Graduate Education Advisory Committee Meeting March 26, 2012

Committee members attending:

Mohamed Abdelrahman, Phil Cohen, Andrew Blanchard, Michelle Broadway, Paul Brooke, Karen Butler-Purry, JoAnn Canales, Ralph Ferguson (for Peggy Miller), Oney Fitzpatrick, Dorothy Flannagan, Benjamin Flores, Stuart Hall, Jack Loveridge, Jennifer Martin, James Meernik, Mrinal Mugdh, Bonnie Melhart, Mary Beth Sampson, Nancy Street, Debbie Thorne, Emily Wilson (for David Carlson)

CB staff:

David Gardner, James Goeman, Kevin Lemoine, Allen Michie, Raymund Paredes, MacGregor Stephenson

I. Welcome and call to order

Commissioner of Higher Education Raymund Paredes' welcome included remarks on the current state of graduate education in Texas. The budget climate is not likely to be better during the 2013 Legislative session than it was during the 2011 session, and it is likely that there will be further cuts in higher education. It will be difficult to get full funding for enrollment growth. There are declining numbers of jobs available in humanities fields, so institutions should keep this in mind when making new program requests to the Coordinating Board.

II. Introduction of new committee members

James Goeman welcomed new members, and he reminded proxies that they are welcome to participate in discussions but are not allowed to make motions or vote.

III. Consideration of approval of minutes from last meeting

The minutes from the November 19, 2010 meeting were approved.

IV. Discussion of the Coordinating Board staff presentation of low-producing programs (LPP) data

MacGregor Stephenson reported that the Coordinating Board is proposing to raise the number of graduates that programs must produce in a five-year period in order not to be considered low-producing. A raise in number of graduates would bring Texas closer to the middle ground of the thresholds used in other states. There is little chance of the numbers being reduced from current levels. The Coordinating Board solicits GEAC's input on how and when to implement the new standards so that institutions can make long-range plans.

Mary Beth Sampson noted that based upon census data from 2009, of the states that are above the national average for attainment of graduate degrees, only five of them have LPP limits. The states that Texas is comparing itself to in the LPP limits are below the national average for the attainment of graduate degrees. Since closing programs limits access, the number of degrees will drop, so the limits are in conflict with Closing the Gaps objectives.

MacGregor Stephenson responded that he does not see a necessary correlation between graduate degree attainment and LPP limits.

Mohamed Abdelrahman stated that convincing students to move to South Texas is difficult, so the LPP standards should make exceptions particular fields and regions. Mary Beth Sampson added that rural areas desperate need critical STEM fields. Paul Brooke brought up the special case of allied health professions and the health-related institutions. Some institutions, including the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, have doctoral programs with only one doctoral faculty member that graduate just one student per year. These programs are necessary to provide faculty and practitioners in specialized fields, particularly in regions where recruitment is difficult.

Raymund Paredes reminded institutions that it is their responsibility to close LPPs. If the argument is that the institutions are providing access for students, then the Coordinating Board needs evidence that the institution is following all their students through to graduation. It is not the Coordinating Board that is closing programs; it is the institutions that have failed to attract and graduate students.

James Goeman provided data that showed what the results would be if Texas applied the various LPP thresholds of other states. Mohamed Abdelrahman asked for the criteria states are using to generate these thresholds, and James Goeman replied that presumably they are for economic efficiency. Mohamed Abdelrahman stated that a change in the Texas thresholds needs to be supported by stated reasons.

Kevin Lemoine presented a document comparing the programs that were affected by the 2011 LPP review and the programs that would have been affected under the proposed new thresholds. The data excluded programs approved within the last ten years and masters programs that lead directly to a doctorate degree.

Allen Michie presented data on job fields in demand in Texas and how they correspond to current graduate program offerings. Benjamin Flores pointed out that in the case of mathematics programs, there is a disconnect between the demands of the LPP thresholds and Texas workforce needs. Kevin Lemoine replied that the national workforce need is considered, not just Texas needs.

MacGregor Stephenson notified GEAC members that LPP exemption requests need to be detailed.

Dorothy Flannagan asked if institutions can request sequential temporary exemptions. MacGregor Stephenson responded that it is possible under very special circumstances,

but the Coordinating Board expects Provosts to close programs if they are still are not meeting standards after the first two-year exemption.

V. Small group discussion of changes to proposed low-producing programs thresholds and effective date for such changes

GEAC members broke into five groups to consider three questions: What is the impact of the current LPP thresholds? What would the impact be of raising the LPP thresholds? If they are raised, what would be the best timeline for implementing the plan?

VI. Discussion of the feedback from small groups by committee as a whole

Benjamin Flores spoke for the first group. Comparisons of Texas to other states are problematic because they do not compare for size, diversity, economic conditions, and national impact. The group concluded that LPP criteria are a moving target, and institutions a full seven-year cycle to do their own self-assessments and improvements.

Jennifer Martin spoke for the second group. The LPP standards have had a large impact on the students of institutions represented in this group, particularly on place-bound and low-income students. The proposed new thresholds will cut deeply into STEM programs, costing institutions graduate assistants who help in labs and with undergraduate teaching. Smaller institutions would be disproportionately affected. There should be differentiated thresholds for designated fields (such as allied health), taking into consideration the size and location of institutions, and the regional need for graduates. There might need to be a study of the LPP impact on students. The assumption is that they will go elsewhere for their degrees, but is this always true? The best implementation date for new thresholds would be 2020.

Nancy Street spoke for the third group. The sense of the group was that it is not always a bad thing to lose or consolidate programs, but there are little to no cost savings to institutions for doing so. (MacGregor Stephenson responded that it is the institution's responsibility to demonstrate that there are no cost savings.) The group recommended allowing the two-year exemption period to pass before implementation. The timing for gathering LPP statistics could be tied to the 5-7 year program reviews in order to get a more complete look at the overall health of programs.

Paul Brooke spoke for the fourth group. The consolidation process was generally positive—its effect was to increase faculty awareness of retention and graduation rates, and it focused the attention of deans and program directors on good stewardship of increasingly rare resources. It is too early to see cost savings. Raising the LPP thresholds would be disproportionally hard on regional universities. Exceptions to LPP thresholds should be made for programs with low enrollments but high graduation rates, and for certain CIP codes in STEM fields. If new standards are implemented, 2012-2017 is as good a time as any. It is important for the Coordinating Board to mitigate the impact of

raising the thresholds by allowing institutions to retort, respond, and have an active dialog.

Dorothy Flannagan spoke for the fifth group. Smaller institutions and institutions in certain areas of the state would be affected more than others. The Coordinating Board should look for alternatives for students who will be losing programs, especially those students who will be hundreds of miles away from the nearest offering institution. Different thresholds should be considered for individual fields. 2017 is a reasonable date for implementation so institutions have time to communicate with their faculty and students. Doctoral programs will take longer than master's programs for implementing changes.

MacGregor Stephenson asked the groups for specific recommendations for how their suggestions could be implemented.

Phil Cohen said that there could be alternate measures for certain critical fields, as there are with the undergraduate success rate criteria. Mary Beth Sampson that different parts or schools within institutions can have different thresholds.

Mary Beth Sampson made a motion, amended by Debbie Thorne into two separate motions: "STEM programs as defined by the National Science be excluded from the proposed thresholds until further study of the impact of the current thresholds." The motion carried.

The second motion, "Foreign language programs be excluded from the proposed thresholds until further study of the impact of the current thresholds," did not carry.

Mohamed Abdelrahman made the motion: "Delay consideration of proposed increases in new thresholds until after summer 2013." Kevin Lemoine clarified that by 2013 we will know the results of the second-year LPP review, including temporary exemption requests. The motion carried.

Jennifer Martin made motions for new GEAC recommendations and a preamble: "GEAC recognizes the need for careful degree program review in an era of declining resources and the need for efficiency and effectiveness in allocating those resources while maintaining program quality. GEAC, therefore, recommends the following:

- Delay consideration of proposed increases in new thresholds until after Summer 2013.
- Continue the current thresholds through 2018 in order to focus attention on the need for stewardship and productivity without a focus on changing targets.
- STEM programs as defined by the National Science Foundation be excluded from the proposed thresholds until further study of the impact of current thresholds.
- Provide a mechanism for universities to express special circumstances (e.g., location, special populations, size of the institution, high graduation/retention rates, etc.).
- Study the statewide impact of low-producing program review decisions on student enrollment and graduation data."

The motion carried.

Mohamed Abdelrahman made the motion: "Provide justification of any future increases in the threshold and its projected impact on the efficiency of the selected programs in the state." The motion did not pass for lack of a quorum.

The meeting adjourned at 2:40.