REPORT FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

(a) Proposal for an Alternate Degree Nomenclature

MOTION: that Senate approve the adoption the alternative designations: Baccalaureate (for Bachelor), Magisteriate (for Master) and Doctorate (for Doctor) as an option to all graduating students except those receiving a D.V.M. degree. Students would be given an opportunity to request the designation at the time of applying to graduate, effective Spring, 1996.

MOTION: that this policy be reviewed after a five-year trial period.

Membership:
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PROPOSAL FOR AN ALTERNATE DEGREE NOMENCLATURE

It is proposed that the University of Guelph provide students with an option for alternate degree designations: Baccalaureate, Magisteriate, and Doctorate. Students who so desire could choose these designations in place of the current ones: Bachelor, Master, and Doctor. The use of the term Doctorate would not be available for students graduating with a D.V.M. degree. The issue of degree nomenclature was brought to the attention of Senate Executive, both by a faculty member on Senate Executive and by an M.A. student who has refused to accept the M.A. degree on the grounds that the term master is gender-specific. This is not the first time a student has raised this issue.

The issue of degree nomenclature has also arisen at a number other universities, three of which, Concordia, Western and York, have adopted a policy of offering graduating students alternate degree designations. Concordia adopted such a policy in 1991, York followed in 1994 and Western’s Senate passed the revision in 1995. These institutions give students the option of choosing an alternate degree designation: Baccalaureate for Bachelor; Magisteriate for Master; and Doctorate for Doctor.

The proposal and rationale which follow are derived mainly from the proposal that was approved by the Senate of York University in November, 1994. York’s report was in turn heavily influenced by the earlier Concordia policy. It also draws on an M.A. Research Paper on the issue prepared by Susan Milne, an M.A. student in Women’s Studies at York. It seems reasonable to take advantage of the discussion and debate that has taken place elsewhere, since a policy that has survived the rigours of debates at three other Canadian universities provides the most reasonable starting point for a debate at Guelph.

Rationale

To some, the use of the term master as part of the degree designation is gender-specific, i.e., it refers specifically to males. Furthermore, this can be offensive because historically masters have typically exploited the women over whom they have had authority. The issues raised by such a claim are extremely complex. One could contend that those who find the term offensive are mistaken; even if it is admitted that most of those who in the past were termed masters (in such contexts as the master-servant relationship, or when referring to the master of the house) were males, and that they were typically exploitive in their treatment of women, it could be argued that the term master itself is innocuous. Such arguments are, however, irrelevant to the question facing the University. For even if it is a mistake to claim that the term master is offensive in itself, the fact that it creates a problem for some people must be addressed by the University.

The challenge to the University is that there are those in our community who, upon serious reflection on the meaning of the term and especially on what the term means to them, have decided that another term would be preferable. The University of Guelph claims to provide a friendly and supportive environment; this creates a prima facie case in favour of introducing alternative degree designations for those who request it. Only an extremely weighty reason could justify a refusal to recognize these concerns.

The recommended term magisteriate is a new word, coined by Concordia Professor Katherine Waters. It is derived from the Latin words magister, meaning teacher, and magisterium, meaning teaching authority. It thus has an affinity with the traditional meaning of the phrase master of arts, which was originally used in British universities to designate a
person qualified to teach undergraduates. Magisteriate, therefore, avoids many of the negative connotations that have come to be associated with the term master, while at the same time conveying a meaning close to the original meaning of master when used as part of a graduate degree designation. While one could quibble over whether the Latin origin is gender neutral, the important point is that it is perceived to be so. In addition, it is a term that is being adopted at other institutions, and thus will have recognition externally.

Our current degree designations are commonly used to refer to the person holding the degree, as in Smith is a Bachelor of Science. The new designations, on the other hand, would naturally be understood as referring to the qualification rather than to the holder of the qualification. In current usage it makes no sense to say Smith is a Baccalaureate of Science. This new usage may be seen as desirable quite apart from the fact that it avoids the use of the questionable term master, since it could be argued that the university should emphasize the qualifications its bestows on its graduates rather than designating its graduates as special persons.

Although concerns have been expressed only with regard to the term master, the reasoning supports the introduction of the alternative designation baccalaureate. The adoption of doctorate is being proposed simply to complete the alternate options. The terms baccalaureate and doctorate are already in common use and, like magisteriate, refer to the qualification rather than the person.

Legal counsel has advised that under the University of Guelph Act we have the legal authority to introduce the new degree designations.

Proposal

(1) That the alternative designations Baccalaureate (for Bachelor), Magisteriate (for Master) and Doctorate (for Doctor) be made available as an option to all graduating students except those receiving a D.V.M. degree. Students would be given an opportunity to request the designation at the time of applying to graduate beginning Spring, 1996.

(2) That this policy be reviewed after a five-year trial period.