.

1. Meet with Representatives from Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE) program to Discuss Option Elevation

The committee welcomed Ram Nunna (Dean of Lyles College of Engineering), Jesus Larralde-Muro (Associate Dean of Lyles College of Engineering), and Reza Raeisi (Chair of the ECE Department) to discuss the option elevation of the ECE program that currently awards an MS in Engineering with either an electrical- or computer-engineering option.

Dean Nunna began by providing a brief history of the program. About 10 years ago, the program was focused on electrical engineering and aeronautics. Over time, computer engineering became an important area of study, so a computer-engineering option was created along with an electrical-engineering option. Those two options currently do not share enough courses to be in compliance with the Chancellor’s Office Executive Order 1071.

Instead of creating two separate degrees, as some programs have done when faced with non-compliance, the program has found a way to share enough courses to comply with the order. They will share a core set of required courses and a large number of electives. The degree will be an MS in Electrical and Computer Engineering.

Dean Nunna and his colleagues explained that the industry will be open to this change degree because electrical- and computer-engineering are often “mixed together” and not sharply divided. The change is also consistent with ECE department’s culture because the department does not distinguish between electrical- and computer-engineering faculty. The change may also be helpful from a branding and marketing perspective, the Dean suggested.

Enrollment trends were discussed to conclude. Dean Nunna and his colleagues explained that, after a “dip” in enrollment due to national policy changes, enrollment has rebounded.

D. Lent asked if the program would need to channel more students towards taking comprehensive exams, rather than completing projects or thesis, if enrollment continues to grow. The Dean committed to keeping the ratio of graduate students to faculty at a level where students can complete a project and thesis, which he viewed as better for students than taking a comprehensive exam.

After the representatives left, the committee continued its discussion and ultimately voted to approve the program’s request.

1. MSC adjourned at 3 p.m.

The next scheduled meeting of the University Graduate Committee is Tuesday, February 4, 2020, at 2:00 p.m. in TA 117.

1. Agenda for Feb 4, 2020
2. Approval of January 28, 2020
3. Approval of agenda
4. Communications and announcements
5. ...