December 8, 2016

To: Dean Van Galen, Chancellor
    116 North Hall
    University of Wisconsin-River Falls

From: Mialisa Moline, Chair
       Faculty Senate
       University of Wisconsin-River Falls

Re: UWRF Faculty Senate Motion 2016-17/69

The following motion was approved with 16 in favor, 3 opposed, 2 abstentions, by the Faculty Senate on December 7, 2016:

A motion from the Academic Standards Committee (Imtiaz Moosa, Chair) to approve “allow[ing] students who have successfully completed a campus-supported, for-credit, education-abroad program to purchase and wear at commencement stoles reflecting their international academic experience.” (Original proposal with rationale attached)

☑ Approved

☐ Disapproved

Dean Van Galen, Chancellor

12/18/16

Date
International Programs Committee  
Proposal to Include Stoles Reflecting Education-Abroad Experiences at Commencement

Proposal:  
To allow students who have successfully completed a campus-supported, for-credit, education-abroad program to purchase and wear at commencement stoles reflecting their international academic experience.

Rationale:  
As specified in the Faculty Senate Handbook, 9.2.26, “commencement is designed to recognize academic achievement” and “the function of the academic regalia is to recognize academic achievements.” Campus-supported, education-abroad experiences are a central part of student’s educational achievements.

First, this proposal ties eligibility for wearing education-abroad regalia to a quantitative measure of academic achievement. Specifically, eligibility will be restricted to those who received course credit for completing a campus-sponsored, education-abroad program. Students often participate in a study abroad program outside of the minimum expectations of their degrees, making the experience a distinctive, high-impact achievement that surpasses the standards of our campus’s academic expectations.

The second element of the current proposal making it unique is that education-abroad experiences are directly tied to the university’s mission and strategic plan.

Third, a number of universities in the Wisconsin System already do this, including: Green Bay; La Crosse; Madison; Milwaukee; Parkside; Platteville; Stevens Point; Superior; and Whitewater. As such, offering students the option of wearing a stole reflecting their country of study is consistent with what our peer institutions are doing.

Fourth, this process would be a way of further institutionalizing education-abroad at UWRF.

Fifth, both empirically and anecdotally, education abroad has been credited with: instilling in students intercultural sensitivity that is difficult to achieve through reading and lectures alone; creating more informed and engaged citizens through greater understanding of one’s own culture and its place in a broader context; and increased confidence and fluency in one’s linguistic abilities. Importantly, students consistently highlight their own educational, professional, and personal development achieved as a result of studying abroad. These results clearly align with many of the learning outcomes we hope to achieve as a university by the time students graduate.
Finally, in addition to recognizing a central part of a student's academic achievements, these stoles would have other benefits as well. Communicating to the public the value of higher education in Wisconsin is clearly an important part of our mission—perhaps more so in the current climate—but often difficult to effectively achieve. Graduation stoles reflecting participation in an education-abroad program would be an efficient, low cost, and visually striking way to convey what it is that the faculty and staff at UWRF do for the students, community, and state. In this way, adding stoles to commencement regalia would also act to simultaneously promote education abroad to current students and potentially recruit new students to the university. The stoles would also provide a direct visual example of our values and missions when they are addressed during commencement exercises.

Further:
Students who have earned credits towards graduation by participating in a campus-supported education-abroad experience will not be required to purchase a stole but will be informed of the option. Interested students will be able to purchase the stoles through the Office of International Education for approximately $30. The stoles will be the students to keep.