

CLASSROOM ADVISORY SUBCOMMITTEE  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
NOVEMBER 7, 2011  
Morrill Hall Room 300

[In these minutes: research and evaluation of active learning classrooms; update on classroom scheduling policy; final exam scheduling policy]

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions or actions reported in these minutes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT: Susan Wick (Chair), Gordon Duke, Jeremy Todd, Brad Cohen, Peggy McCarthy, Barbara Jensen, Broderick Anderson, Krishna Jhaveri, Roberta Juarez

REGRETS: Ozayr Saloojee (for John Comazzi), Patricia Schaber, Kevin Smith, Jed Overmann, Keya Ganguly, Jeff Lindgren

ABSENT: John Andrus, Emily Bramschreiber

GUESTS: J.D. Walker, manager, Research and Evaluation, Office of Information Technology; Sarah Kussow, scheduling coordinator, Office of Classroom Management

Professor Susan Wick called the meeting to order and welcomed those present. She asked the committee members to introduce themselves.

**Research and Evaluation of the Active Learning Classrooms**

J.D. Walker, manager, Research and Evaluation, Office of Information Technology provided the committee with a PowerPoint presentation summarizing four years of research on the Active Learning Classrooms (ALCs). The pilot phase of the learning spaces research began in 2007. Students and instructors using ALCs were interviewed and surveyed regarding the effect of the ALCs on teaching and learning methods. Overall, there was a positive reaction to the ALCs from students and instructors. There was a perceived reduction in psychological distance between instructors and students. This was primarily attributed to the round tables and the “de-centering” of the room.

From Fall 2008 to Spring 2011, three-comparison-design studies were conducted using two different investigations. One controlled for the pedagogical approach and varied the space, and the other controlled the space and varied the pedagogical approach. The first study involved Post Secondary Teaching and Learning (PSTL) course 1131. In this study the pedagogical approach remained constant. The course was taught at the same time of day, by the same professor, utilizing the same materials and activities. Student characteristics were also controlled. But one section of the course took place in the active learning classroom and the other took place in a traditional lecture-style classroom. Average composite ACT scores were used to predict average course grades in each

section of PSTL 1131. The results of this study showed student perceptions of enrichment, engagement, flexibility, effective use, and course/classroom fit were all higher for the ALC. Student's actual and expected grades in the traditional classroom were almost identical, but the students in the ALC significantly outperformed expectations. The improved student performance occurred because instructor activity and behaviors changed in the ALCs. For instance, instructors spent less time at the podium lecturing and more time was spent on discussion, group activity, and consulting.

Brad Cohen remarked that the findings are quite striking when you consider them in the context of proposed spending on ALCs, and asked if other Universities had done similar studies. Mr. Walker stated he was not aware of any similar studies, but he noted the findings of the PSTL study were replicated in a study of the Biology 1003 course taught in two Science Teaching and Student Services (STSS) rooms. The students overall perceptions of the ALC room were higher. Despite lower composite ACT scores in the section of students in the ALC; the students in the ALC outperformed the students in the traditional classroom.

The third comparison study was of two sections of the Family Social Science (FSoS) course 3101. In this study, both sections were taught in an ALC, but the instructional approach, lecture versus student-centered active learning, was varied. The instructor who taught FSoS 3101 took a course to adapt her teaching to use the ALC room. The actual grades of the students in the lecture section were slightly higher than their expected grades. The actual grades of the students in the active learning section were significantly higher than expected. Mr. Walker explained the study showed that if active learning teaching techniques are utilized in the ALCs, student learning improves.

He summarized, the three controlled studies demonstrate that space and the teaching style matter. New learning spaces help students to outperform final grade expectations, and affect teaching-learning activities, even when the instructor attempts to hold these activities constant. The ALCs are not conducive to a lecture-based approach; student performance improves when instructors move to active, student-centered teaching methods. Students and instructors perceive the ALCs in a largely positive light, but some adjustment is necessary for instructors to adapt to the new spaces.

Mr. Todd asked what is on the horizon for this research. Mr. Walker indicated there would be continued research on the ALCs in the STSS building with more focus on the instructors' experience.

Mr. Cohen asked if research had been done to determine whether the teaching style or the learning space is the primary factor in the improved student performance. Mr. Walker responded that he does not know which is the primary factor.

Mr. Cohen indicated it would also be useful to investigate the use and impact of the technological affordances in the STSS classrooms such as the projection devices. Mr. Walker indicated his team has not yet researched these types of micro-level affordances, but he believes the layout of the space is making the difference in student performance.

He also noted that any data gathered on use of the technical equipment would need to be correlated with the activities the instructors are undertaking.

Professor Wick asked if Mr. Walker had presented the learning space research to the Board of Regents. Mr. Walker indicated he had not but would like to get on the agenda.

Mr. Cohen commented that the ALCs and investment in faculty development result in improved learning across the board. He suggested policies should be put in place to support faculty learning and development when new classrooms are built. He further suggested that CAS encourage support for recurring faculty development funds.

Professor Wick asked Mr. Walker if faculty demand for the ALCs is outstripping supply. Mr. Walker stated there is not enough awareness of the rooms yet, and the incentives for using the rooms are not high enough. The committee briefly discussed whether faculty that have received ALC training should receive a preference for using the rooms.

Peggy McCarthy asked whether departments are finding the ALCs present a competitive advantage in hiring faculty. Mr. Todd responded that although the University of Minnesota currently has the most ALCs, many Universities are looking into building these types of spaces and they are not a unique enough characteristic to recruit faculty. But he stated if the University demonstrated commitment to supporting the buildings and the faculty this would be a draw. Mr. Cohen noted the ALCs are more directed at recruiting students. They are shown to prospective students and one-third of new students have classes in these rooms. He emphasized the need to provide training and support for faculty in the use of these rooms.

### **Updated Classroom Scheduling Policy and Fall 2012 Course Preparation**

Sarah Kussow, scheduling coordinator, Office of Classroom Management (OCM) updated CAS on the new administrative policy for *Class Scheduling: Twin Cities, Crookston, Morris, Rochester*. She stated the policy was updated in May 2011 and is being implemented this fall. Some of the primary changes from the previous policy are that it 1) requires colleges to distribute classes evenly throughout the day and 2) requires colleges to distribute enrollment, as well as classes throughout the day and the week. Colleges are permitted to schedule a maximum of 50 percent of their classes using a Tuesday/Thursday meeting pattern, with the remaining classes using a combination of Monday/Wednesday/Friday meeting patterns. The new policy also eliminated the 60/40 guidelines of not scheduling more than 60% of the classes during peak hours, and it adds two new meeting patterns to the standard class times.

Next, Ms. Kussow demonstrated the on-line class scheduling distribution summary. This report provides Twin Cities' collegiate and departmental schedulers with the distribution of actual hours and the percentage of total scheduled class minutes for the selected term. Faculty, staff, and students can access it. Some of its features are:

- Showing collegiate time period demand, hours allowed and the actual courses scheduled.
- Showing departmental time period demand

- Sorting by room assignment
- Viewable course numbers and names

Ms. Kussow noted that the scheduling policy is read at the college level, so college scheduling overages are more important than departmental overage.

Professor Wick asked, assuming there are courses of quite different sizes and all the large courses cannot be scheduled to meet at the same time, how is enrolment distribution monitored? She noted the scheduling program is currently blind to the distribution of numbers of students; it only looks at numbers of classes at any given time slot. Ms. Kussow replied that OCM does not yet have a metric for enrolment distribution. Colleges and departments must manage enrolment distribution throughout the day, but most colleges do not want to alter when their larger courses take place. Mr. Todd stated that if a department wanted to add a new course section with a large-enrolment the schedulers should contact OCM.

Barbara Jensen asked if the college is over its scheduling limit and the departments will not voluntarily change, how the problem is resolved. Ms. Kussow replied that OCM would work with its contacts in the college offices, but it is not within OCM's purview to decide when particular classes are taught. The colleges must work this out with the departments. Mr. Todd commented that the new scheduling policy provides more flexibility than the previous policy and allows colleges and departments to work together.

Ms. Kussow also noted that the report refreshes nightly and only looks at general-purpose classroom demand during the daytime. Mr. Todd noted that if demand for courses after 6:00 pm increases, OCM may consider adding nighttime demand to the report.

Mr. Cohen asked how the new policy reflects courses with blended formats. Mr. Todd responded that this is a challenge, but if OCM is contacted early in the scheduling process blended formats can be accommodated. He gave the example of a blended chemistry course scheduled in STSS. He also noted that OCM is looking at the demand for on-line and blended courses, and how they impact OCM's scheduling process.

### **Recommendations to SCEP on Final Exam Scheduling Policy**

Professor Wick reported that she met with the Senate Committee on Educational Policy (SCEP) regarding CAS's recommendations for the administrative policy on *Scheduling Examinations, Final Examinations, and Study Days: Twin Cities, Crookston, Morris, Rochester*. CAS requested SCEP to consider two issues:

1. A change in the system for scheduling rooms for final examinations in order to improve the efficiency and accuracy of scheduling and to decrease the costs.
2. A review of the policy on scheduling examinations to insure it is fair to students and instructors, clearly defines final examination, takes into account capstone projects, and encourages appropriate forms of examination.

Professor Wick stated SCEP approved the first request with little discussion, but was reluctant to take on a deeper review of the final examination policy. They indicated they

had recently completed a review of all educational policies. However, members of SCEP were sensitive to issues of fairness to students and faculty created by the existing policy. SCEP directed OCM to gather information from instructors who are not giving final exams about how they are assessing their students' performance in lieu of giving a final exam. OCM will bring this data back to CAS and depending on the results, CAS will report back to SCEP.

Hearing no further business, Professor Wick adjourned the meeting.

Dawn Zugay  
University Senate Office