Resolution # 66-08

**The Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA)**

**The Pennsylvania State University**

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**of the 66th Assembly**

February 1, 2017

*Be it decided by the Assembly of Elected Delegates,*

**Support for Reform of Graduate Faculty Definitions**

**Advocating for Revisions to Improve Graduate Student Experiences**

(Decided: [ Y / N / A ])

**Nature of the Situation:**

The current Penn State Graduate Faculty membership is defined in two categories, “R” and “P”, to denote the respective roles of “research” and “professional” faculty. According to the Graduate School website, one of the minimum requirements for an “R” category faculty is a research doctorate or a professional doctorate with a record of scholarly achievement. The duties of “R” faculty include advising of graduate students, teaching graduate courses of all levels, supervising master’s and doctorate dissertation research, serving on master’s/doctorate committees, and chairing research master’s/doctorate committees. In contrast, faculty who do not hold a research doctorate or a professional doctorate with a record of scholarly achievement fall under the “P” category. In the “P” category, faculty are determined to teach 800-level (practitioner-oriented) graduate courses, and only tenure-line members may teach 500-level (research-oriented) graduate courses. “P” faculty cannot supervise research master’s theses and may only serve as a Special Member of a research doctorate (Ph.D.) committee.

The current definitions create a number of issues for graduate students in Colleges and Departments where it is common for faculty to have a non-doctorate terminal degree (e.g. Master of Fine Arts) or a professional doctorate degree (e.g. Doctor of Musical Arts, Doctor of Education). In other cases, Penn State administrators who no longer engage in research due to their current role at the University may be labeled as “P” faculty, even if they hold a Ph.D. Because of the restrictions on teaching 500-level graduate courses, faculty who have subject matter expertise but do not have the required academic credential or appointment (e.g. tenure-line or full-time) are often not able to share their knowledge with students. Since current research-oriented programs have mainly 500-level course requirements, “P” faculty not on tenure-lines effectively cannot teach graduate courses for a research-oriented program at Penn State without special temporary permission, and students in a research-oriented program cannot benefit from the practical experience of “P” faculty under the current definitions.

In addition, the current definitions alter how students are forced to shape their master’s and doctoral committees. Students are less likely to seek out these faculty members for their expertise, since they cannot advise research master’s/doctoral students and can only serve as a fifth “Special Member” of a Ph.D. committee. In departments where only a few professors meet the requirements for an “R” faculty, these individuals end up serving on many students’ committees, which overloads them and limits their ability to effectively guide so many students. Students who have interdisciplinary research interests and seek to include faculty members from multiple Colleges may also be affected by these restrictions when forming their committees.

**Recommended Course of Action:**

The Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA) urges the Penn State Graduate School to reform its current definitions of the Graduate Faculty membership in order to address the student concerns mentioned in this Resolution. Specifically, GPSA requests that the Graduate School revise its policy to allow greater flexibility in terms of how faculty members may advise master’s/doctoral students, serve on master’s/doctoral committees, and teach all graduate-level courses.

Respectfully submitted,

**Matthew Krott**

Delegate, College of Engineering

Chair, Advocacy Committee

**Shenli Pei**

Delegate, College of Engineering**Kyler Sherman-Wilkins**

Delegate, College of Liberal Arts  
Chair, Human Diversity Sub-committee

**Chr Christine Mosich**

Delegate, College of Education

Chair, Professional Development   
 Sub-committee

President \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Affirm Veto

The Graduate and Professional Student Association