

UNL Graduate Council Minutes
October 2, 2025
Location: Zoom
2:30 p.m.

Attending: Rochelle Dalla, Dai Shizuka, Christopher Bilder, Tom Kubick, Elizabeth Niehaus, Michelle Harvey, Can Vuran, Frauke Hachtmann, and Colten Skinner. Dean Hope presiding. Eva Bachman and Jason Carmichael from Graduate Studies.

1. **Welcome new members** – Frauke Hachtmann (subbing for Maria Marron) and Colten Skinner (new GSA VP).
2. **Approval of minutes from meeting held on September 4, 2025:** Motion to approve minutes, seconded. Before a final vote occurred, a request was made to include in section five of the minutes specifics from the discussion regarding the budget reduction process. The original motion to approve was amended to table a decision regarding the minutes pending the inclusion of additional details, seconded, and unanimously approved.
3. **Major modification of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Specialization Proposal:** Dean Hope provided background and overview of the proposal. A brief discussion followed, and it was noted that there was no documentation of support from the College of Law for the law courses included in the proposal. Motion to approve the proposal pending receipt of approval from College of Law, seconded, and unanimously approved.
4. **Update on 10/16 scheduled special meeting of UNL Graduate Council:** Dean Hope reminded the Council that, at the request of Dr. David Jackson, the Graduate Council scheduled a meeting to consider the specific graduate degrees that are being proposed for elimination by Chancellor Bennett per budget reduction process. The October 16 meeting date was chosen because it occurs after the APC's public hearings and during the APC's deliberations prior to submitting their final recommendations. Dean Hope explained the advisory role Graduate Council has with the APC and has invited Professor Jennifer Clarke, the Council's liaison with the APC, to the October 16 meeting to report the Graduate Council's feedback to the APC. According to legal counsel and information provided to Dean Hope, the Graduate Council can certainly provide feedback on proposed eliminations of graduate programs, but a vote is not required. This led to a full discussion about the role of the Graduate Council in the current APC process, especially related to voting on program deletions, which resulted in agreement among the council that they have an obligation to vote on the proposals. Concerns were raised about the amount of information that would be provided to the Graduate Council regarding program eliminations and the limited timeframe to adequately review the materials to make an informed decision. Dean Hope will request that the proposals include as much information as possible in a reasonable time to review it. Dean Hope encouraged the Council to attend APC hearings that involve graduate programs to hear those perspectives since it is not possible to predict how much information will be given.
 - a. A request was made that materials provided to Graduate Council for consideration include teach-out plans, and that these materials also be distributed to faculty who are

responsible for these programs. Dean Hope indicated that she could put forward the request to make materials available to faculty, but it is not an action she can take. A request was made that Dean Hope put into writing to the Graduate Council whatever response she receives.

- b. A motion was put forth that Graduate Council issues a formal vote on program deletions by program and by degrees during the October 16 meeting. Discussion about voting method followed, and it was agreed to postpone this decision until the Oct 16 meeting. A motion was made to a vote by program, by degrees based on the understanding of the UNL Graduate Council that they have an obligation to vote on program eliminations and intend to do so during the October 16, 2025 meeting. The motion passed with all yeas and one abstention.
 - c. A request was put forth that someone from the administration be present at the meeting to respond to questions. Jennifer Clarke of APC will be present, and Dean Hope agreed to invite EVC Button to the meeting as well.
 - d. A question was raised about admissions to impacted programs. Dean Hope explained the conflict between transparent communication with applicants to programs that are proposed for elimination and the adverse impact to admissions should those programs not be eliminated. The application for admission includes a message that alerts the applicant to the budget reduction processes that are occurring, while encouraging them to apply. Programs were contacted by Graduate Admissions and invited to include a message of their choosing in the application, and some have added their own message.
5. **Student Grade Appeal (documents in separate folder):** Dean Hope provided background and supporting documents had been provided to the Graduate Council for review. A student grade appeal was submitted and reviewed by a Graduate Council subcommittee, and the subcommittee returned a decision to the program and faculty member. The faculty member appealed the subcommittee's decision, which came to the full Graduate Council for a decision. Following full discussion, a motion was made to uphold the subcommittee's decision, seconded, and unanimously approved.
6. **Discussion of data and proposed policy for English language proficiency:** Dean Hope reminded the Council that the current minimum English language proficiency policy expires in December with the possibility of developing a policy that is not test-specific and thus contingent on recurring changes in scoring. Dr. Alisha Hanshaw joined the meeting to discuss data provided to the Council, tests and CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) definitions. To determine how many applicants would be denied admission if the standard score is raised, the data showed how many UNL applicants take English proficiency tests, their average scores, the preferred tests being taken, and a comparison of score concordances. TOEFL is re-evaluating their scoring system, leading IELTS and Duolingo to shift their scoring tables which has implications for the UNL policy. A discussion followed about the costs and benefits of raising the standard as opposed to keeping it in the same range. The Graduate College setting a minimum score does not prohibit any program from setting a higher standard based on the level of language proficiency required for student success in that program. Benefits for using the CEFR categories for scoring were discussed: 1) prevent the need to rewrite the policy every time test specific scores change, 2) provide an opportunity for admission to those who cannot afford the

TOEFL but took a CEFR certified course and received a qualifying score, and 3) allow us to accept more of the tools that are assessing English proficiency for applicants. A request was made for more data that quantifies other Big Ten universities' TOEFL requirements and clarifies the apparent discrepancy in the B2 score range between admittance numbers for IELTS the corresponding TOEFL score. A vote to formulate a new policy was tabled until the November meeting.

7. **Curriculum Discussion:** None.

8. **Graduate Student Assembly Report:** Vice President Skinner reported. GSA is reaching out to students in programs that are being proposed for elimination to collect letters from them to present to APC when the hearings are over. The letters share the personal experiences of those students affected by these proposed cuts.

9. **Announcements:**
 - a. Dean Hope reported that the admissions coordinator in Office of Graduate Studies has left for another job. Approval for a temporary replacement has been received.
 - b. Dean Hope reminded everyone that it is important to dispel rumors among students about budget reductions. Proposals for program deletions are not final yet, nor will any other programs be added to the list, regardless of the outcome for current programs.

Meeting adjourned at 4:45 pm
Respectfully submitted,
Jason Carmichael