Rebuttal to the Statements of Dr. Steven Landry  
Concerning the Graduate Student Bill of Rights (GSBOR)  
January 16, 2019

Exercising his faculty rights, Dr. Steven Landry, Acting Head and Professor of the School of Industrial Engineering, has sent an email to numerous faculty, first to garner support for the University Senate to revisit its endorsement of the Graduate Student Bill of Rights that was reviewed in November, and then to forward it on to various members of the Graduate Council to generate support for his dissenting statements about the document.

This document has been drafted by Dr. James Mohler, Associate Dean of the Graduate School and Professor of Computer Graphics Technology, also exercising his rights as a faculty member, to dispel what he perceives as misinformation meant to derail the laudable efforts of the PGSG and their attempt at following the faculty directives of garnering support from the Senate and its Student Affairs Committee prior to full consideration by the Graduate Council.

1. From Dr. Landry’s Email

   “The statement that “no Purdue University-sponsored document fully describes the rights and responsibility (sic) of the graduate student body” is completely false. The student bill of rights (https://www.purdue.edu/studentregulations/student_conduct/studentrights.html), passed by the Board of Trustees in 1970, with revisions in 1975 and 1997, covers *all* students, including graduate students. The need for a separate graduate bill of rights is not clearly identified, and much of the document is duplicative of the student bill of rights. Moreover, there is a clear process (Article 21) for amending the Bill of Student Rights – it even calls out the PGSG as one organization that can initiate amendments.”

Dr. Mohler’s Rebuttal

1. The existing Bill of Rights specifies that it covers WL only in its title. The Graduate School is a systemwide graduate school and any document pertaining to its students must also be systemwide.
2. The existing Bill of Rights generically covers rights that affect all students but do not sufficiently address specific issues that apply to graduate students. This is the genesis for the creation of the Graduate Student Bill of Rights.
3. Adding articles that are specific to graduate students to the existing Bill of Rights creates a single document with articles that are not relevant for undergraduate students.
4. The current Bill of Rights provides a provision for many different entities to suggest changes to the document (see article 21: “Proposed amendments of this Bill of Student Rights may be initiated by the Purdue Student Government, Purdue Graduate Student Government, University Senate, administrative officials, or the Board of Trustees”). However, only the Senate and Purdue Student Government “consider and recommend” adoption of revisions. If the Bill of Rights were a document covering all students, the Graduate Council and the Purdue Graduate Student Government would/should also be part of the “consider and recommend.” Additionally, a combined committee that equalizes representation amongst those four groups would be needed.

5. The Graduate Student Bill of Rights provides some overlap with the Bill of Rights, but the document is not mostly “duplicative” as asserted by Dr. Landry. Most of the Graduate Student Bill of Rights is unique to graduate students (space does not permit article by article comparison, but the reader is encouraged to examine this).

2. From Dr. Landry’s Email

“The *there is no provision anywhere that students can establish their own bill of rights that is binding on the University*. The PGSG bill tries to impose responsibilities on faculty and staff (see Article 2, #2 and Article 3, #1 for examples), and even tries to prescribe how salaries are set (Article 2, #4.) Encouraging or endorsing students in mandating such things is a *very bad idea*, even if the university should do these things.”

Dr. Mohler’s Rebuttal

According to the documents that establish the Graduate School and Graduate Council, those bodies have authority over all matters pertaining to graduate curricula, faculty and students (see *Purdue University Graduate Council Minutes, Volume I, September 24, 1929 to December 1, 1939*). Additionally, the Graduate Council has a special relationship with the Purdue Graduate Student Government and works with them to ensure that graduate education at Purdue meets the needs of graduate students. The president of PGSG serves on the Graduate Council and PGSG may, from time to time, propose recommended policies or other changes pertaining to students and for the betterment of graduate education overall.

The Graduate Council involved the University Senate in the development of the GSBOR early on as a *courtesy*. The Graduate Council does have the authority to approve policies, procedures and other documents that are related to graduate curricula, faculty and students as it sees fit.
To the points raised pertaining to specific articles in the GSBOR:

1. Article 2, #2 says students “should” in both cases. It is not “imposing”; it is suggesting.

   From the GSBOR, Article 2, #2: “2. Graduate staff members should understand the impact of their earnings on eligibility for student loans and salaries. Relevant university, college, department and/or graduate program resources, including human resources and business office staff, should be responsive to graduate student inquiries about their working conditions.”

2. Article 3, #1 repeats what is already recommended in the recommendations for faculty mentoring and follows the best practices recommended by the Graduate Council and Graduate School (see Appendix G of the Policies and Procedures for Administering Graduate Student Programs that was approved by the Graduate Council on May 8, 2017; Graduate Council Report 17-18a).

   From the GSBOR, Article 3, #1: “1. Graduate students have a right to request consultation on all aspects of their progress within their degree program. Graduate students should receive regular and constructive feedback and guidance concerning their performance on a mutually agreeable schedule from all members of their graduate committee. Requests for meetings by either party should be met in a timely fashion, and feedback should be provided in writing when requested.”

3. Article 2, #4 acknowledges what the Graduate School already attempts to do by managing the lowest graduate stipend in the university, and by advocating, from time to time, increases in graduate salaries (typically bi-annually). This bullet does not demand a specific wage but simply one “comparable” and competitive across the Big 10.

   From the GSBOR, Article 2, #4: “4. Graduate staff have the right to a competitive salary relative to their colleagues in comparable departments in peer institutions, standardized to cost of living for an individual who is renting housing in the Greater Lafayette area. Graduate salary levels should be evaluated on a triennial basis by colleges and departments. The process and rationale for outcomes of evaluations should be made available to the pertinent graduate staff members.”
3. From Dr. Landry’s Email

- “This document was generated with minimal faculty involvement. PGSG seemed to work with Graduate Council members and Senate committee members, but Colleges and Schools were not consulted.”

**Dr. Mohler’s Rebuttal**

PGSG did as they were directed by faculty representatives on Council and Senate (as the highest faculty governance bodies in the university) as well as senior leadership such as the Dean of the Graduate School. If appointed members of the Council or voting members of the Senate are not relaying information, this should not be considered a fault of PGSG. The very first versions of this document began being circulated in December of 2016 (the first draft was June 27, 2016). Thus, communication within the faculty governance structures seems to be the problem, not PGSG working in a rogue or secretive way. I suggest we find ways to solve the communication problem in faculty governance rather than subjugate the endeavor to make graduate education and the graduate student experience better.

4. From Dr. Landry’s Email

- “There are several places where students are requiring staff and faculty to do certain things. (See for example Article 3, #1.) These statements are vague – who decides whether, for example, feedback to graduate students is sufficiently “regular and constructive?” Who decides whether students have been given “a fair opportunity to improve performance and address deficiencies?” Who decides whether students have been given “fair treatment and attribution?””

**Dr. Mohler’s Rebuttal**

The level of vagueness in Article 3, #1 is no more vague than the requirements for tenure or any other university element requiring interpretation by faculty and/or faculty/student review committees. And, as issued above, Article 3, #1 repeats what is already recommended in the recommendations for faculty mentoring and follows the best practices recommended by the Graduate Council and Graduate School (see Appendix G of the Policies and Procedures for Administering Graduate Student Programs that was approved by the Graduate Council on May 8, 2017; Graduate Council Report 17-18a).
From the GSBOR, Article 3, #1: “1. Graduate students have a right to request consultation on all aspects of their progress within their degree program. Graduate students should receive regular and constructive feedback and guidance concerning their performance on a mutually agreeable schedule from all members of their graduate committee. Requests for meetings by either party should be met in a timely fashion, and feedback should be provided in writing when requested.”