

Graduate Council Meeting Minutes

Thursday, February 19, 2026 – Zoom

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Annette Barnes, DNP, MSN
Jennifer Bergner, MSME
Stephanie Bernhard, ENG
Joshua Bolton, PUBCOM
Melissa Bugdal, At-Large Perdue School Rep
Yvonne Downie-Hanley, MBA
Maida Finch, EDD
James Fox, EDLD
Aston Gonzalez, HIST
Clifton Griffin, Dean of Graduate School
Allen Koehler, AVP Enrollment Management
Eric Liebgold, BIO
Lauren McDermott, GIS
Ruth Malone, CURRMED

Scott Mazzetti, HHPF
Myrana Ruzigamanzi, GSC
Mark Shaffer, CHHS Rep
Jessica Scott, OGS
Ignaciyas Soosaipillai, CADR
Christine Spillson, Fulton School Rep
Brian Stiegler, MED Higher ED

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Elizabeth Kressin, Registrar
Stephen Oby, MSW
Heather Porter, Seidel Rep
Star Weaver, MAT

I. Call to Order – 3:32pm.

II. Good News

- J. Fox – The M.Ed. earned its first-ever ranking from U.S. World and News.
- Hailey Ader is a Fulbright semi-finalist.
- A. Barnes – Close to having our first international nursing student.
- C. Griffin – Introduced Lauren McDermott as the new GIS Graduate Program Director.
- L. McDermott – The Accelerated GIS program was approved.
- A. Koehler – Introduced Doryann Barnhardt as the new Director of Financial Aid. She has 23 years of experience in public and private institutions. Also Scott Talentino is the new Coordinator of International Education.

III. Minutes

- November minutes were submitted and unanimously approved without corrections.

IV. Curriculum

- GCC presented a list of graduate curriculum that was approved at the 2/18/26. The following were approved:
 - EDLD 516 – Course Change – “P-12 School Administration”
 - EDLD 517 – Course Change – “Supervision to Improve Instruction”
 - EDLD 550 – Course Change – “Leadership and Change”
 - EDLD 552 – Course Change – “Diversity and Group Dynamics in School Administration”
 - EDLD 555 – Course Change – “Public School Fiscal and Human Resource Management”
 - B.S./M.A.T. – New Accelerated Program

- The following curriculum was returned:
 - EMAT 519 – Course Change – “Teaching Music in Grades 7-12”
- A. Barnes – As a reminder, if a change is made to a swing course, it must go through both UCC and GCC.

V. Immunization Requirements for Online Students - M. Finch

- Online students are not expected to come to campus. They’re often older and it’s not always easy to get immunization records
- C. Griffin – Recently attended the MD Deans’ Meeting and how immunization requirements are handled for online students varies dramatically across campuses.
- R. Malone – Rules should be applied consistently. Students may go without proof of exemption for an entire semester before having holds placed on their accounts. The communication from Student Health is not thorough or timely.
- M. Bugdal – Online students should at least have TDAP & MMR since they may be coming to campus for library services or graduation
- A. Barnes – Nursing students may face more requirements based on the site of their experiential learning requirements.
- M. Ruzigamanzi – Are there ever exemptions?
 - C. Griffin – The only exemptions are for religious reasons
- B. Stiegler – We should definitely get feedback from GSC.
 - M. Ruzigamanzi – Will bring this topic up to the GSC Executive Board.
- Questions for Student Health once the Director returns from leave:
 - How is rule applied?
 - What are communications?
 - Why are they allowed an entire of semester without proof of vaccinations?
 - Can this rule be reviewed since other USM schools operate differently?
 - What is their role in regards to different programs and their respective requirements?

VI. Student Decision Turnaround – S. Bernhard

- Faculty are encouraged to make quick decisions due to enrollment numbers. English recently admitted a borderline student to late discover he was banned from the university. That information wasn’t in Slate.
 - C. Griffin – Student didn’t answer the conduct question. J. Scott has revised the application to make that a required field. However, this is a self-reporting question and student can answer dishonestly. This particular student also withheld that he was a previous SU student.
 - J. Fox – If they’re permanently banned, isn’t there a hold on admissions?
 - J. Scott – No, just an enrollment hold
 - S. Bernard – Are they background checks on students?
 - C. Griffin – No

VII. GA Updates – Maida Finch

- C. Griffin – Prior to WorkDay, all GA paperwork flowed through J. Scott who ensured paperwork was correct. The Grad School has met with Princely Munro and Tara Smith and J. Scott will be accepting GA paperwork for all programs from the respective HCMi and entering them in Facebook. J. Scott has been developing an input form for staff to use.
- B. Stiegler – Are all GA positions advertised?

- J. Scott – No. Program dependent positions such as TA’s in Biology and English are hired from within the respective program. General GA positions, with no required discipline are advertised to all grad students.
- A. Barnes – Has there been a decrease in GA’s?
 - C. Griffin – Yes, budget concerns have decreased the number of GA’s on campus.
 - J. Scott – Current cost of a full-time GA for 2 semesters is \$17,280.
 - E. Liegbold – Biology has lost one.
 - A. Barnes – Nursing has lost two.
- J. Bergner – Can we advocate for more GA positions?
 - C. Griffin – The Grad School would love to see more GA positions. If Grad Council wants to submit a statement discussing the importance of GA’s and offering support, that would be positive.
- M. Bugdal – Who sets minimum stipend? Can the Grad School leverage funds that could contribute to additional GA’s?
 - C. Griffin – Minimum stipend is \$4,635 and was calculated to keep it just above the minimum wage when broken down. The Grad School has advocated for stipend increases in the past and can make another request.
 - Fall 2020 - \$4,000
 - Fall 2021 - \$4,500
 - Fall 2023 - \$4,635
 - E. Liebgold – GA increases should be tied to COLA increases.
 - C. Griffin - The Grad School has never had a pool of funds to create GA positions. The Grad School uses of portion of the student activities fee to support the Grad School GA.
- M. Ruzigamanzi – Can fees be reduced?
 - C. Griffin – Fee schedules are set for all students.

VIII. GSC Remarks – M. Ruzigamanzi

- Many GA’s feel they are being overworked.
- GSC reviewed the Strategic Enrollment Plan and offered feedback to Zebadiah Hall.
- Upcoming Social Events
 - Game Night at the President’s House
 - Coffee Hours
 - Lacrosse Game in the President’s Box
- Elections will be coming up soon. Please encourage your students to become involved in the GSC
- Are there any professional development opportunities?
 - C. Griffin – The Grad School sponsored 10 students to attend Dr. Stephen Habay’s professional development workshop.
- B. Stiegler – Offered congratulations for getting a human reader at the Graduate Ceremony.
- C. Griffin and J. Scott will schedule a meeting with GSC to discuss further program issues.

IX. Dean’s Remarks

- Strategic Planning – Grad Student Council was asked for feedback but not Grad Council.
 - Plan will be revealed at the President’s State of the University address
 - J. Fox – Long Range Planning Committee of the Faculty Senate received it because they pushed for it.

- M. Bugdal – Why wasn't it shared with Grad Council?
 - C. Griffin – Not sure. It was also not shared with Chairs.
- Accelerated programs are doing well and now we have several either approved and going through the approval process.
- Direct Admissions - HHPF was our pilot program and now the MBA program is in effect.
- Impact of graduate education is in jeopardy with the loss of the Grad Plus Loan. Financial Aid can speak to students about preferred lenders and loan options.

X. Other Remarks

- M. Finch – Is there an update on Liz's vacant position?
 - C. Griffin – Recently met with HR and Aurora about organization structure for all of Graduate Studies and Research. Huge thanks to J. Scott for covering those duties along with our Grad Assistant, Katie Ray.
- A. Barnes – Thank you for marketing efforts for our programs.
- J. Scott – Katie is working on social media updates and will reach out to you for student names.

Meeting was adjourned at 5:02 p.m.

Submitted by Jessica Scott