

MINUTES

Meeting of the Graduate Academic Policy Committee

Monday, Oct 7, 2024, 2-3.30pm

Location: Zoom

Present: Adam Frank (Chair), Michael Hunt, Richard Price, Curtis Suttle, Davide Elmo, Dónal O'Donoghue, Sumeet Gulati, Jolanta Aleksejuniene, Shannon Hagerman, John Ries, Jenny Phelps (guest), Max Read, Jennifer Fletcher (guest), Jens Locher (Guest), Orkhon Gantogtokh

Regrets: Thomas Chang

1. **ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

All	}	That the agenda be approved.
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Carried

2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

All	}	That the minutes be approved.
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Carried

3. **Business Items**

New policy: Graduate Deferred Admission

- Adam briefly introduced the proposed policy document, on the Graduate Deferred Admission, which closely follows the undergrad policy ('UBC Deferred Admission policy') with minor changes in wording to align with the graduate practices and circumstances. He mentioned that there was a delay-in-start-of-program policy with an expectation that students would be attending classes at the start of term and that the students would be permitted a short delay in starting the program. That policy was sometimes confused with a program deferral. Max highlighted that the deferred admission would become more of an issue because of the delays in visa processing.
- Jolanta asked if a deferral could be extended into the second year if a student had strong reasons to re-apply for deferral – Adam said that the policy language did not allow for that.
- Jenny observed that the policy was clear on why a request for referral could be denied (student had to request it and then there was the eligibility criteria) but it might not be sufficiently clear on what would be the appropriate circumstances for denying the deferral. Adam said that the current policy granted the programs as much flexibility as they would need to make a decision in

this regard. Jenny suggested something along the lines of “the program has to approve the request” be added to prevent students from assuming that deferral could be availed as a right. Max endorsed this viewpoint.

- Curtis asked if a deferral could be made for a duration less than a year – Adam acknowledged that the language of the policy should include ‘up to one year’ instead of the more definite ‘for one year’
- Sumeet highlighted that a number of supervisors in his faculty (Land and Food Systems) provided the funding to students which might make it difficult for their program to grant deferral. Michael pointed to the discretion of individual programs in making such decisions.
- Sumeet also if the requirement of applying for deferral on the 21st could be reconsidered as a lot of potential students might be waiting for their visa approval by that time? Michael said that the students were not allowed to register until they had received a valid study permit so that might not be a problem – He acknowledged that some programs did register students before the students were granted study permits and that such a practice needed to be discouraged.
- Shannon asked about the provenance of this deadline and asked if, in view of the slow processing of the study permits, there has been any conversation about revising this deadline - Max said that the current deadline was considerably more generous than the one for undergrad students and that for students who could not meet this deadline, G+PS would treat such cases flexibly.
- Jens mentioned that new details were emerging about PAL (Provincial Attestation Letter) and how it would be use. He shared his concern around the requirements to accept the letter and the role played by the university in issuing the letters – He proposed waiting until the new policy initiatives became clearer. This was accepted by the committee members

4. Items for Discussion

Introduction to the Committee and Welcome to the new Committee Members (Michael Hunt)

- Michael welcomed the new members of the Committee and gave an overview of the Policy Committee. He also spoke briefly about an informal meeting between the Associate Deans to talk about things not related to policy. The next such meeting was likely to be held in late November/early December.

IRCC

- Jens made a presentation about the recent changes in federal immigration policy and its impact on UBC
- he started off by mentioning the 3 distinct areas G+PS was focusing on:
 - 1) inclusion of graduate degree students under the cap and PAL requirements
 - 2) Changes to PGWP
 - 3) Changes to the spousal work permits
- Jens discussed a number of forthcoming actions and talked about the potential scenarios for exemption from PAL, given the limited number of PAL, such as Masters and doctoral students are issued separate PALs, that could potentially be excluded, exchange students as well. He mentioned that a number of such suggestions had been made to the government but no feedback had been received.

- Sumeet asked if PALs were going to be used at the point of immigration as well. Jens briefly explained briefly how the PAL validation worked: students typically needed a number of documents to submit the visa application, including admission offer and PAL. Once a PAL is submitted as part of the visa application, IRCC reaches back to the university to get the letter validated. Sumeet also asked about who verified PAL at the graduate level. Jens said it was done by the undergraduate office and that G+PS worked closely with them. Jens also stated the difference between the offer letter and PAL – the former being a fraud-prevention measure and the latter an attempt to reduce immigration numbers.
- In response to a question from Curtis about whether anything could be done differently at the unit level, Jens remarked that the biggest threat resulting from these changes is the perception among potential students of Canada not being a welcoming destination anymore. Michael also agreed with the ‘perception’ issue and observed that there were many unknowns at that stage.
- Shannon mentioned reading somewhere that these immigration strict measures were meant to end by 2026 and were therefore short-term in nature. Jens said that the initial assessment was made as such but that not much is known about whether these measures might be in place in the longer run as well.
- Curtis – it seems like you have the data on average time of completion for grad programs – couldn’t that become part of the offer letter? Based on the data, the avg. time of completion for this program is x number of years. Jens – this is what I would aim for
- Regarding time to completion (TTC), Davide asked if it would be worthwhile mentioning 24 months as the time needed to complete a program to protect the student – Jens said that his ISD colleagues thought that IRCC might not look favorably at such an approach.
- Curtis asked about who issued the letters mentioning the length of programs and if it could be done at the unit level. Jens said it was normally done at G+PS through eVision.

Closing Remarks

- Adam made the closing remarks and mentioned the items which were to be discussed at the next meeting:
 - Realistic TTC – PAL issue
 - GenAI to be discussed next time
 - Embargoes on theses

4. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:32 pm.