

To: Emily McDermott, Dean CLA  
 From: Graduate Capstone Workload Task Force  
 Date: October 5, 2012

## **TASKFORCE CHARGE**

In June 2012, the Graduate Workload Taskforce, comprised of Randy Albelda (Economics), Corinne Etienne (Applied Linguistics), Aaron Lecklider (American Studies), and Eve Sorum (English), met with Dean Emily McDermott and Associate Dean Pam Annas to discuss the taskforce's charge and parameters. The committee was charged with collecting information, deliberating, and making recommendations about accounting for graduate workloads in light of the college's transition to a 2/2 teaching load.

In this process, the taskforce following the following questions:

In moving to a 2/2 course load, should graduate teaching be differently compensated/counted than undergraduate teaching? And if so, how? Specifically should these be college-wide definitions or department-based? Is doctoral teaching/advising distinguished from that of masters' teaching and advising?

In making recommendations, the taskforce agreed to check with Graduate Studies to make sure they conform to any regulations currently in place and to report back to Dean McDermott in early October.

## **PROCESS**

The committee decided to contact and communicate with GPDs from CLA master's and doctoral programs and GPDs from doctoral programs in MGS to discuss current practices. In addition, since all committee members are themselves part of a graduate program, each reported on their own program.

### **Master's Programs**

American Studies	Aaron Lecklider
Applied Linguistics	Corinne Etienne
Applied Economics	Randy Albelda
Applied Sociology	Stefi Hartwell
Latin and Classical Humanities	Jacqueline Carlon
Creative Writing	John Fulton
English	Eve Sorum
Historical Archeology	Steve Silliman
History	Paul Bookbinder

### **Doctoral Programs**

Clinical Psychology	Alice Carter
Development and Brain Science	Erik Blaser
Gerontology	Jan Mutchler
Public Policy	Michael Johnson

Conflict Resolution, Human Security,  
and Global Governance

Eban Weitzman

Interviews and reports were based on the following questionnaire prepared by the committee in June:

1. How is the curriculum structured to integrate graduate thesis/capstone advising (i.e. do students get time/credit for completion of thesis/projects)?
2. What work is involved in out-of-class advising?
  - a. Number of students and number of faculty involved?
  - b. Typical length of time with an advisor?
  - c. Intensity of advising students?
  - d. Distribution of advising – i.e. evenly spread among faculty? Typical range?
3. How does the department currently deal with accounting for advising and/or unevenness of advising?
4. In moving to a 2/2 load, what would work best for your department? Should advising be compensated differently and if so how?

The materials collected were shared among task force members in late August. The committee met in early September to discuss the information received and make its recommendations.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

### **Question 1 – Structure of the Curriculum and Capstone**

With two exceptions, CLA graduate programs require students to complete either a capstone course (3 credits), a “final” capstone project (3 credits), or a thesis (6 credits). While capstone courses are taught by faculty who count that as one of their courses, the projects and theses require advising by individual faculty. Some programs have courses that directly support and “lead” to the thesis or capstone project, though the burden of individual advising is still upon the faculty advisor. In general, master’s students formulate a formal proposal at least one semester before they begin the process of producing their major project.

Two programs, Applied Linguistics and Latin and Classical Humanities, have different culminating requirements. In these programs, all students who are degree candidates must either successfully pass a four-hour long computer-typed comprehensive exam, or write a thesis as part of their capstone project. Students may consider the option to write a thesis *only* if they have a grade point average of 3.5 or better, have completed all of their course work (both required and elective), have taken 1-2 research methods courses, and have demonstrated the ability to conduct independent research. Students who pursue the thesis option must have been invited to do so by a professor. Most students take the comprehensive exam option.

The Clinical Psychology Ph.D. (the only fully operating Ph.D. program currently operating in CLA) requires students take a master's research seminar in which students complete a master's thesis. The instructor of the course serves on the committee, but the chair and third member are drawn from the faculty with expertise in student's field. Students are also required to complete a comprehensive exam (a journal article) that is read by a committee of three. They are also required to write a doctoral thesis.

**Question 2 - How much time do faculty spend working on graduate student advising?**

The number of graduate students varies between departments from an average of 8 to 12 per year (Clinical Psychology, Historical Archeology, American Studies, and Latin and Classical Humanities, for instance) to approximately 30 students in English and 160 in Applied Linguistics (face-to-face and online).

In all departments, the major project or thesis advisors have some set responsibilities, though many go much beyond them in terms of the time they spend with students. During the thesis preparation or capstone seminar / independent study (depending on the departments) students ordinarily meet with their advisors 4-5 times, or a little more than once a month, with more meetings added in as needed. In the final semester (which often extends over additional semesters), advisors read at least one and more often two or three drafts for their advisees. They give feedback to the students within 1-2 weeks of receiving material, in addition to whatever papers and grading they are doing as part of their regular teaching loads. In all programs, advisors often continue reading and commenting on drafts into the summer. Finally, faculty advisors are expected to meet with their advisees regularly throughout the time students are writing and revising, generally every 3-4 weeks.

Doctoral advising in the Clinical Psychology program is intensive and occurs over a much longer period of time (including work on master's and comprehensive).

**Question 3: Distribution of work among faculty**

In general, there is no programmatic control in place that requires even distribution of capstone/thesis students among faculty (one exception to this is the Creative Writing MFA program). Distribution happens according to the students' interests and the number of faculty teaching the graduate seminars. Though some departments mitigate this by encouraging students to work with faculty teaching the course from which their projects initially emerged, the pattern seems to be that there is great inconsistency in the apportioning of graduate students to faculty advisors across departments. Quantitatively, across all programs, the number of advisees per project/thesis advisor ranges from one to as many as seven per year.

In some departments, graduate seminars are taught exclusively by tenured faculty. However, as junior faculty members have gotten more experienced in graduate teaching and helping students begin to design research projects in the seminars, they have increasingly shared the load. Other departments (such as American Studies, Applied Economics, and English) spread the graduate teaching between tenured and tenure-track faculty, which in turn leads to many junior faculty advising final projects and theses.

Note about Applied Linguistics and Latin and Classical Humanities:

Both graduate programs offer a licensure track to master's students whose curriculum is regulated by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). All students in this track need to complete a supervised practicum. Not only does the faculty member in charge of the practicum teach a 3-credit course but s/he also must do 5 visits per student and per semester in addition to teaching a practicum seminar. Visits to schools where students do their practicum require an average of 6 hours (transportation, observation, and debriefing). When more than 5 students are enrolled in the licensure track, it becomes unmanageable for the faculty member.

#### **Question 4 – Suggestions and Concerns about Graduate Advising with the 2/2 Course Load**

All GPDs with whom we spoke agreed that there was considerable additional time associated with graduate project/thesis advising. This was the one aspect of graduate teaching that seems to be universally seen as especially consuming of both time and energy; the other particular tasks of running a graduate program, such as course advising and student interactions that help students find housing, negotiate university requirements, etc., were not seen as onerous and in most programs were undertaken by the GPD and/or staff. In departments in which graduate courses had been, prior to the 2/2, counted as 1.5 courses, the primary rationale was to provide some compensation for the individual project and thesis advising that inevitably comes to teachers within the program.

The move to 2/2 course load is well-received. However, there is considerable trepidation about the effects on total student loads. If faculty members who currently teach and advise graduate students end up with more undergraduate students and the same number of graduate students as before the switch, there are no longer any positive incentives (namely the course reduction) to advising graduate students once everyone moves to a 2-2 load. And while most departments indicated that working with graduate students is gratifying and promotes the type of research, teaching, and service consistent with the overarching values of UMB (including the growing emphasis on graduate research), it still comprises a considerable amount of work in an already intense workload environment, often without the assistance of professional or administrative staff found in other graduate-rich and research-oriented UMB departments (e.g. all MGS departments) and universities (e.g. UMass Amherst).

Departments in which teaching a graduate course “counted” as 1.5 courses are the most concerned that, in moving to a 2/2 teaching load graduate advising/mentoring will no longer be compensated work time. This will mean that some faculty members will end up with a heavier load than their peers (i.e. teaching just as many undergraduate students along with a heavy graduate advising load); in some cases, this may result in a heavier load than prior to the change to 2/2 teaching load.

Some departments count graduate research advising in merit considerations; however, this seemed to be an “after-the fact” method of compensation and has several problems. In at least one department with a point system, it is possible to max out on points before any advising is added. In other departments this work is regarded as teaching or as service, which is not as heavily rewarded as research. Finally, the merit amounts for this type of work are small and variable, making it an unsatisfactory mechanism.

### **Practices in MGS graduate programs**

The three graduate programs in the McCormack Graduate School have 2/2 teaching loads and only provide CLR to GPDs (one CLR in two program and two CLR in one program) and in one program to the faculty who takes the lead on compiling and grading the comprehensive exams. They do not provide additional time off to department faculty who advise more students than other faculty. Merit is the only compensating differential. However, each of these programs only teaches graduate students; each program has professional staff (as well as clerical); and a great deal more college administrative staff per student and faculty than does CLA.

### **COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

The work of mentoring/advising graduate students and evaluating their research has been described by faculty members variously as part of their research, teaching, and service contributions. If this work were distributed evenly among all faculty, it would probably not be considered terribly onerous, except in departments with large graduate programs. That is, advising one or even two graduate students each year would be additional work, but not beyond a reasonable workload expectations (as is often the case with undergraduate students doing honor's thesis). But, in every department, GPDs told us the work of mentoring and evaluating is not distributed equally among department/program faculty. Further, the curriculum does not often create course credit for faculty who do advise. In some cases (e.g. Applied Sociology MA), capstone advisors are mostly the faculty who teach the capstone seminar and do get teaching credit for advising a large number of capstone projects, but in most programs, while students get credit for completing major projects, faculty only get course load reductions for teaching core courses (and, as graduate course faculty, are more likely to advise students on research projects).

While it is difficult to quantify thesis/capstone advising work and it varies across students (some require more of your time, while others less), we estimate that meeting with master's students and providing written and oral feedback directing them on their master's thesis or project is approximately equivalent to the amount of time it takes to teach 2 weeks of a class. Doctoral advising is even more time intensive and occurs over a longer period of time.

Given these considerations, there are four possible ways to accommodate the additional work under the new 2/2 regime.

1. Provide a CLR after advising to successful completion 8-12 masters' projects. The exact number could be determined by the program and/or depend on if it is a thesis versus a capstone project.
2. Provide merit pay only.
3. Continue to provide a 1.5 course credit for graduate teaching, so that people who do teach graduate course would have a lower teaching load than those who do not (e.g. if you teach 2 graduate courses a year, your teaching load would be 3 courses per year).
4. Do nothing— provide neither course credit nor merit pay to those doing this work.

## Recommendations:

**1. The taskforce favors and recommends the first option (provide a CLR after advising to successful completion 8-12 masters' projects) as it would compensate graduate advising in a way commensurate with the work involved with advising.**

We recommend against using merit because the compensation would be meager and uneven across years, and therefore unfair (less pay for same work when merit is low). Moreover, this form of compensation would disconnect the work of advising from other forms of teaching. It would lead to poorer graduate outcomes (i.e. less time with students, water-downed requirements, etc). Providing additional course load reduction to those teaching graduate students was favored by some with whom we spoke, as it currently works (more or less) to compensate for the additional work involved in graduate advising. However, it does not end up fairly compensating those faculty who do the most advising work, unlike option #1. Without reducing workload for faculty advising large number of graduate students, doing nothing creates an unfair burden on those faculty members and but would also lead to poorer graduate outcomes.

This recommendation is not at odds with current Graduate Studies regulations.

2. While we propose a college-wide principle of compensating graduate thesis/capstone advising, two important distinctions must be considered on a program-by-program basis.

- Take into consideration the difference between master's and doctoral student thesis advising by providing a **CLR to faculty members who advise 4-6 doctoral students** to successful completion of their thesis. The amount should vary depending on the program and be negotiated with each program.
  - **Devise a fair system to provide a CLR to faculty members who take primary responsibility for compiling and grading comprehensive exam and/or supervising placements.** As mentioned at the beginning of this memo, two departments, Applied Linguistics and Classics, use a comprehensive exam and offer a licensure program along with the master's degree, which heavily increase faculty's advising/teaching/ mentoring load. These two departments would need to be accommodated in any new compensation system in a fair and even way.
3. **Continue to provide a CLR to Graduate Program Directors.** While this was not specified as the purview of the taskforce, the role of the GPD in non-thesis/capstone graduate advising did come up in our discussions with GPDs. The work of steering graduate students through a program beyond their main research project is considerable work. Further, several GPDs indicated that they took on thesis/capstone advising as the last resort (i.e. students who could not find an appropriate advisor). In moving to a 2/2 load, we urge the Dean to consider the additional advising done by GPDs (which may even increase without course load reductions for graduate teaching) and maintain a one-course load reduction.