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Improving the commencement ceremony participant screening process

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2/12/2015: Tabled for more information

3/9/2015: Motion to move tabled motion until the data is received.

4/21/2015: Motion withdrawn

Improving the commencement ceremony participant screening process.

Submitted by Mark Hanna

1/20/2015

Motion:

The Faculty Senate moves to request that the Provost charge the Registrar to:

1. To take steps to improve the proportion of participants in graduation ceremonies who have actually completed their degree requirements at the time of the ceremony to the point that virtually all of the participants will "have completed the requirements for the degree to which they are entitled" (as is asserted by various college Deans during the commencement ceremonies).
2. Annually, by the first day of September, report to Faculty Senate 1) the number of participants in the each of the prior two graduation ceremonies, 2) for each ceremony, the proportion of these participants that had not yet completed the requirements for their degree at the time of participation, 3) for each ceremony the proportion that have not completed their degree requirements as of the date of the report, and 4) any substantive changes made to commencement procedures to decrease the likelihood of premature participation in a graduation exercise.

Rationale:

It is in the interest of both the university and candidates that the graduation ceremony be perceived as a celebration of actual completion of degree requirements by the participants. A recent RFI has demonstrated that, for a surprisingly large proportion of candidates, participation in the graduation ceremony is not tied to actual completion of degree requirements.

The Registrar is responsible for administering the commencement ceremony and determining the actual degree completion status of participants. Hence, though it is in the faculty and university interest to improve the screening of commencement participants, it is not in Senate's best interest to prescribe the exact procedural changes by which improvements might be made. Further, it is the Provost's prerogative to supervise the Registrar's activities and to provide incentives for more effective administration.

Response:

Minutes: 2/12/2015: As far as graduation rates and people who are walking not really graduating one thing I have discovered which hopefully will help rectify some of this situation, is that new procedures in terms of clearing for graduation are being carried out throughout the University. Most all colleges except for CHHS all advising is now going to be done through their professional advising centers. The professional advisors, among other things, have powers that we as faculty members don't. They can update a graduation semester with something as changed, rather than us filling out a form and it going off to never never land like everybody knows that it has in the past. In addition, COSM and CLASS are taking over clearing for graduation for their own majors. For COSM and CLASS majors that will no longer be done by the Registrar's office. The only time the Registrar's office will actually clear one of our majors is after the fact when they have graduated and they are going to do basically a check as I understand it from our associate dean and from our advisor lead, and all they want to see on those DegreeWorks pages, is a lot of green, if it's all green check you graduated. So that, hopefully will help change things because as 9 these advisors can update things as things happen, a student drops a course, a student fails a course, a student gets a "D" in a course that they need a "C" in, they can update things right there and then where we as individual faculty members cannot do that. There's always going to be some, don't get me wrong, something happens at the last minute, but hopefully we won't see anything like excessive 30%.

8. Motion: "Improving the Commencement Ceremony Participant Screening Process," Mark Hanna, COBA: Sorry to be the squeaky wheel on this thing, but it's kind of what I feel like. Last fall, when the RFI on graduation participants and their status with regard to their degree program came out I received numerous emails from faculty across campus suggesting that this was important to them and Senate should latch onto this and do something about it, so that's why I'm still the squeaky wheel, I guess. The perspective generally is that when more than one quarter of the participants in graduation have not completed and will not complete their degree program at the time of the graduation when that's the case it significantly dilutes the meaning and relevance of the ceremony itself. And may in fact go to, well, the effectiveness of our processes in my view to the, it relates even to the integrity of our processes and from a faculty perspective that seems to be the concern. So not wanting to dictate exactly how the problem is solved generally I subscribe to the notion that the people who are responsible for the process should be the ones who have the opportunity to make the appropriate amendments to the process. And I also subscribe to the notion that what gets measured gets done. And so those are the underlying elements of the logic and what's behind the motion that you have seen and I'll read it to you now. Very simply, "The Faculty Senate moves to request that the Provost charge the Registrar to:

1. To take steps to improve the proportion of participants in graduation ceremonies who have actually completed their degree requirements at the time of the ceremony to the point that virtually all of the participants will "have completed the requirements for the degree to which they are entitled" (as is asserted by various college Deans in the ceremonies).

2. That annually, by the first day of September, the Registrar would report to Faculty Senate the number of participants in the each of the prior two graduation ceremonies, and for each ceremony, the proportion of these participants that had not yet completed the requirements of the degree at the time of the ceremony, and finally for each ceremony the proportion that have not completed their degree requirements at the time of the report, lastly, the Registrar would report to the Senate any substantive changes that have been made to commencement procedures to decrease the likelihood of premature participation in a graduation exercise."

Pat Humphrey (COSM) Chair: There's the rationale and the motion. Do we have a second? Janice Steirn has made a second. Is there any discussion on this motion?

Jean Bartels (Provost): I need to point out that the Provost does not charge the Registrar. The Registrar does not report to the Provost, so that would be a difficult piece

to achieve. And I would also just like to be on record to say this. There are a number of reasons why students may not graduate or achieve all of their requirements at the day of the march; it's a symbolic opportunity, and in many cases students are completing an internship, they are doing a summer course to finish up, whatever, there's number of situations which are quite innocent which result in the student graduating, but I would like to request, respectfully, that you don't become mean spirited with a motion like this. To eliminate students who are by all means going to be graduating they will not receive a diploma until that moment is done, but to restrict them from a ceremonial opportunity, I think could look extremely mean spirited when indeed some of the reasons you got numbers like you did are very legitimately explained. They may not have, we graduate students in ceremony the same week they finish their exams. They are not approved through the graduation process until after that point just by virtue of timing. That's one instance. Again, we've got several instances where students are doing something that would prohibit them from coming back to a graduation ceremony that you would then be disallowing them from being a part of that ceremony. So I'm just asking for, on behalf of students, for some sensitivity to what a process in ceremony is knowing that the actual awarding of a degree does not occur until the student has accomplished all requirements.

Janice Steirn (CLASS): I totally understand what you're saying and I don't think it's the spirit of the motion to do that. I think when we received the data that showed some of the students that had not completed requirements, never completed the requirements. That's really is concerning. That seems to reach into, to really touch the integrity. Because it is a celebration, and if students have to finish three hours or if they've got a summer internship and they can't come back there are always going to be some legitimate reasons, but I think that we should take as many steps as we can to make sure they are legitimate. I would love to know and I know that data were sent to us and I didn't bring it with me and I don't know if these data were in there, but the percentage of people who graduate without completion of requirements, what percentage of those are finishing just a three hour course? Or, you know, have to finish something during summer? What proportion thought they were graduating but failed a required course in their last term because due to the insane timing we can't get papers graded in time, and what percentage actually fell through the cracks in clearing? And it sounds like some steps have been taken to hopefully improve the clearing procedure, but if a student knows ahead of time the only way they can graduate is take 19 hours that last term and they have a 2.01 average GPA, it's a pretty good bet that student should be advised that they are not going to be able to finish.

Becky Kennerly (CLASS alternate): But I've been advising for such a long time and most of the students that go through our program are the very same case that Provost Bartels is talking about, and all of the different increments and issues that you are

raising that you want more information about, I think that before any kind of motion ever gets made and accepted, you need to have that kind of information and decide who's going to find that out before we're charging people to try and take some kind of action that could be so negative on so many students. So there's lots of information that you're asking for we don't have.

Janice Steirn (CLASS): Actually, we did have a lot of data. I just didn't bring it with me because I didn't know I would be doing this. But we were sent a spreadsheet that told us a lot of the numbers, and the thing that really I have to say get to me was that there was a fair, first of all, how large the proportion was. You know, 25 to 30% of the students going through the ceremony hadn't finished yet. And then there was, I don't remember the proportion, but a fairly significant number of students who never completed their degrees. And I don't feel like I'm being mean to those students; I want them to complete their degrees. You know, when a student says oh, I went through graduation at Georgia Southern, I want it to mean oh, I graduated from Georgia Southern. And I want graduation to mean something to those students who have completed their degrees.

Lowell Mooney (COBA): Jean, you seemed to imply that this would prohibit those students from going through graduation ceremony. I don't think that's what the intent is. The message may be to the student, well you can't go through this ceremony, you have to wait until the next one until you are closer. Now, perhaps we do need exceptions for those that are within three hours or they are on internships, you know, the reasonable ones that we are hearing, but some of these students are gone for years and they still haven't graduated, so I think it would give some extra incentive for these kids to get it done. If you want to go through the ceremony, then get it done and I think to imply that we are taking away their opportunity to walk, I don't think so. We are delaying it until they get closer to accomplishing.

Jean Bartels (Provost): I guess I would like to see the data looked at again because I firmly believe that the data that was received did not capture actually what was going on. I think the data looked very skewed, in my opinion, was very skewed probably because of a lack of Registrar clearance just because of timing, so I think far worse that what the actual data is so at the least I would like to have an opportunity to look at the data again. ??? I think this is a fairly contentious issue, and I don't know if we are ready to make a decision on this. And I would like to table the motion, not end it, but I would like to table the motion to next meeting and bring it up in a fuller context. I think that the points that have been brought up by my colleagues here and by Jean Bartels has been very good. I mean, I think we need to have a fuller discussion of that and there might be people who aren't here, because I think this is an important issue and I think that we

have to address this sort of making our graduation more meaningless by allowing people to graduate who never graduate. So I think this is an issue that needs to be addressed, but I think I would like to ask if anybody would be interested in tabling this until the next meeting and bringing up this issue

Pat Humphrey (COSM) Chair: Excuse me, we have a motion to table this motion, which needs to be voted on first.

James Stephens (JPHCOPH): I want to make a comment first. I think we need to review the exceptions first before we go further with a motion on this topic. I know in our college particularly in our master of health care administration we require internship at the end of the two-years, and so we would be very concerned what the criteria would be on this. And that's for every student that goes through that program. Now, we could maybe ask them to do the internship after the first year, but we don't think they are ready. And most of them go into hospitals and securing internships at hospitals are not easy, and so we want to keep those relationships going. With the timing that the students come in there at the right time. And so if you need a motion to table or a second to table I'll give make the second.

Pat Humphrey (COSM) Chair: All right. The motion has been made and seconded to table the motion. That needs an immediate vote. ??? Table it to the next meeting, I don't want it tabled 17

Pat Humphrey (COSM) Chair: Yeah, table it to the next meeting. All those in favor of tabling this motion until we can get more information and bring it back up again at the next meeting please say aye. All opposed? Well the motion to table has been carried so we'll try and get more data and bring this up again next time. ??? Point of order. Is a motion to table not a subject to discussion? All right. Thank you. Jim Harris (CEIT) Can we get the numbers for this, Pat? Because I would like to see them again.

Pat Humphrey (COSM) Chair: Velma Burden is I see in the back there. Is it possible for us to get any kind of breakdown on these numbers by students who are within three hours of graduating or students who didn't graduate because they are going to some kind of an internship or some kind of breakdown in terms of reasons why they have not actually completed their degree when they march? Velma Burden (Registrar): I think it is certainly possible to look at the data to see what's out there as far as if they are within three hours or six hours. As far as internship, I think we can only look at those that are registered for internship course that haven't completed, so we could possibly do something like that. Jean Bartels (Provost): I'm also wondering, if this body would or someone in this body would be interested in identifying those situations which would be

permissible for a student to be able to walk without, in other words, what are your criteria for allowing somebody to walk if their degree was incomplete at the moment of graduation.

Janice Steirn (CLASS): I would be willing to help with that. I wouldn't be willing to do it on my own. But I would be willing to help with that because I think we need input from a variety of people from the colleges because I don't know what goes on in all of the other colleges, and when the timing of internships or anything like that may be, and then we could work with Velma maybe on asking for which kind of data, you know, that we would like. But I'm not going to volunteering unless there's a bunch of us.

Mark Hanna (COBA): Sorry, I'd just say that I'm fairly invested in this I'd be happy to help with that as well.

Pat Humphrey (COSM) Chair: Okay, so far we have Janice and Mark willing to work.

James Stephens (JPHCOPH): I'll be happy to be involved.

Pat Humphrey (COSM) Chair: That's three people. Is three people enough willing to work on this? Janice Steirn, James Stephens, and Mark Hanna in terms of what might be legitimate reasons.

Janice Steirn (CLASS): I'm sorry. I don't know what colleges the three of us would represent?

Pat Humphrey (COSM) Chair: James Stephens is College of Public Health, Mark Hanna is COBA.

??? I have a point of information I'd like to address it to either Dr. Keel or Dr. Barteks. My understanding is that the metric that Georgia Southern is being measured by these days is how many students we've shoved through the peg or shoved through the python. We don't get credit for students who walk who don't complete graduation right?

Jean Bartels (Provost): That's correct. The only students that we can call graduated are those that have achieved all of the requirements, so when we look at graduation rates its only those students who have actually completed all requirements. ??? Well, this leaves me a little, I mean, I don't see it as mean spirited if we tell people who come in May and want to graduate and we say no, you still have degree requirements, but you can march in December. I mean, we have two commencements a year. I'm not clear

why its mean spirited to tell them they can't march when they haven't finished their degree.

Pat Humphrey (COSM) Chair: Well, the problem, what the Faculty Senate voted on back in 1999 was that people who anticipate graduating over the summer semester could march in the May graduation because at that time the summer graduation ceremony was being done away with. And the thought was if you're graduating August, you'll be gone somewhere and have a job and you won't come back in December. That one is fine as far as I'm concerned personally. It's some of these other ones who they didn't finish in May, they didn't finish in August, and heaven in the December ones who didn't graduate in December.

Linda Mullen (COBA): Why don't you bring back summer then? I assume it's going to be an expense, but I graduated in the summer because I had credits and I had to take summer school. I do have students and I have cases and I think this is what we're speaking to where students went through the ceremony for their parents, their grandparents and 80 million other people knowing they were never going to complete their degree, but it looked like it.

Errol Spence (SGA): I just want to speak from a personal case and on behalf of students. Many students, even in my case, fully plan on graduating in May, not in May, in July, after completing my degree requirements in July, but I would love to graduate in May because God willing I get a good job and if its far away, and it might be highly inconvenient for me to come back to school in December just to go through the formal ceremony of graduation and it would be probably convenient for my family members as well. So I would definitely look favorably upon considering a summer commencement, but if not I think it would highly inconvenient students to have to come back in December for the ceremony.

Pat Humphrey (COSM) Chair: That's not really the question. The question is people who marched in May, who should graduate in May, or in the summer, but don't really graduate in either one of them at that point

Errol Spence (SGA): What I'm saying is it's going to end up hindering those students who plan to fully complete their requirements in July and would like to march in May.

Pat Humphrey (COSM) Chair: Well.

Lisa Abbott (CLASS): I agree with our Student Rep here. There are so many reasons and graduating with family, graduating with friends, also I looked up from the Senate

meeting that met in September 15, the numbers that we're talking about state that spring, summer graduation in 2011, which is the last numbers we had, 240 students who took part in graduation exercises did not finish their degree. Now I don't know how many we go through in the spring graduation, but the other one was fall of 2009 and 100 didn't finish their degree. So not to be terribly picky but its not huge number and it is a ritual ceremony they haven't graduated until they get their diploma. And I do think we have to be able to offer them that, I mean, its the celebration of an accomplishment and a number of our students are going to do their internship that summer or going even into fall and often those internships if they are the right kind of internship, turn into a job which means they don't come back. And I don't want them to come back if they got a job. Actually, I just don't want them to come back, I want them to graduate. Right? I think we are being too picky right now. Also as a point of order, unless I just broke it, too, didn't we table this?

??? I agree with ???

Pat Humphrey (COSM) Chair: Yes. I think we need to move on and bring this back up again in March.

Li Li (CHHS): Point of clarification. I'm not sure what the rule says, based on the motion what Dr. Bartels was saying the motion probably needs to be amended because the Provost cannot have the Registrar's office do anything, so are we tabling it, is that table actually opportunity for the motion to be amended?

Pat Humphrey (COSM) Chair: Yes, that would give it opportunity for the motion to be amended.

Mark Hanna (COBA): Thank you for that and that amendment can certainly be made. I'd just like clarity with regard to the numbers that came out in the RFI, for example, in the fall of 2013, the number of participants in graduation, this is fall, not summer, we're not talking about the students who might graduate in summer participating in May. So the December graduation had 1,736 participants of which 571 did not graduate. Perhaps some, were working on internships, but not likely 33% of the participants. So I don't think we need to get into symantics about magnitude about whether the magnitude is significant or important or something of that nature. It passes the smell test in my view. I would just note one more thing that the motion was not crafted to specify a specific target for what proportion are participating that have not completed their requirements, so whoever has the opportunity to address the processes for determining who participates can use reason to drive down the number of individuals who perhaps are participating without completing the requirements with no intention of completing

requirements or no likelihood of completing requirements and in the scenario Dr. Mullen described by participating creating a social barrier to completing the requirements and that they would now have to tell their loved ones that they were actually not graduates even though they said they were. So the motion is not to prescribe the process and a lot of this issue about data will be very important to process revision. The motion is to get freedom for the administration to address the issue. Thank you.

Pat Humphrey (COSM) Chair: All right. That said I think we will table for good this tabled motion.