MINUTES
Graduate Council
August 12, 2020

Present: Ex officio: R. Bonhomme; H. Edwards
Voting Members: W. Allen, C. Bostater, D. Carstens, J. Du, V. Follette, E. Perez, Y. Sohn, B. Webster, D. Wilder
Guests: V. Bukshynov, J. Ickes

The meeting was called to order at 3:02 p.m. (via Zoom)

1) CALL TO ORDER – Dr. Heidi Edwards

Dr. Edwards informed all that this zoom meeting will be recorded and that this meeting was called for unusual circumstances. She said that Ms. Jessica Ickes, Associate Vice President for Institutional Research and Effectiveness, has brought to our attention a policy issue that is related to accreditation and that it has to be fixed before the start of the semester (Fall 2020) so that we will be in compliance.

2) GRADUATE POLICY REVISION/ COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS REPORT

Committee on Standards’ Recommendation Unanimously Approved

A request was submitted to the Office of Executive Vice President for Academics and the Office of Graduate Programs to review and bring forward to Graduate Council a proposed revision to Graduate Policy 1.8 on Second and Succeeding Master’s Degrees. This change is requested in order to bring the policy into alignment with SACSCOC core requirement 9.2, specifically the rationale and notes section of the resource manual that identified a concern in the integrity of a second degree due to significant “double counting” of credits. This would also expand the policy to include a new policy permitting a student to earn a second major as part of their Master’s degree.

Dr. Bonhomme mentioned that this came up while Ms. Ickes was working through the Fifth Year Report and that this has to do with the Master’s level, double counting credit, not transfer credit, for second and subsequent Master’s degrees. He said that most degree programs are 30 credit hours and that our current policy of counting up to 15 credit hours is considered excessive, resulting in the request to review this policy.

Ms. Ickes said in 2018 SACSCOC revised the standards, which is why this is now an issue and was not in the past. She said in their policy manual, they included a note with one of the standards that addressed program length and integrity, specifically in instances of multiple Master’s degrees. It addressed the integrity of two individual degrees, if there is excessive double counting. She said after speaking with the Provost’s Office, academic deans, and department heads she learned it is not a common distinction at Florida Tech regarding the differentiation between
multiple degrees versus multiple majors within a degree, but essentially when a student earns two
degrees, it does show a substantive body of work in that area. She said after speaking with the
deans there was a suggestion we didn’t want to eliminate flexibility for students. This proposed
change also puts forth the ability for a student to declare a second major and give them the
flexibility to earn two majors, which is in some cases what they really are doing in terms of
content amount, as opposed to two individual degrees, so they will actually have a second choice
under this proposal.

Dr. Edwards said that the Committee on Standards met on Monday, August 10, 2020 to
discuss this proposal and bring it forward to Graduate Council. She thanked Drs. Perez, Allen,
Carstens, and Follette for being gracious and meeting. She then introduced Dr. Carstens, who
summarized the discussion from the August 10, 2020 Committee on Standards meeting.

Dr. Carstens said that Florida Tech is in the process of preparing the Fifth Year Report
for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges that is due in
March 2021. Any policies that go into the report have to already be in effect for the 2020-2021
academic year. As discussed, there is a standard, 9.2, on program length and it’s a core
requirement. The institution must show itself to be in compliance with it and unfortunately this
double counting of credits, the way the current policy reads really will bring into question the
integrity of the degrees that we offer. So unfortunately the only option would be to be in
noncompliance and be issued a formal sanction and we obviously do not want that. So with that,
she said the proposed new wording was emailed by Dr. Bonhomme back in July (July 20 + 21,
2020) and we ask that everyone review it so it makes that the double counting would no longer
occur for more than nine credit hours. So it means that if a student is seeking a second degree,
only nine credit hours from that first degree can transfer over into that second degree. It would get
rid of allowing one half of credit hours to be applied to the other degree. As discussion ensued on
Monday, the committee looked at how this would impact current students pursuing a subsequent
Master’s degree. She wanted to point out that if there was any prior communication, commitment
from a department to an existing student that we would honor the wording that is in the current
policy. We will make sure we will be able to then request an exemption for that student. However,
any new student requests for a second Master’s would the have to follow this new proposed
wording.

Dr. Carstens said that one item that Ms. Ickes mentioned was that instead of us thinking
of Florida Tech awarding a second Master’s, instead we might just need to be rethinking this in
terms of a second major within the Master’s. We also need to look at any other policies that may
be impacted, whether it’s at the university or department level. One policy that was already
brought up at Committee on Standard was transfer credit. Dr. Carstens reminded all that Florida
Tech allows 12 credit hours of transfer credit. She said the accrediting body does distinguish
transfer credit from this instance of second and succeeding masters. As of right now, she said
Florida Tech is in compliance with the accrediting body in terms of that, however, we realize that
it’s still might be appropriate to possible address the transfer credit policy as well.

After Dr. Carstens concluded her summary of the Standards meeting, Dr. Edwards
opened the floor for discussion. Dr. Du agreed that the change seemed reasonable, he said that in
the current version of the revised policy, he said that a thesis or capstone would be completed in
one of the majors. He was concerned if this would conflict with some of the program requirements
because some programs make a thesis mandatory. His second concern was if the thesis option is
mandatory, some programs will request publishable results from the thesis research, so he was not sure if this requirement could be easily replaced by six credit hours of coursework and expressed concern about waiving the thesis requirement.

Dr. Edwards said that, her interpretation is that if a student is doing a double degree and they both require thesis, that a student would have to do a thesis for both degree requirements. Dr. Du was concerned that a student pursuing a double degree could have the option to choose to do only one thesis.

Dr. Edwards conferred with Dr. Du and said that he is asking about both situations applying to a student pursuing a double degree and double major. Dr. Bonhomme referred to the applicable policy, Graduate Policy 1.8.3. Dr. Carstens provided clarification by referring to Graduate Policy 1.8.2 and stated, "With the approval of the academic unit head, up to one-half of the credit (non-thesis or non-design project formal coursework) applied…”; she said it is letting everyone know that it only counts for non-thesis, thesis work can’t be applied to two majors or degrees.

Dr. Du asked for the difference between double degrees and double majors. Ms. Ickes said if a student earns two degrees, they would physically get two degrees. If they were to get two majors, they would get one degree. Dr. Du asked if a student wanted to major in Applied Math and Astrophysics, the student can choose which program to complete the thesis. Ms. Ickes said yes, in the instance of a double major. In the instance of a double degree, the student would have to complete a thesis for both majors.

Dr. Allen added his understanding of the difference is if the student’s transcript shows dual major or two complete Master’s degrees. He said if it says two Master’s degrees, they have to meet the requirements for both Master’s degrees, versus two majors, they meet the minimum requirements for them, but if they both require the thesis, they would only have to do one and they would get one diploma that lists two majors.

Ms. Ickes said that this was not very common at Florida Tech, but it is at other universities. Dr. Bonhomme said, if he is not mistaken, is that some of the departments have moved to that and they still get one degree but what happens is that the transcript shows both majors. Ms. Ickes nodded in agreement.

Dr. Follette said an option for exceptional cases was discussed at the Standards meeting which would allow special cases to be reviewed, not outright denying requests, but the request would need to go through a special review looking for something unique. Dr. Bonhomme and Ms. Ickes both echoed in agreement. Dr. Bonhomme said that we can assume that we can document it and say why we did it outside of normal policy. Ms. Ickes added that it is always good to have a well documented exemption.

Dr. Allen said there is some description of this in the catalog. He said he assumes that the catalog will be updated to reflect these changes? Dr. Bonhomme replied yes. He said Ms. Ickes and Ms. Johnston have had some conversations over what we need to do in the catalog if this were to happen. Dr. Allen said the catalog wasn’t real clear in that distinction and it would help if you could make that more clearer. He said it caused confusion with some of the students. Dr. Bonhomme agreed.

On a motion and second made by the Committee on Standards, the recommendation made by the Committee on Standards to revise Graduate Policy 1.8 was unanimously approved. [The revised policy language is presented on pages 5-6 of these minutes].
3) **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Dr. Edwards announced that the next Graduate Council meeting is September 17, 2020, and the submission deadline for materials is September 3, 2020.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:28 p.m.

[Signature]

Raymond Bonhomme, Ed.D.
Associate Vice President of Graduate Programs
Current Policy

Second And Succeeding Master’s Degrees
(Graduate Policy 1.8)

Definitions (Rev. 11/15/07)
(Graduate Policy 1.8.1)

A second or succeeding degree is defined as a degree with a different official title from any master’s degree awarded at Florida Tech, as recorded on the student's transcript. This definition applies equally whether awarded concurrent with or subsequent to the first degree.

Multiple Degrees
(Graduate Policy 1.8.2)

To receive a second or subsequent master’s degree a student must fulfill all the requirements of graduate policy, as well as those of the academic unit in which the student is enrolled. With the approval of the academic unit head, up to one-half of the credit (non-thesis or non-design project formal coursework) applied to the first degree may be used to satisfy the requirements of the second or subsequent degree. The academic unit head will decide, on a per-course basis, the applicability of each course to be applied to the second or subsequent program. However, at least one-half of the coursework leading to any master's degree granted by Florida Tech must have been taken at Florida Tech but never applied to any other degree.

Before the student can be admitted to the new program, a new program plan including those courses carried over from the first degree must be approved by the academic unit head of the program in which the student wishes to enroll.

A specific course may be applied toward any number of degrees as long as the statute of limitations is not exceeded, and not more than one-half of the credits applied toward previously earned degrees are included in any program plan.

Proposed Revised Policy - Approved by Graduate Council 8/12/2020

Second and Succeeding Master’s Degrees and Second Majors - Master’s Degrees
(Graduate Policy 1.8)

Definitions (Rev. 11/15/07)
(Graduate Policy 1.8.1)

A second or succeeding degree is defined as a degree with a different official title from any master’s degree awarded at Florida Tech, as recorded on the student's transcript. This definition applies equally whether awarded concurrent with or subsequent to the first degree.

A second major is defined as two master’s level academic majors (e.g. physics and mathematics), concentrations, or specializations pursued under the same academic degree (e.g. M.S. or MBA). A student may earn a second major to be listed on the transcript concurrent to the completion of their first major.
Multiple Degrees  
(Graduate Policy 1.8.2)

To receive a second or subsequent master’s degree a student must fulfill all the requirements of graduate policy, as well as those of the academic unit in which the student is enrolled. With the approval of the academic unit head, up to 9 credits (non-thesis or non-design project formal coursework) applied to the first degree may be used to satisfy the requirements of the second or subsequent degree. The academic unit head will decide, on a per-course basis, the applicability of each course based on the comparability of course learning objectives to be applied to the second or subsequent program.

Before the student can be admitted to the new program, a new program plan including those courses carried over from the first degree must be approved by the academic unit head of the program in which the student wishes to enroll.

Second Majors – Master’s Degrees  
(Graduate Policy 1.8.3)

Students matriculated in a master’s degree program may add a second major to their academic degree plan upon approval of their academic unit head. Common courses in each major need not be repeated but all other major and academic unit requirements would need to be satisfied. If required for one or more of the majors, students would complete a thesis or capstone in only one of the academic majors. For non-thesis/capstone degrees, only one Final Program Examination is required. The degree would be awarded upon completion of both majors, unless one major was removed from the program plan.

Students are not permitted to add a second major to an already conferred degree.