Minutes of CGSR Meeting #3 on 10/12/2021

The Committee on Graduate Studies and Research (CGSR) held its third meeting of AY '21/'22 on October 12, 2021 (Tuesday) via Zoom.

Present: D. Korkin (CS, Chair), S. Shell (BBT, Secretary), T. Camesano (Dean of graduate studies), M. Demetriou (AE), L. Fichera (RBE), D. Medich (PH), J. Tourtellotte (BCB, GS), Y. Telliel (HUA), B. Vernescu (Vice Provost for Research)

Guests: S. Miles (Registrar), K. McAdams (Director of Academic Program Planning), M. Terrio (Executive Director of Graduate Recruitment and Admissions)

Prof. Korkin called the meeting to order at 3:00 pm.

1. The minutes of meeting #2 were reviewed and approved with minor edits.

2. There was brief continued discussion of the motion item from the previous meeting regarding introduction of +/- grading for graduate courses.
   a. It was noted that feedback from current graduate students should be solicited. CGSR will therefore reach out to the GSA to identify an appropriate mechanism for soliciting feedback.
   b. There was a question about how such a change would affect current students. S. Miles clarified that such a change would occur at a point in time and apply to all courses taken from that point onward. Students partway through degree programs at the point of change would retain all grades given through the current grading system, and receive future grades according to the new grading system.
3. Discussion item: posthumous degree policy. WPI does not have a policy in place to award posthumous degrees. CAP is currently working to develop such a policy, and it was suggested that CAP and CGSR work together to develop a policy that encompasses both undergraduate and graduate students.
   a. Typically, institutions require that a specified percentage of a degree be completed for a student to be eligible for a posthumous degree. However, CAP is considering a policy in which posthumous degrees are offered regardless of the percentage of the degree that is completed. The committee discussed the rationale for having or not having a requirement that a specific percentage of the degree be completed.
   b. Some institutions offer posthumous certificates of achievement for students who don't meet the requirements for a posthumous degree. There did not appear to be support for this option.
   c. It was suggested that a posthumous degree is a symbolic gesture acknowledging a person as a member of a community, and they were a member of the community regardless of the length of time.
   d. It was suggested that since posthumous degree recipients cannot enter the workforce, there is no harm in them receiving a degree for which they have not completed the requirements. The degree in this case is a gesture to show value and appreciation of the student who was lost, not a credential to determine job placement.

e. It was suggested that since other institutions do require a percentage of the degree to be completed, there may be a compelling reason to do so that we haven't thought of yet, and the question therefore calls for more research and thought.

f. It was suggested that if the student was very early in their degree process, their family might view a posthumous degree as an insincere PR stunt.

g. A member with personal experience noted that receiving a posthumous degree for a family member was appreciated by the family.

h. There was discussion of the process, specifically whether posthumous degrees should be automatically awarded or the family given the option to nominate the student for a posthumous degree.

i. The committee agreed that the discussion should be continued, and that a joint motion with CAP would likely be appropriate.

4. Discussion item: an ME faculty member plans to propose a "Graduate project mentoring experience," in which graduate students can get credit for jointly mentoring MQP students together with faculty.

a. The ME faculty member wanted to know if CGSR approval is required to add such a course. CGSR approval is indeed required for all new graduate courses.

b. There was additional discussion about the idea of the course itself, as follows.

c. There was concern that faculty might abuse such an option to offload MQP advising onto grad students.

d. There was a suggestion that this should be a zero-credit course.

e. There was general agreement that such a course should include learning objectives and a statement that the graduate student's work will be assessed.

f. It was suggested that the role of the faculty member should be made explicit to ensure that the MQP students receive faculty mentoring as well.

g. It was noted that in a past grad student survey, students expressed interest in gaining mentoring experience.

h. It was suggested that such a course should be offered for all departments and programs, given that many graduate students are likely to be interested. CGSR will submit the idea to department heads and program coordinators to assess the extent of support for it.

5. The committee discussed a B-term meeting time and agreed that it can likely be kept at the same day and time.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:03 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Scarlet Shell
BBT
Secretary