Graduate Education Advisory Committee Meeting
March 26, 2010

Committee members attending:
Thomas Belinoski, Paul Brooke, Cynthia Brown, Phil Cohen, Jason Cooper, Austin Cunningham, Oney Fitzpatrick, Dorothy Flanagan, Fred Hartmeister, Linda Jones, Larry Lyon, Jennifer Martin, Michael Monticino, Mrinal Mugdh, Mary Beth Sampson, George Stancel, Nancy Street, Debbie Thorne, Jamboor Vishwanatha, Robert Webb, Emily Wilson (for David Carlson), Patricia Witherspoon

CB staff:
James Goeman, Kevin Lemoine, Allen Michie, Anya Sebastien, MacGregor Stephenson

I. Welcome and Call to Order

II. Consideration of approval of Summary Notes from last meeting

The minutes from the October 9, 2009 meeting were approved.

III. Discussion of 18 Characteristics Reporting

K. Lemoine asked to have all institutions send the Coordinating Board (CB) links to the 18 Characteristics web sites as soon as they are up. M. Stephenson stated that the letter describing the requirements will be re-sent to all of the academic deans. The 18 Characteristics for each of the various departments should all be collected in one central place on the institution's website.

Several problems with the specifics of data gathering were mentioned, and P. Brooke reminded members that the "rule of common sense" will need to apply for the first few years while the data become more useful and regresses to a mean. R. Webb said that institutions should do what they feel is best, and if there are any doubts about the information, explain the methodologies used in footnotes.

P. Cohen raised the question of whether or not institutions should post copies of previous 18 Characteristics reports, or only the most recent one. In the discussion following, it was pointed out that each new report will contain data from the previous three years' reports, since the data reflects a three-year rolling average. M. Stephenson said that institutions are free to include reports from previous years (so long as they are marked with an asterisk), but the Coordinating Board will only be expecting the most recent report to be posted.

P. Brooke made a motion that "The current year's data be the one that is posted on institution's websites." [Staff note: The sense of the motion is that institutions are required to post only the most recent year's data, but institutions are free to post clearly labeled older reports as well if they so choose.]

IV. Discussion of the New Doctoral Proposal Approval Process

M. Stephenson reminded members to please use the latest version of the new doctoral program application form. If applications for programs were begun using the old form, please have those completed before September 1, 2010, when only the new forms will be accepted.

M. Stephenson reported that the CB is going to be taking deeper looks at the state and national demand for graduates with the doctoral degree in certain disciplines, the capacity of existing programs to expand and meet new needs, and the level of financial support offered to graduate students. If the State is going to add expensive new programs rather than expand existing ones, they will need be of very high quality and nationally competitive for the best students. The burden will be on institutions to persuasively demonstrate the need and quality of new doctoral programs they propose.

D. Thorne asked how the CB assesses program capacity. K. Lemoine said that the faculty/student ratio is used to calculate capacity, and out-of-state institutions are called to ask about their rejection rate of qualified applicants. M. Stephenson replied that CB staff contact deans and department chairs. He recommended that institutions putting together new proposals be in touch with the deans at other universities for information and advice about capacity and distinctive curricula.

J. Goeman reminded members that all of this is time-consuming work for CB staff, and if institutions have already researched this kind of information about program capacity, to please include it in the applications.

The issues of professional doctorates, appropriate review standards, and degree creep were raised by G. Stancel and P. Brooke. K. Lemoine stated that GEAC will be working on standards for professional doctoral programs, which for now will need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

K. Lemoine announced a new CB policy that if staff send the institution questions related to a new doctoral degree proposal and we do not hear back within three months, then the proposal will be closed out.

V. Consideration of Maximum and Minimum Credit Hour Requirements

R. Webb reported the findings of a subcommittee formed to study the question of whether it was feasible to have maximum or minimum credit hours for doctoral programs. (Meeting materials included a table of 1,900 master's programs in the state, sorted by CIP code, and three graphs to illustrate the spread of hours.)

It was found that there are some niche doctoral programs that have internships or other elements which increase their required hours. Some masters programs that serve as terminal degrees have higher maximum hours than other master's programs.

M. Stephenson pointed out that there is up to a 60 percent variation of credit hours within similar programs. The report will be useful, therefore, to assist with the internal review of programs as institutions compare their program to those elsewhere in the state.

P. Brooke said that institutions have financial incentives to increase the hours of programs, so it is helpful to have these data collected so we can question the programs that are far outside the mainstream. The data should be made available to the financial officers of institutions. M. Stephenson added that the data will also be useful to students trying to decide between competing programs.

In answer to a question from J. Martin, K. Lemoine stated that if required credit hours for doctoral programs are calculated using post-master's numbers, please add a footnote. Otherwise, post-baccalaureate hours are the default.

G. Stancel said that there is sometimes a difference between the minimum/maximum hours required in theory and the minimum hours students take in practice. Individual advisors may require additional hours in advanced courses. He suggested that institutions could add a second column for the number of hours students are actually doing.

In answer to some skepticism about the utility of counting credit hours expressed by L. Lyon, P. Brooke said that credit hours remain "the coin of the realm" because that is how the State funds universities via formula funding. M. Stephenson stated that since the legislature has already imposed limitations at the baccalaureate level, he would like to have GEAC be proactive and have answers prepared for the Commissioner and legislature based on valid academic reasons.

Based upon the variation of calculation methods used and the questions brought up during the discussion, P. Cohen proposed that the report is not yet ready to publish. K. Lemoine added that GEAC may need to produce a second report specific to Health Science Centers, since they report credit hours differently.

It was agreed to send the request for data back to the institutions for verification and clarification. After four weeks, the subcommittee will meet again to incorporate the new data into a revised report.

VI. Discussion of Periodic Review of Existing Master's Programs

J. Goeman stated that many states do not have a set policy on academic program review. It is something that is done by the system, or internally.

In a show of hands, it was shown that most GEAC members' institutions do regular internal reviews of master's programs, most exempt programs that already have period accreditation reviews, and most do reviews of master's and related doctoral programs at the same time.

P. Cohen asked GEAC members what they considered the most salient features of master's reviews to be. Discussion followed, with the following items mentioned at least once:

- quality of applicants
- quality of graduates
- time to degree
- retention rate
- curriculum and syllabi
- student learning outcomes
- pass rates
- job placement/future study of graduates
- alignment of program objectives with the curriculum
- self-assessment
- communication within the program
- exit interview with the provost
- action plan from the department chair
- follow-up and documentation
- budget
- long-range planning
- enrollment
- performance on licensure and certification exams

K. Lemoine referred to a handout from the Undergraduate Education Advisory Committee (UEAC) highlighting the guidelines used for undergraduate program review. He stated that the CB's goal by the end of the summer is to select a CIP code and do a pilot test of a review of undergraduate programs. If there is a similar statewide review of master's programs, they may be some overlap in the criteria for evaluation.

M. Stephenson said that he hopes this review process will make it easier for graduate deans and provosts to close low-producing programs. K. Lemoine, in response to a question from P. Cohen, said that the review process will help clear up reporting issues such as institutions claiming students under a different CIP code than the one for which the program was originally approved.

VII. Items from the Strategic Plan for Graduate Education to Recommend as Legislative Priorities

With a reminder from P. Cohen that recommendations are the extent of GEAC's authority, the floor was opened for a discussion of GEAC's most immediate priorities from the Strategic Plan.

M. Stephenson reminded members of the budget reduction mandates likely forthcoming from the legislature. If there is a five percent budget cut, he asked, what would most important: getting that five percent back, or graduate tuition remission?

J. Vishwanatha responded that the five percent cut would be across the board. Since the focus of GEAC is graduate excellence, we should stick to tuition remission as our most important issue so we can remain competitive with other states.

P. Brooke said that if the legislature doesn't get a clear sense that further reductions will hurt graduate education across the board, then this committee will have failed. Tuition remission will

be irrelevant if the graduate programs don't survive in the face of more budget cuts in the upcoming and subsequent legislative sessions.

M. Stephenson said that the mantra from all the institutions this session will likely be "give us back our five percent, give us increases tied to enrollment growth, and then let us go home." He told members that they may want to check with their presidents before throwing their weight behind tuition remission as your top priority.

R. Webb likewise warned that if GEAC chooses the wrong issue to prioritize, it could polarize the debate and GEAC could come away with nothing. M.B. Sampson said that whatever is good for undergraduate education is also good for graduate education, so GEAC and UEAC need to provide a united front with any of our recommendations.

The revised consensus of members was that fighting for restoration of a five-percent budget cut would be the top priority that GEAC would recommend that the CB carry to the legislature.