Resolution # 71-09
The Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA)
The Pennsylvania State University

of the 71st Assembly
December 8th, 2021

Be it decided by the Assembly of Elected Delegates,

Denouncement of Overlapping Credit Change to Graduate School’s
Academic Policy GCAC 611 on Graduate Minors
(Decided: [ Y / N / A ])

Nature of the Situation:

At the November 17, 2021 meeting, the Graduate Council considered changes to GCAC 611: Minor- Research Doctorate. The policy was also considered on April 14, 2021 for a vote, and was tabled due to disagreement on the proposed changes. The changes include clarification on some of the processes and a new requirement that the student must be admitted to the minor prior to the comprehensive exam, as well as others. The document with all proposed changes can be viewed [here](#) in Appendix A, on pages 27-29.

We highlight the following addition to GCAC 611 being considered by Graduate Council:

“No more than 3 credits to fulfill the graduate minor requirements can overlap with credits counted towards the student’s graduate major program.”

Although the graduate minor is meant to be distinct in some ways from the graduate major program, this requirement places a significant burden on students, and could negatively impact recruitment of new students. Many graduate and professional students who approached members of the Graduate Council Student Caucus mentioned that they would not be able to complete their minors under the proposed policy. Others mentioned that the ability to pursue interdisciplinary programs through graduate minors and dual degrees was a major draw of choosing to attend Penn State for their graduate studies. Therefore, this change in policy could also have a negative effect on recruiting efforts at Penn State. This change also effectively discourages interdisciplinary graduate education, as fewer students will pursue graduate minors and therefore will remain siloed in their individual departments and programs. The current policy on graduate minors,
without these proposed changes, allows students to strategically select courses to gain additional competencies in a specific discipline without necessarily adding a large number of additional courses, which provides strong benefits to students in their careers and allows focus on research.

This revised policy may also disproportionately affect marginalized students at Penn State. Graduate minors have the potential to create spaces both of refuge and of strategic tool-gathering and coalition building that push on the boundaries of traditional disciplines. Graduate Council Student Caucus representatives have received feedback that students who do not feel that they ‘fit’ in their major program often seek out minors that better align with their identities and commitments. Therefore, this policy may have a disparate impact on marginalized student populations that are seeking to expand their scholarly community and resources beyond their major program, but would be constrained by these new requirements.

Recommended Course of Action:

By adopting this resolution, the Graduate and Professional Student Association recommends the following to the Graduate Council:

- Overall, we **strongly** recommend that the Graduate Council does not adopt the proposed change quoted above, on limiting the number of credits that can overlap between the graduate minor and graduate major programs due to the negative potential effects on interdisciplinary education, recruitment, and participation in valuable graduate minor programs.
- If the change is adopted, the new policy should not be implemented retroactively and lack of retroactive implementation should be clearly communicated to all students and departments. The incoming class, starting in Fall 2022, should be the first class to whom this policy is applied.
- If the Graduate Council decides to pursue the changes to graduate minor requirements not overlapping with graduate major requirements, then full justification, perspectives from industrial and academic professionals, and benchmarking with peer institutions should be provided before voting on the changes. Due to the profound impact on the ability to pursue minors and recruiting efforts, the reasoning for the changes needs to include justification other than committee and council discussions, especially given that the discussion within Graduate Council has been contentious.

Respectfully submitted,

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Graduate Council Student Caucus Chair

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Chair, Professional Development Committee  
Delegate, College of Engineering

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The Graduate and Professional Student Association