

UNL Graduate Council Minutes

April 3, 2025

Location: Zoom

2:30 p.m.

Attending: Rochelle Dalla, Souparno Ghosh, Xu Li, Tom Kubick, Maria Marron, Elizabeth Niehaus, Dai Shizuka, Brenda Wristen, Venn Jemkur and Alejandra Vasquez. Dean Hope presiding. Eva Bachman and Jason Carmichael from Graduate Studies.

1. **Approval of minutes from meeting held on March 6, 2025:** Motion to approve minutes, seconded, and unanimously approved.
2. **Proposal for Deferring Approval of Dual Degrees to the Dean of Graduate Education:** Dean Hope shared an excerpt from Graduate College Policies regarding simultaneous matriculation and a proposed statement for review at the request of the Graduate Council at the previous meeting. The following statement was reviewed, discussion followed, and the Council added the phrase “and administered by the same academic unit” to the end of the first sentence:

The Dean of Graduate Education may approve simultaneous matriculation pathways for dual master’s and doctoral degrees if the programs are in the same major and administered by the same academic unit. Dual degree programs across two or more academic units, in different majors, or requesting curricular changes must be approved by the UNL Graduate Council.

A motion was made to approve the statement as a new policy as amended, was seconded and unanimously approved.

3. **Discussion of Potential Policy Changes:**
 - a. Inclusion of GPA on official UNL transcripts: Dr. Eva Bachman provided background – since 1995, a graduate student’s GPA has only been included on their unofficial transcripts only. Some faculty and students are requesting the GPA be included on official transcripts to meet the requirement of institutions where students or alumni are submitting transcripts. UNK and UNO already put the GPA on official transcripts. A motion was made to request that the University Registrar start including the GPA on the official transcripts of graduate students, was seconded, and unanimously approved.
 - b. The requirement for “graduate only” courses in master’s degree (8 hours for Option A and 15 for Option B): Dean Hope provided an overview into the requirements for master’s degrees and raised the possibility of reducing the number of required “graduate only” courses. A “graduate only” course does not include undergraduate students in a simultaneous cross-listed undergraduate course (400/800). One of the reasons this concern was raised is due fewer faculty available to teach and enforcement of minimum enrollments. As a result, fewer “graduate only” courses are possible, which makes it difficult for students pursuing master’s degrees. Discussion of the benefits and costs of a change in the “graduate only” requirement resulted in no recommended change in the policy. Although hiring freezes and budgetary constraints may continue to limit course offerings, Council Members raised concerns about reducing the rigor of the graduate curriculum and potential impact on accreditation and rankings.
 - c. Removal of prohibition of off-campus paid employment in the in assistantship appointment template letter: Dean Hope described that the graduate assistantship offer

letter currently stipulates that “Graduate assistants may not be employed more than a total of 19.6 (.49 FTE) hours per week during the academic year to include all positions and appointments internal *and external* to the university.” Despite this, Dean Hope found in her meetings with students this spring that many are working off campus to help support their cost of living and are requesting this prohibition be removed. The Graduate Council discussed the pros and cons of removing the phrase “external to the university” from the offer letter to allow students the freedom to work in paid employment off campus, especially in light of budget constraints that limit increases in stipends. This would not apply to international students since they are not legally allowed to work off campus. Stipends are not keeping up with the cost of living, leading some students to consider dropping out of their programs. For students in some programs, prohibitions on employment external to the university reduce the quality of their educational experience and can prevent them from gaining practical professional experience pertinent to their employability after graduation. Financial concerns can make it difficult to focus on studies and work at the university. There was discussion of whether removing the prohibition would mean additional policies were needed such as limiting the number of hours that would be allowed for working off campus but it is unclear who could set or enforce that limit. Also there was discussion of whether policy would be needed if outside work interfered with academic progress. Differences across disciplines were discussed as students in lab sciences or working on projects with fixed deadlines may have challenges managing competing schedules. Some funding sources for assistantships and fellowships would not allow students to have other paid employment. No vote was taken but consensus of Council Members at end of discussion was that dropping the prohibition against outside work would need to be the prerogative of the program and that there are already sufficient policies in place if students are not making satisfactory academic progress. There was also discussion that it would be important to articulate the priority that the GTA / GRA is the first job and any other employment is secondary. The Dean agreed to further explore this change with other campus stakeholders and general council.

4. **Curriculum Discussion:** Dr. Bachman reported there are two courses currently in the queue for review, otherwise there are no new curriculum concerns to discuss.
5. **Graduate Student Assembly Report:** President Jemkur reported that graduate student appreciation week kicks off with tomorrow’s social event. Executive Vice President Vasquez reported on meeting with the Chancellor to create a new program that supports student travel to conduct research and participate in conferences to be distributed come Fall 2025. EVP Vasquez also reported on meeting with representatives from Campus Recreation to schedule events specifically for graduate students so they can see the value of the fees they pay for Campus Rec.
6. **Announcements:**
 - a. Graduate Council elections: The terms of Professors Xu Li and Brenda Wristen are coming to an end, and they will be rotating off the Council though they are welcome to run again for a second term. We are currently accepting nominations from Engineering and Arts & Architecture to fill their vacancies with a vote to follow.
 - b. New graduate application software system update: We will continue to use CollegeNet for graduate admissions applications for the 2025-2026 academic year.

- c. Future Forward Microsoft migration: Units are migrating to the new Microsoft systems at different dates over the course of this calendar year. The migration involves changes in email addresses, which has led to communication challenges in Teams and Outlook. Graduate Studies is scheduled to migrate in June. Keep us apprised of your scheduled migration so we can ensure as seamless a transition as possible.
- d. Scheduling end of the semester luncheon meeting: We will meet on Monday, May 12 for lunch at Well and Good in the Scarlet Hotel on Innovation Campus.

Meeting adjourned at 4:09 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Jason Carmichael