

Nolen's comments to the Faculty Senate 2-17-12

“Recently a document titled, “Proposal for Faculty Discussion Regarding Graduate Faculty Status Procedures” was distributed to the faculty in an effort to solicit feedback. It has raised some concern among some groups of faculty and I want to address this here:

History – For the past 5-6 years, the Dean(s) of the Graduate School have maintained that the current policy and practice for graduate faculty status approval is not robust and should be updated to reflect the changing culture of graduate education here at UALR. Repeatedly, the council addressed it, talked about it among ourselves and not making any progress would drop it only to pick it up the following year. This year seemed the right time to address it in light of the new Roles and Rewards documents, P&T guidelines, and revised governance documents so we all thought this was perhaps the year when we could get some traction on the issue. As the scholars and skeptics that we were however, we decided to collect data to find out if a) there really was a problem that needed to be addressed; and b) if there was a problem what was the nature and scope of the problem.

I gave the personnel sub-committee 2 parameters as they embarked on this task: 1. I would not support any proposal that stripped or reduced faculty authority in this issue and hand it to the deans (either college or Grad School); and 2. I would not support any proposal that allowed the Graduate Council to abdicate its responsibility as charged by the Faculty Senate by pushing all of the authority down to the depts. and colleges. I saw that as dangerous as there is the potential for conflicts of interest either practical, personal, or political in nature that could obfuscate or undermine the process.

The personnel sub-committee looked at peer institutions and examined the policies and practices they have regarding awarding graduate faculty status. While all have graduate faculty status approval policies, institutions vary in terms of processes. The processes ranged on a continuum from very loose and open (for example, UALR and UMSL) to very restrictive and prescriptive (for example, U of Memphis – graduate faculty must publish 6 artifacts in nationally recognized refereed journals or equivalencies over 6 years).

The sub-committee also collected data from graduate coordinators and dept chairs during the fall regarding the nature of graduate faculty workload. “What is it that they do?” Preliminary analyses suggest a wide diversity in the nature of the work, the kinds of work that is valued within the departments, and the degree of support grad faculty receive to do their work. This last point is particularly concerning and only added to the complexity of the issue.

What was distributed two days ago was a document outlining two general models that represent the types of practices of our peer institutions. They do not include any detail yet...we want to hear from the faculty their ideas and thoughts about how these models would fit their work in the context of the culture of graduate education in their units and colleges. Once we get a better sense

of the issues, we will choose one, or perhaps choose the best of both, OR if feedback indicates, we will eliminate those options and look towards other models.

Across the two models you will see two common characteristics. First, we recognize the need for a more graduated graduate faculty status, so we added the Doctoral Faculty status level. The need arose out of recognition of the important role that non-tenure track faculty play in graduate education here on campus, as well as faculty or instructors who do not hold a terminal degree. We wanted to loosen the requirements of graduate faculty status to allow us to grant those individuals the access and privileges that are not allowed to them under the current policies. However, by doing so, that necessitated a third category for doctoral coursework and research supervision. We can all agree that doctoral coursework and research cannot be supervised by individuals without terminal degrees in their fields. This will allow us to approve faculty for graduate status with diverse backgrounds and experiences, while at the same time protect the integrity of doctoral education.

The second characteristic common to both models is called faculty review. Currently, once a person is afforded full graduate status, they have it forever...like the Pope, or a supreme court justice! There are individuals listed as graduate faculty who have not taught a graduate course in years or have not supervised graduate research in years. We wanted to employ a mechanism that allowed the faculty member to re-apply for graduate status after a six-year term. This mechanism, I might add is present in approval processes in many of our peer institutions. This idea of review is the issue that has caused the most consternation on the council and probably among the faculty writ large. Review suggests that there are some criteria with which to review one's credentials or capabilities. Here is where we are seeking candid feedback from the faculty to help us power through this issue.

In whatever form the new policy takes, our intention is NOT in erect obstacles for qualified and capable faculty to acquire graduate faculty status.

The integrity and quality of UALR's graduate programs rests fundamentally on the credentials and competencies of the faculty. Any policy regarding graduate faculty status is intended to ensure (and ASSURE our stakeholders) that student research and coursework are being directed by faculty members who are actively engaged in original scholarship (broadly defined) and are up to date with respect to important developments in their discipline.”