

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, April 20, 2011
2:00 – 4:00
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Thomas Brothen (chair), Sean Finn, Joseph Kirchner, Alon McCormick, Robert McMaster, Kristen Nelson, Peh Ng, Jane Phillips, Henning Schroeder, Alfonso Sintjago, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Cathrine Wambach

Absent: Barbara Brandt, Norman Chervany, Cody Mikl, Peggy Root, Paul Siliciano, Elaine Tarone, Michael Wade

Guests: Suzanne Bardouche (Office of the Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education), Tina Falkner (Academic Support Resources), Professor Leslie Schiff (incoming Committee member), John Ziegenhagen (Office of the Provost)

[In these minutes: (1) policy on Adding, Changing, or Discontinuing Academic Plans; (2) degrees with distinction; (3) cancelling students who register for audit status; (4) eliminating the skills courses limit; (5) curriculum committee; (6) funding allocation mechanisms for graduate programs]

Professor Brothen convened the meeting at 2:05 and welcomed Professor Schiff, a new member of the Committee beginning July 1.

1. Policy on Adding, Changing, or Discontinuing Academic Plans

Professor Brothen welcomed Mr. Ziegenhagen to discuss the proposed revisions to the administrative policy "Adding, Changing, or Discontinuing Academic Plans."

Mr. Ziegenhagen distributed copies of the revised proposal, changed in response to the request from the Committee that it not be conjoined with the "Academic Unit Authority over the Curriculum and Major." The revised policy brings together, in one place, information that is now scattered on the policy website, the Provost's website, and the Graduate School website, and makes the requirements consistent.

By August all graduate-education policies will be in PCAS and ECAS, so right now the situation is transitional, Mr. Ziegenhagen said. They are using policies and procedures that reflect the practice of the last 6-7 years, so they are finding their way into the electronic systems.

The proposed policy clearly places the authority to change or discontinue programs in the hands of the faculty, departments, and colleges and campuses, Mr. Ziegenhagen pointed out, and it governs undergraduate, graduate, and professional credit-bearing degrees, majors, minors, free-standing minors, and certificates. The evaluation criteria are those that have been used for some time: aligned with related policies and address the University's common evaluation criteria (mission,

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priorities, and interrelatedness; need and demand; comparative advantage; efficiency, effectiveness, and use of resources; program quality and assessment; and program development). All program changes are subject to approval by the Board of Regents (some decisions can be made at lower levels, and they are indicated in the procedures that go along with the policy).

The reasons for the policy, as laid out in the proposal before the Committee, are:

- Enhances quality, productivity, and efficiency in academic plan development and implementation by faculty, departments, collegiate units, and campuses.
- Ensures that academic plan development is aligned with unit compact statements and institutional, campus, and collegiate unit mission and strategic directions.
- Makes explicit commonly held assumptions about criteria for academic plans and connections to related policies.
- Fosters shared consultation, and where appropriate, planning across academic units.
- Enhances availability, consistency, and coordination of information about the University's academic plans for transcript records, internal analysis, accountability reporting, and accreditation.
- Ensures thorough and timely review of proposals.

All proposals come to the Provost's office and are looked at a number of times, Mr. Ziegenhagen related. Initially, they want to be sure that a proposal has all the necessary pieces and has been consulted appropriately (they go to Vice Provost McMaster's office for undergraduate programs and Vice Provost Schroeder's office for graduate programs, and to the Vice President's office in the Academic Health Center for health sciences professional programs).

Committee members offered a few editorial suggestions, including elimination of reference to "courses" in the policy. Mr. Ziegenhagen concurred and commented that central offices do not want to be in the business of deciding which courses should be part of a major or program. Dr. McMaster agreed but said that they may look at course requirements to see if a course is requiring more than is appropriate.

The Committee voted unanimously to approve the revised policy, with the amendments that had been suggested at the meeting. Professor Brothen thanked Mr. Ziegenhagen for bringing the policy to the Committee.

2. Degrees with Distinction

Dr. Falkner referred to a handout that addressed a question raised by one of the colleges about the number of S-N credits that should be allowed when calculating the GPA for qualification for a degree with distinction. The policy requires completion of 60 University of Minnesota credits; how many should be A-F? She provided data on students receiving degrees with distinction on the Twin Cities campus for the year 2006, which she said was representative of the years following it as well.

- 10.5% of students received degrees with distinction
- 21.6% had 0 S-N credits; 43.7% had 1-6 S-N credits. So 65.3%, or 393 out of 601, had 0-6 S-N credits. Only 11.4% (69 students) had 12.1 or more S-N credits.

They do not have data on what portion of their degree programs were required S-N for students with more than 12 S-N credits, Dr. Falkner said. Advisers in the colleges inform them that a significant number of degree programs have required S-N components. If a policy change were to be proposed, limiting the number of S-N credits that could be counted toward a degree with distinction, presumably the mandatory S-N credits would be excluded.

Dr. Falkner concluded that they do not recommend a change in policy. The Committee concurred.

3. Cancelling Students Registered for Audit Status

Another item referred to the Committee, from the Faculty Consultative Committee, concerned a proposal to allow instructors to cancel the registration of students who register to audit a course but who do not show up. Ms. Bardouche reported that there are about 700 audit registrations per semester, about half of which are by graduate students. An "audit" registration requires paying tuition and allows a student to be a guest in a course, but the student receives no grade or credit (except for a "V" on the transcript). The proposal from FCC would allow an instructor to "kick out" a student registered for audit status. The student would not receive a tuition refund and there would be considerable administrative work to implement the change. It is difficult to envision someone paying tuition and then not showing up for a course, she concluded.

The "V" on the transcript does not mean the University certifies that the student sat in the class or learned anything, Dr. Falkner said in response to a question. It only means the student was granted permission to register and pay tuition for the course. The University certifies nothing. They have no evidence that anyone is using audit registrations to some particular advantage, she said. If a student audits a course, and then wants to take it for a grade, the audit counts as one of the two permissible registrations for a course.

Ms. Bardouche, in her handout, noted that if an instructor is having a problem with audit students attending class, he or she can require that the grade basis for the course is A-F (or S-N) and does not include the audit option. In limited-enrollment courses, Dr. Falkner added, a department will often not allow audit registrations.

Part of this is the principle of the thing, Ms. Phillips commented; it looks like a student is getting something for free because it looks like the student did something. Professor McCormick said the sense of whether a "V" conveys something could vary by discipline.

Following brief additional discussion, the Committee concluded that no action was required.

4. Eliminating the "Skills Courses" Limitation

Ms. Bardouche brought to the Committee a proposed change in "Credit and Grade Point Requirements for an Undergraduate (Baccalaureate) Degree" policy. The current policy reads as follows, in pertinent part:

(Twin Cities) No more than 6 semester credits from physical education, study skills, or applied music (in any combination and including transfer credits) will count toward a student's degree, unless the additional credits are a required part of the student's program requirements. This provision does NOT mean a student may count 6 credits of physical education, 6 in study skills, and 6 in applied music; it establishes a TOTAL of 6 credits from all three areas combined as the number that will count toward a degree. (That is, a student may count 6 skills credits, or the number of skills credits required by the major, whichever is greater.) A student may NOT count all the skills credits required by the major plus an additional 6 skills credits.

Ms. Bardouche provided the Committee the following information:

The Student Support Advisory Committee (SSAC) Policy Committee is comprised of academic advisers from each of the Twin Cities undergraduate colleges. This committee is charged with looking at the undergraduate educational policies to ensure the policies reflect current practice, identify areas where there may be gaps in language, or where policies may need to be improved. One of the policies the committee examined is the 6-credits skills policy, which limits the number of credits a student can count in his or her degree program from certain, specified categories. The committee took a broad look at the policy, the courses included, and its impact -- with the goal of creating standards and criteria for evaluating courses for inclusion on the skills list, leading to a comprehensive review of all course offerings that meet the skills criteria.

Courses on the List: Currently the "skills policy" course list is a static list. There is no existing, identified process for reviewing new courses for inclusion on the list or for removing courses from it. Additionally, there is little historical information about how particular courses were identified as skills courses and placed on the list. The list was created and last updated approximately 2000.

The committee came to the conclusion that it would be difficult to establish comprehensive criteria to govern skills courses, without expanding the current list significantly. The current list of courses on the "skills" list now appears arbitrary, as there are nearly identical course offerings where one is on the list and the other course is not. For example, an applied music course such as piano for music majors would come under the 6-credits skills policy, while Marching Band would not.

Current Impact of the Policy: In examining the list of skills courses, the SSAC Policy Committee noted that certain students seem to be disadvantaged over others by this policy -- i.e., majors requiring these courses, such as music or physical education majors. Current policy language "counts" the skills courses the same for students who have the courses as part of their major, therefore not allowing them to take a full range of these courses, and therefore it unfairly disadvantages students who have some of the skills courses built into their program. Specific requirements are part of the students' major, minor and/or college requirements; credits beyond those requirements are electives. If one program deems the credit worthy of degree credit, all programs should deem them worthy of some credit.

All U of M courses that carry credit have been reviewed by a departmental curriculum committee and approved by a college curriculum committee as worthy of credit. An elective is

an elective; it is students' choices how to use their electives. By limiting certain electives, students' choices are narrowed. Exploration by undergraduates should be encouraged, not discouraged. Curricular offerings outside the major often enhance students' ability to succeed in their careers and wellness/health/well-roundedness contributes to students' overall success and health (for example, career exploration courses, yoga, or guitar).

Impact of Changing the Policy: The concern that removing the list of skills courses would allow students to fill up a degree program with a high number of skills courses is unfounded. Currently, undergraduate majors are structured such that there is no major that allows students to fill up a degree with an excess of electives.

For example, from CLA, a conservative figure of what it would look like for a CLA student if there was no skills policy: CLA students at graduation averaged 35 major credits, 18 credits upper division outside major, and 38 credits for LE requirements bringing a student to 91 credits. The most extreme case scenario would be that a student who is waived of the language requirement could take up to 27 credits of electives. However, most students will study some language (let's say 15 credits), bringing them up to 106, only then allowing for up to 14 credits of electives. Furthermore, most courses on the skills courses list are lower-division, and degree programs and collegiate requirements specify the number/proportion of upper-division coursework that is required.

The skills courses list has been around for a long time; in 2009 the Committee decided that the Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education is responsible for the criteria and maintaining the list. The SSAC looked at it and recommends it be eliminated. Both the Office of the Registrar and the Twin Cities undergraduate associate deans endorse eliminating it as well.

Following brief discussion, the Committee voted unanimously in favor of the change.

5. Curriculum Committee

Professor Brothen turned to Vice Provost McMaster to discuss a proposal for a Twin Cities campus curriculum committee.

Dr. McMaster said that there is a long story behind a proposed curriculum committee for the campus. This Committee approved the idea about a year ago; over the last few months he has been giving thought to what the committee would look like. All major institutions have a curriculum committee that has responsibility for the all-campus curriculum, and sometimes the charge to such committees includes looking for redundancies. The latter goal was part of the idea behind the SCEP endorsement of the establishment of a committee.

Initially, the idea was that it would be a faculty committee, appointed by SCEP, and with representation from his office. Another option would be a committee composed of associate deans because individual faculty members would not necessarily have a deep knowledge of their college's curriculum—the associate dean's role is to know it. He met with the deans and associate deans of the undergraduate colleges and put before them the proposal for a faculty committee; there was resistance because they did not want another faculty committee involved in the curriculum business of the colleges—but they did believe that there should be intervention in college curriculum decisions from

time to time. So he has agreed that there would be a curriculum committee constituted when issues arise between two colleges. If there is a conflict, they would pull a group together: the associate deans for the two colleges, the Vice Provost (him), one member chosen by the chair of this Committee, and one member from Academic Support Resources. Those five people would try to resolve the dispute. If that fails, the deans of the two colleges would be brought in. If the conflict remains unresolved, it would go to the Provost.

Dr. McMaster said he was not certain this process would work, but given what the deans and associate deans wish to see, it is worth trying for a year and see how it goes. He will return to this Committee if it does not work and discuss the possibility of appointing a full committee to deal with such disputes.

Professor Schiff commented that dealing with problems and eliminating redundancies are two different things. Dr. McMaster said that some matters other curriculum committees deal with are not needed here (e.g., liberal education requirements). What is needed is some way to deal with challenges that arise.

Many of these disputes are caused by the budget model, Ms. Phillips observed. Dr. McMaster agreed. Ms. Phillips said that colleges will not hesitate to offer a course as long as the University has its current budget model. Much of what the colleges do is pushed by the budget model rather than what is best for students or pedagogy. The question is how to make money. It's very frustrating, she said.

The Provost could deal with or consult on any of these disputes, Professor Wambach pointed out. Dr. McMaster said the Provost does not want to deal with all of them; the vast majority can be resolved at a lower level. The proposal he's made makes clear—codifies—how they will be resolved.

Committee members discussed the fact that courses in some areas (e.g., statistics) are taught in many colleges, and have been taught in those colleges for 50 years or more. There is an historical sanction for these offerings, Professor Wambach said, but if there were to be a new proposal, that would be a different matter. Dr. McMaster agreed and said the committee won't be looking in a rear-view mirror.

On the budget model question, Professor Wambach recalled that the Provost is going to consult on it and learn what other schools are doing, but the Committee has not heard what he discovered. Ms. Bardouche said the Budget Model Advisory Committee has been meeting about once per month and discussed tuition attribution, among other things (schools vary a great deal in tuition attribution: some are 25/75, some are 75/25, some are 50/50, and one changed from 75/25 to 25/75). Her interpretation is that no one has figured out the optimal way to attribute tuition, and there may not be an optimal way, so the University has not made a reactive change. Professor McCormick commented wryly that they need to find someone for the curriculum committee who does not know how the budget model works and who refuses to learn how it works, staying answerable only to what is best educationally.

It was agreed that Dr. McMaster would report back in a year on how the process worked.

6. Funding Allocation Mechanisms for Graduate Programs

Professor Brothen welcomed Vice Provost and Dean Schroeder and noted that he joined the meeting because of questions raised by Directors of Graduate Studies about funding allocation mechanisms.

Dean Schroeder said the plan is that for FY13 and beyond, they would use quality metrics. Last month he met with all of the deans on evaluating success in the disciplines; moreover, the enrollment-management committee is seeking to identify ways to evaluate quality in graduate programs. So there is much work going on in terms of quality metrics. He provided handouts that he has given to the deans and to the college representatives on the Graduate Education Council.

There are two main questions to be addressed: How to allocate the old block grant funds (\$4.5 million) and how to handle the old Graduate Student Fellowships funds (\$3.5 million). For FY13, in order to make decisions based on quality, they will include metrics common to all graduate programs (e.g. time to degree, attrition patterns, completion rates), but the process should not burden the colleges with the responsibility of providing a huge report. There is not that much money involved, so the procedural efforts should be in correlation with the amount of funds to be distributed. The programs will also be asked to provide information on placement.

They have no mechanism or algorithm or calculation as of now that would allow putting dollar amounts to certain numbers, Dean Schroeder said; between now and the fall when allocation decisions are due a lot of work and consultation remains to be done. The ongoing work on program metrics by the enrollment management committee will provide crucial input into this process.

Dean Schroeder said that he has met with President-designate Kaler, and it is Dr. Kaler's goal that for FY13, the Graduate Student Fellowship funds be given to the colleges in such a way that there are no winners or losers, so the allocation will be along historical lines but only for FY13. They will develop a long-term strategy on how to use quality metrics in the future.

With respect to peers and the amount of money to the Graduate School, the University is not in the top ten; Dean Schroeder provided data on the amount of money allocated to graduate education at peer institutions. He said he did not know how that could change, but it is clear that there is no relationship between quality and whether the Graduate School is centralized or decentralized. The correlation is rather with the amount of money available.

Professor Wambach reported on the work of the graduate-education subcommittee of the enrollment-management committee (on which she serves). They expect much more information from Academic Analytics. Their concern is that there are high-quality, highly-rated programs that will decline in quality (and thereby hurt the University) if they do not receive central funds to support them. There is some lack of trust between deans and high-quality programs and a concern that deans will distribute money across programs. So the administration could give money to the colleges and give money directly to programs in order to retain quality and thereby increase the reputation of the whole University. This problem will not go away, she said.

Dean Schroeder agreed. The original notion of reform was to no longer collect money from colleges into the graduate school cost pool and leave the money in the colleges. Now about 50% of

the money will stay in the Graduate school. President-designate Kaler is aware that there are 10-15 University programs that were very strong in the NRC rankings.

Dean Schroeder said that going forward, a certain amount of funding could be reserved centrally for excellent programs that do not have access to NIH, NSF, and similar funding sources (e.g., in the humanities). All the University's peer institutions have built-in allocation mechanisms that address the "market disadvantage" of certain disciplines.

Professor McCormick said he liked the concern that this is a university and there is need to be concerned about the institution. He suggested that when they discuss the block-grant funding, they rely not only on the data but also trends and gradients, and where investments would be wise at this time to encourage excellence.

Dean Schroeder agreed. They want to be able to reward programs where the data might suggest they should not but the program's plans for improvement suggest they should. There needs to be a narrative and judgment exercised. One suggestion has been a rolling average in the use of metrics.

Professor Wambach agreed; some departments, she said, are doing better and better while others take a dive but then rebound. One can see that the highly-rated departments have high numbers on the proposed measures.

Ms. Phillips asked about the range in size of graduate programs. Professor Wambach said that some are tiny and have only 1-2 students per year or every other year. One concern of the enrollment-management committee is the optimal size of a program. It should not fall below a certain number or there is not a reasonable cohort of students, and some suggest that 8-10 students are a critical mass. Small numbers also affect the metrics, Ms. Phillips observed. That is why one might use the measures over a ten-year period, Professor Wambach said. And some programs, Dean Schroeder pointed out, have hundreds of graduate students.

Professor Brothen said the minutes can reflect the fact that no decisions have been made about metrics. Dean Schroeder agreed and said they are working with a number of groups—and that there is no secrecy about the process. They need a system that has broad support; everyone wants to perform by metrics that are relevant to their disciplines and that students and faculty can identify with.

Professor Brothen thanked Dean Schroeder for the comments and adjourned the meeting at 3:55.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota