

## **QEP Committee Minutes**

**Friday, January 27, 2023**

**3:15 p.m.**

Members Present: Piers Rawling (Chair), Philosophy; Gale Etschmaier, Libraries; Maxine Jones, History; Jorge Galeano Cabral, Engineering; Jim Whyte, Nursing; Ethan Vouzas, Biological Science; Cindy Chapa, Communication; Latika Young, Undergraduate Studies; Jorge Piekarewicz, Physics; Michelle Rambo-Roddenberry, Engineering; Ashley Bush, Business; Beth Hodges, Research; Cathy Levenson, Biomedical Sciences; Justin Kennemur, Chemistry and Biochemistry; Casey Dozier, Career Center; Dawn Carr, Sociology; Mark Riley; Graduate School

Members Excused: Stephen Tripodi, Social Work; Toby Park-Gaghan, Education Policy; Jayne Standley, Music

Staff Present: James Hunt, Institutional Research; Leslie Richardson, Center for Teaching and Advancement; Sara Hamon, Provost's Office; Charlotte Nafe, Provost's Office; Monoka Venters, Provost's Office. Galiya Tabulda, Provost's Office; James Beck, Graduate School; Devin Soper, Libraries

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The Chair convened the meeting and indicated the items would comprise the agenda: the introduction and status of the subcommittees, a summary of promising practices in doctoral education, a discussion of promising practices, an update on the survey subcommittee, the meeting schedule, and a preliminary discussion of initiatives if time allows. Monoka Venters began by presenting the background on the promising practices given in the handout. She informed the committee that the list of promising practices was comprised from several surveys and reports (such as reports from the Council of Graduate Schools' Ph.D. Completion Project) from over thirty-two universities, including FSU, Duke, and Yale. These practices were intended to increase the PhD completion process rate. She then looked for overlapping practices in reports and narrowed them down to common and innovative, making three main categories: Mentoring and Advising, Administration and Support, and Career and Professional Development. The committee examined the practices to see what FSU does well and not well and commented on FSU policies that match promising practices.

The two key issues in improving PhD completion rates are the barriers to finishing and figuring out who can be successful in the program. The committee agreed that they need to understand what the dropout rate is, what the time discrepancies are between majors, and what the timeline is from admission to receiving a PhD at FSU. An app was proposed to see which milestones PhD students have completed, especially before candidacy. Committee members are hoping to get specific help in customization for each department. James Beck said that two or three staff could work with the 17 programs to keep the app updated with common data elements and departments could create specialized measures. The app would be set up to keep doctoral students on track, send auto reminders to keep them motivated, and aid faculty in their evaluations of students. Members voiced the opinion that this app is essential as it would be student centric, many PhD students do not know what is involved in the doctoral program, and it would be a repository for annual evaluation. The app would give the statistical information that the committee is currently lacking, and more faculty buy-in is attainable if it decreased the reporting burden and increased retention rates. Chair Rawlings requested a budget for the app to take to the provost.

The committee discussed that there exist different evaluation forms per department for the annual student evaluations. The committee wants these forms to be completely online and to find a system that is easier to use than the current model. The committee was concerned implementing this technology might take a while to develop and implement, and it is important that the suggested initiatives have measurable data within five years. However, it might be part of an overall initiative related to academic advising. One person mentioned that EAB Campus Connect is a similar advising technology already in use for undergraduate students and advisors right now at FSU. It could be expanded to graduate students if it met our needs.

Using the doctoral student survey that the Committee has developed to see how students feel about the annual review process before the proposed app and after the proposed app would provide a measurable outcome. A pilot was then suggested that would take place in two stages: one to two years running the pilot on a control group, and then another to figure out any bugs in the system and analyze data.

Members voiced that the committee must make sure whatever we are doing is holistic, and the plan should not become narrowly focused on the technology but may include technology as one piece. It was also addressed that getting students to put info in and use technology may be difficult, so there needs to be something useful for both students and faculty. It was suggested that the app be stacked upon the Graduate Tracking System. It was noted that the committee does not have the workforce to make the app even though people are interested. The Biology department also has a homegrown tool (Grad Phile) for graduate students that some say is very effective and could be utilized across campus. This system has passed the necessary security aspects and Tom Houpt will be invited to demo it at a future QEP meeting. Grad Phile is integrated into my.fsu.edu, may be integrated into Student Central eventually, decreases burden, increases participation, and already exists so just needs to be made available for all department.

Members asked if there is evidence from rigorous studies that show the promising practices work. Chair Rawling explained that the promising practices are meant to spur conversation, and there will be a more detailed literature review conducted. The committee plans to consider the practices along with the data from the focus groups before deciding on initiatives to put into effect to be able to track milestone data.

Members inquired on whether it helps to release doctoral students from teaching for a semester to help them complete their dissertation. FSU had a fellowship for students at the end of doctoral studies, but the fellowship is no longer offered because FSU data showed it did not impact completion. Yet teaching loads could potentially be a problem as there are different requirements in different departments. The survey should give us a better idea of how students feel. Students in the focus groups have mentioned the stipend issue; even though the committee cannot solve it, we will investigate the scope of the problem. FSU is far behind in stipend grants compared to other universities and in giving doctoral students time off from teaching. It was pointed out that there are constraints per department, and this issue may be evaluated on a department-by-department basis. An additional issue is that faculty often do not want to teach large undergraduate classes, putting the responsibility to doctoral students.

It was noted that, for students who achieve at the desirable level, it is not difficult for them during their dissertation semester in specific departments. A reward after passing candidacy could be considered to incentivize and encourage students. The committee decided they must figure out what the measures concerning doctoral education are to help figure out what practices need to be implemented to reach the desired goal. The measures could be time between milestones and/or measures of student satisfaction using the current survey as the baseline and tracking changes in student satisfaction after initiatives have been implemented. There is a university maximum on the number doctoral students being mentored by a

professor (10). The committee could look at which programs take students an exceedingly long time to progress from matriculation, to admission, and then to candidacy.

The committee addressed that obtaining upper-level writing skills may be a barrier to degree completion. Data from the focus group indicate that writing skills are a barrier. The committee hopes to get a sense of the severity of the unmet need, what specific skills are lacking, and how to improve writing proficiency. There are variants in writing skills that may level the playing field to completion. There is a writing diagnostic exam early in some but not all doctoral programs.

A bridge program was discussed to aid students who need additional help in certain areas such as English and writing. There are many international students who are brilliant, yet English is a difficulty for them. The chemistry bridge program won a national award. It is designed to bring in masters students early, fund them without the pressures of teaching, and bring them into the intensive doctoral program experience with the idea that they will want to continue on from the masters. Such a program is excellent for bringing diversity into the school but is expensive.

The committee agreed that they must produce three to five measurable initiatives. We may rethink portions of the survey based on this discussion to have a longitudinal, yearly survey to gain insights. Oklahoma State University had such a survey, and committee student staff will be asked to find more surveys. Further comments on promising practices are to be emailed to the Chair.

Casey Dozier then updated the committee on the status of the survey. She informed members that both the student and faculty surveys are finished and are being translated to Qualtrics. The plan is to receive data before spring break. The committee is planning to send out the survey next week. Knowledge that there is a survey is to be matriculated to chairs and faculty (through the DDD list) for them to let their students know to look out for the email. The committee hopes faculty will urge students to please fill it out the anonymous survey. It is expected that the data committee will quickly pull together institutional data, insights on what might help select initiatives, and ideas on what persuasive data needs to be examined.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and informed the committee that the next meeting would be on February 17<sup>th</sup> at 3:15PM, via zoom, with data presentations, subcommittee list (in which members will select their own chairs). Upon motion of Chair Rawling, the Committee adjourned at 4:41PM.

Handouts:

Promising Practices in Doctoral Education

An 'Individual Development Plan' (IDP) templet from the graduate school:

[https://gradschool.fsu.edu/sites/g/files/upcbnu761/files/media/Files/IDP%20Fillable%20Doc/FSU%20Individual%20Development%20Plan\\_Fillable\\_Updated\\_Fall2021.02.pdf](https://gradschool.fsu.edu/sites/g/files/upcbnu761/files/media/Files/IDP%20Fillable%20Doc/FSU%20Individual%20Development%20Plan_Fillable_Updated_Fall2021.02.pdf)

Discussion of IDPs: <https://gradschool.fsu.edu/professional-development/individual-development-plan-idp>