

Minutes \*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy**  
**Wednesday, February 1, 2012**  
**2:00 – 4:00**  
**238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Thomas Brothen (chair), Kirsten Barta, Lee-Ann Breuch, Eva von Dassow, Norman Chervany, Amanda Koonjbeharry, Alon McCormick, Robert McMaster, Cody Mikl, Peh Ng, Jane Phillips, Peggy Root, Leslie Schiff, Elaine Tarone, Cathrine Wambach

Absent: Barbara Brandt, Emily Combs, John Cwodzinski, Henning Schroeder

Guests: Suzanne Bardouche (Office of the Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education); Tina Falkner (Academic Support Resources)

Other: Jon Steadland (Office of the President)

[In these minutes: (1) update on the Twin Cities undergraduate curriculum; (2) syllabus policy]

**1. Update on the Twin Cities Undergraduate Curriculum**

Professor Brothen convened the meeting at 2:00 and turned to Vice Provost and Dean McMaster to present on the Twin Cities undergraduate curriculum. Dean McMaster provided copies of a set of slides and walked the Committee through it.

Dr. McMaster began by noting the number of degree-seeking undergraduate students enrolled in Twin Cities colleges in the fall of 2011.

14,723 Liberal Arts  
5,046 Science & Engineering  
2,360 Education & Human Development  
2,204 Carlson School of Management  
1,954 Food, Ag & Natural Resource Sciences  
1,806 Biological Sciences  
1,359 Design  
616 Health Sciences (Nursing, Dent, CLS, Mort Sci)  
542 Continuing Education

For a total of 30,610.

There are 149 majors on the Twin Cities campus, which is a large number and does not include the number of choices/sub-plans within majors. There 89 minors related to majors and 41

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free-standing minors (interdisciplinary minors that cross college lines). Ms. Bardouche reported that there are 12 majors that require more than 120 credits, fewer than in the past, and some of those that still require more than 120 have reduced their requirements from 128 credits to 123-124 credits.

Committee members discussed with Dr. McMaster the implications from dropping a minor, if a department chooses to do so. Problems arise when students pursuing a minor take seats in major-field classes that students in the major need but cannot get. Dr. McMaster said he also becomes concerned when he sees a student has two or more minors; he wants to see students explore, and take a minor if they wish, but he also wants to see them graduate in four years. Professor Schiff agreed it is a capacity issue for some departments; Professor von Dassow observed it is also an advising issue, because students seem to think that it is better to have on the transcript more than one major and minor—they need to be informed that is not true for the next step in life they will take. Dr. McMaster said he would help to get the message out.

Dr. McMaster reviewed graduation and retention rates by entry year. The four-year graduation rate for the class that entered in 1992 was 15.2%; in 2002 it was 41.2% and in 2007, the last for which enough time has elapsed to count, it was 54%. The goal set by the Board of Regents is 60%. The one-year retention rate, 78.6% in 1992, fluctuates around 90% with the most recent cohorts of students, and 90% is the goal established by the Board.

Baccalaureate degree requirements are set at both the central and the college/departmental level. Central requirements are these:

Minimum of 120 credits earned

Writing requirements:

- 1 First-Year Writing course
- 2 lower-division Writing-Intensive courses
- 2 upper-division Writing-Intensive courses

Liberal Education requirements

Overall GPA of 2.0 or higher

College/Departmental Requirements are these:

Language requirement for B.A. in CLA (e.g.)

Requirements for the major

No grades below C- in courses for the major (the credits count, but not towards the major)

There have been a slightly-increasing number of baccalaureate degrees awarded in the last several years:

|      |      |
|------|------|
| 2007 | 6650 |
| 2008 | 6686 |
| 2009 | 6942 |

2010 7031

Dr. McMaster noted the number of degrees with the most majors and the most common primary and secondary majors for students who double major.

|                          |     |
|--------------------------|-----|
| Psychology BA            | 353 |
| Journalism BA            | 315 |
| Political Science BA     | 223 |
| Communication Studies BA | 195 |
| Mechanical Engr BME      | 189 |
| English BA               | 184 |
| Biology BS               | 180 |
| Marketing BSB            | 151 |
| Kinesiology BS           | 145 |
| Finance BSB              | 139 |

The most common double major (primary/secondary) is Accounting and Finance (29 people in 2010-11), followed by Finance and Accounting (15), then Business & Marketing Education and Human Resource Development (13), Marketing and International Business (12), and no other double major is in double digits. Dr. McMaster also noted the high-enrollment courses for 2011-12 and the highest-enrollment courses for new freshmen.

Dr. McMaster next reviewed course scheduling dynamics. In fall, 2011, there were 6,094 courses offered (3,092 of which were undergraduate). Those courses had a total of 14,307 sections, of which 6,724 required no space assignment (direct readings, graduate courses, and so on). So there were 7,583 courses that required a room assignment, 4,458 that needed general-purpose space in the 318 classrooms and 3,193 that required use of the 513 departmental spaces. This is the situation the Office of Classroom Management must deal with, Dr. McMaster said; it is a big project to get all classes into classrooms, and often they go into the last few weeks before classes begin with some classes unplaced. The last two semesters, however, they have had no unplaced classes, Dr. Falkner reported.

Dr. McMaster also reviewed a graph showing the number of students in class by time of day and day of the week; the peak time was (fall, 2011) Tuesday at 10:40, when 16,064 students were in class. Professor Wambach asked if allowing 3-credit classes to meet on M-W has helped relieve demand on classrooms; Dr. McMaster said it is too early to tell—they don't have data yet—but Dr. Falkner said anecdotal information suggests that it has.

Dr. McMaster turned next to freshman seminars. There were a total of 121 offered during 2011-12, 85 in the fall and 36 in the spring. He noted the requirements for the seminars:

- Taught by Tenure and tenure-track faculty, with a few exceptions
- Class size is limited to 20 students
- Only first-year, first time students may participate
- Limited lecturing in freshman seminars, mostly discussion-based
- All freshman seminars are academic courses
- Faculty are encouraged to help students adjust to the campus and its resources

- Many freshman seminars meet Liberal Education and Writing requirements
- Faculty have a genuine interest in engaging with undergraduate students and connect with students on issues not directly related to the course materials
- The subject matter must be meaningful and accessible to first-year students
- They are designed to encourage discussion and writing
- They provide students real coaching in developing skills that will help them be successful in college (analysis, research, speaking in class, contacting the professor, using the library, writing). These skills should be consciously honed and not just implicit in class assignments.
- First-year seminars are not survey courses and should not strive for "coverage," nor should it have a final examination.

These seminars are critical for a variety of reasons, Dr. McMaster said: They are a spectacular first-year experience and they have a significant impact on retention and graduation. He provided graduation and retention data for students who do and do not take freshman seminars and noted the difference in retention and graduation. He reported that he is often asked why the University does not require all students to take them. Because it does not have the resources. Professor Wambach cautioned that the data present a correlation; one does not know if there is a causal relationship. One needs to look at the students who do not take a freshman seminar and why. Dr. McMaster agreed and observed that a large number of honors students take one of the seminars. Professor Wambach commented that one would like to think the intervention (taking a seminar) makes a difference, but 80 years of higher-education literature indicates about 10% of the variability in student outcomes is due to pedagogy. It is likely that students who take a freshman seminar are different in some way from those who decide not to take one. Professor Chervany said the data provide an idea about the profile of the student the University should be seeking at a time when it receives applications from more students than it can admit. Professor McCormick asked about the number of departments (such as his) that do informal freshman courses that are 1 credit S/N courses with a series of presentations to the students to give them an overview of the subject and careers.

Dr. McMaster said that there is a co-variance with SAT and other indicators and he believes the seminars are important for the University. They would like to see more of them offered. Professor Brothen pointed out that there is a conflict for some departments, such as his, that are trying to have faculty teach more 3XXX courses. To ask them to teach freshman seminars of 20 students demands time that is not then available for other courses. Professor von Dassow reported that her department tried offering a number of freshman seminars but students did not sign up for them because they were not required, so some were cancelled at the last minute, leaving faculty members owing the department a course to be taught. The seminars must either be required or the number controlled so that they do not have to be cancelled at the last minute.

Vice Provost McMaster reminded the Committee that there are standards for freshmen seminars. Ms. Phillips agreed but commented that there are no standards for "discipline-specific rigor." That is, those who teach freshmen seminars do teach rigorous courses in that they clearly meet standards for academic credit, but a seminar with a Biol designator is not necessarily trying to meet the standards of rigor that they might have in a course that meets Biology credit requirements (including liberal-education courses).

Dr. McMaster reported that freshman seminars are funded through a 1998 legislative request. There are two models.

1. Allocation of faculty positions: Through a competitive process, colleges were given faculty positions with the agreement that they would teach 12 credits of freshman seminars for each position allotted; the following are the number of seminars that are expected will be delivered each year.

| College | Positions | Number of Credits | Number of Seminars     |
|---------|-----------|-------------------|------------------------|
| CLA:    | 16        | 192 credits       | 64 (3 credit seminars) |
| CBS:    | 1         | 12 credits        | 12 (1 credit seminars) |
| CSE:    | 5         | 60 credits        | 20 (3 credit seminars) |
| CFANS:  | 1         | 12 credits        | 4 (3 credit seminars)  |
| CDes:   | 1         | 12 credits        | 4 (3 credit seminars)  |
| CEHD:   | 1         | 12 credits        | 4 (3 credit seminars)  |
| UMD/UMM | 6/2       |                   |                        |

2. For colleges that did not receive positions or would like to offer additional freshman seminars, there is a pool of money that was part of the original legislative request. This pool is competitive and dispersed to colleges through a proposal process. This process funds approximately 26 additional seminars. It varies from year to year. Colleges are provided \$2000 per credit for new ad hoc freshman seminars.

Professor Wambach said there are two problems with the freshman-seminar model. It started at a time when there was significant faculty hiring; since then, a number of faculty positions have disappeared and departments are at the size they were before the seminars were started—but they are still held to offering freshman seminars even though they do not have the personnel. That requires departments to rely on non-regular faculty to deliver them. Dr. McMaster said that departments have been given a little more flexibility in deciding who will teach freshman seminars but he said he becomes concerned when a department claims that all the positions it lost were the ones provided for freshman seminars.

Faculty positions are fungible, Professor Chervany responded and Dr. McMaster's position does not hold if positions were not designated for freshman seminars. But if the University says these are important, departments cannot say they will not offer them. Would the new Twin Cities curriculum committee look at this question? This Committee would be the one to do so, Dr. McMaster said. Professor Chervany said that if these seminars are important to the University, this Committee, the educational-policy committee, should say that it is not a local decision whether to offer the seminars and that departments cannot back away from them just because times are harder. Dr. McMaster agreed that there is not a crisis but that the budgetary circumstances have led to allowing more flexibility.

Professor Wambach said that the University should not see the freshman seminars as the most sacred and important intervention in students' lives. There are also interdisciplinary seminars and many other high-impact mechanisms that affect outcomes. No one of them is more important than the others and there are many more things the University can do.

Ms. Barta said she supports the program because it exposes students to things they would not otherwise learn, and they also teach students to write. She said she did not understand the opposition

to them. Professor von Dassow commented that the faculty like the seminars but that department chairs do not because they are the ones who must allocate faculty lines to instruction.

Course access was the next topic Dr. McMaster covered. He noted that there are a large number of units and people who work together to ensure the delivery of the curriculum:

- Academic Departments
- Colleges
- Academic Advisers
- New Student Orientation
- One Stop Student Services
- On-line Registration System
- Classroom Management
  - Scheduling
  - Classroom Support
  - Course Guide and Class Schedule

Planning for courses starts about a year in advance, and departments are now putting in the courses for next year's scheduling. . Considerations at the planning stages include:

Course registration data from the past year(s)

- Patterns
- Issues or concerns

Changes to curriculum

- New majors, minors
- New courses
- Discontinued courses
- Changes in degree requirements

Numbers of students

- Continuing students by level (soph, jr, sr)
- New freshman
- New transfer
- By intended major and minor
- By college
- Placing into different levels of college math, chemistry, and writing courses

Dr. McMaster reviewed the timeline for fall semester courses, which includes entering course schedules into the system in February and March, student registration during April and May, freshman orientation and registration from June to August, also transfer student registration during the summer, and daily monitoring of registrations, available of course seats, classroom capacity, and other factors, with adjustments made as needed. There is daily monitoring and management of a number of factors, including supply and demand and student registration.

Professor Tarone raised a number of points about writing instructors for non-native English speakers. Ms. Bardouche and Professor Breuch offered suggestions.

Professor McCormick inquired whether there is a way to help students get access to a course when positions are taken by repeating students with a C- or better in that course (and who may have earlier access to the course seats because of a higher queue priority, compared to the non-repeating student who may have fewer credits). They do so manually, Dr. McMaster said; the process cannot be automated. What about when students fail the first course in a sequence but are already registered for the second, Professor McCormick asked? Ms. Bardouche reported that Ms. Carroll in their office handles reviewing the math and chemistry registrations, and advisers handle the other fields. Their office is working on the problem, Dr. Falkner reported, because it could be too late for the student to take another course (after learning of an F in the first course of a sequence) and too late to make the seat available to another student.

Dr. McMaster next reported on innovative college initiatives at the course level. All of the colleges have wonderful curricular innovations, and he provided examples of a number of them in various colleges.

Dr. McMaster briefly reviewed the University Honors Program (advising model and curriculum), and then turned to undergraduate writing, which he described as a huge project at the University. "The collective goal of all writing at the University of Minnesota is to prepare students to communicate effectively in a variety of situations – both within and beyond the University." The writing program at the University consists of first-year writing (1301 or 1401, or 1201 for students who are struggling with writing), and four writing-intensive courses (two lower-division, two upper division, one in the major). A large number of students use AP courses to avoid the first-year writing course, and he continues to believe that the University should raise the required AP score to a 4 or a 5 in order for a student to be excused from the requirement. Doing so, however, would require Writing Studies to offer many more sections, which it does not have the resources to do. This is one place where there is a conflict between the budget and the curriculum, Dr. McMaster concluded.

Professor Tarone said it would be worth it to transfer funds from central administration to offer more courses if the University believes writing is important. If they had the money, they would offer the courses, Dr. McMaster assured the Committee. They are putting funding into the Writing-Enriched Curriculum, funded through proposals the colleges make. Professor Schiff observed that this discussion has touched on freshman seminars, honors seminars, the needs of non-native English speakers, and now writing courses—the fundamental problem is that there is not enough money to do everything that the University knows would be good for students. Dr. McMaster concurred.

Dr. McMaster outlined the elements of the first-year writing classes and the writing-intensive classes. First-year writing is intended to:

- Provide a solid foundation in *academic* (disciplinary) writing for first-year students.
- Introduce students to research practices as they relate to academic (disciplinary) writing.
- Teach students an awareness of writing processes – including drafting, revising, obtaining of feedback, and editing – that are normally practiced by academic writers.
- Introduce students to the notion of writing as a knowledge-making activity in the University.
- Students write in academic genres such as essays, summaries, and research papers and learn the appropriate conventions and styles that make those forms convincing.

This is an enormous project for the University, he said, and is the backbone of writing instruction. The Committee asked for information on the number of students who are testing out of writing.

Writing intensive courses:

Writing Intensive courses help students understand what it means to write in various disciplines, and how writing can be stronger and clearer so that views can be communicated effectively. Courses designated as WI must meet the following criteria:

- Writing is comprehensively integrated into the course
- Writing is a significant part of the course work
- Writing is a significant part of the course grade
- Writing is learned through revision
- Writing is explained and practiced in the course
- Instructor understands the practice of writing instruction.

These are new requirements, Dr. McMaster said, and all writing-intensive courses will be recertified over the next few years. They want to be sure that what is promised is what is delivered. It will be possible to submit new courses, he said. Professor von Dassow asked how they know the "instructor understands the practice of writing instruction." Professor Wambach said the Writing Board pays a lot of attention to what instructors say they will do and has to be assured that they have a logical plan.

Dr. McMaster next described the Writing-Enriched Curriculum and the departments that have signed up for it (including five new ones in the fall of 2011). He reported there will be additional departments signed up in the fall of 2012, at which point about one-third of departments will be participating. The writing-intensive courses will be embedded in the Writing-Enriched Curriculum.

Dr. McMaster next touched on the active learning curriculum (and the use of the active-learning classrooms in the new STSS facility), the Council on Liberal Education (which his office manages, which is a big part of the undergraduate curriculum, the change in the number of theme requirements, and the number and availability of courses by theme and core requirements [he noted that there are no courses offered in the arts and humanities that also carry the environmental theme]), the curricular committees that exist (he provided the charges to the Council on Liberal Education and the Campus Writing Board), and Student Learning Outcomes. He also reviewed briefly the continuing efforts to improve graduate and retention rates:

- Enhance first-year programs, including freshmen and transfer orientation and freshmen Welcome Week
- Conduct earlier interventions with students who are showing signs of difficulty (e.g., mid-term alerts)
- Continue development of Grad Planner and other tools for advisors and students
- Increase education in financial literacy
- Review all curriculum with student-centered approach
- Help students make a clear decision on major and direction by end of sophomore year
- Recognize the fiscal concerns created for students by taking longer than four years to graduate

Professor Brothen thanked Dr. McMaster for his presentation.



## **2. Syllabus Policy**

Professor Brothen now asked Professor von Dassow for recommendations for changes in the syllabus policy.

Professor von Dassow noted that the syllabus policy requires that certain policies be included or referred to on course syllabi. At the meeting of the Faculty Senate when this Committee recommended that the statement on academic freedom be required, there were a number of objections to adding another policy to the list of those required on syllabi. She said she sees two problems: (1) students don't necessarily know or understand the policies applicable to their coursework, and (2) instructors don't necessarily know these policies either, nor that there is a policy requiring them to communicate policies to students. She said she is not sure the syllabus policy is the solution to the problem. If faculty members are to know about these policies, they must be told at the time of hiring and orientation. For students, replicating the policies on every syllabus is probably the least effective way to communicate them; they skip over the policies and want to know what they have to read.

Professor von Dassow reported that she asked some of her students what the best way would be to communicate the policies, because these are important. One suggestion was freshman orientation, and not just a "data dump." There should be real-time discussions of substance. Faculty members could discuss some in class (e.g., scholastic dishonesty). And how are the policies to be reinforced thereafter? The syllabus policy is not enforced and many faculty do not know about it. It would be possible to have a simpler policy that indicates there are policies and that provides links. She said that if the Committee wishes to consider revising the syllabus policy, it could start now.

Ms. Phillips said the concern arises a lot because policies change over time and they cannot be provided just once. The University has been trying to use technology to make them more available but that hasn't worked very well. Ms. Barta suggested putting a link in One-Stop and say students must read them—and that they can click a box to do so.

Professor Wambach recalled that the Committee has talked about asking the Office of Undergraduate Education to send a reminder to faculty members saying they should put a link to the policy library in their syllabi. Professor Chervany said that if the policies are important, freshmen should see them at orientation, but others will say that students receive so much at orientation that they won't absorb them. Dr. McMaster commented that he can send a message if the Committee wishes but he is aware that many instructors will use their "delete" key for it. Professor Wambach said there is a person in her department who reminds the faculty of what they must have on their syllabi.

Dr. Falkner said that if the concern is getting information to undergraduates, there are two publications to consider. One is Undergraduate Update, which goes out every other week and students may not opt out of it; it contains information labeled "need to know" and "nice to know." The Committee or Dr. McMaster could ask the editors of Undergraduate Update if there could be a message about policies added to it. The same could be done with the Graduate Update. Ms. Bardouche reported that when the syllabus policy was passed, she and Ms. Zenk in their office were charged to write a summary paragraph about each required policy so faculty could simply cut and paste that information into their syllabi, if they chose. A link to the summaries is at the bottom of the syllabus policy. Professor von Dassow agreed that would be valuable—if the faculty knew about it.

Professor McCormick said he has found these summaries very useful and suggested more would use them if they knew about them.

Professor Tarone observed that lists of policies are very boring. In Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training, they teach policies by critical incidents that are very interesting. They give people a story around the policy that gets them to think about it.

Professor Schiff said she serves on the Provost's Committee on Student Mental Health and has heard students say how powerful it is if a faculty member reads something or acknowledges a policy. It may be difficult to get faculty members to cut and paste policies into a syllabus, but if they do it can be very powerful.

Professor Chervany said he saw two issues. One, students need to understand that the policies exist and what they mean, and two, getting them tied to the syllabus. The latter is a cousin to the issue of providing students information about courses, something that his subcommittee is dealing with. It is possible to get something on every syllabus but it will be necessary to work through three critical people: the director of undergraduate studies, the department chairs, and the department administrators. The policy only requires that the syllabus make reference to the policies; it is an individual choice whether an instructor actually puts the policies on the syllabus. Those three people can remind the faculty about the policy.

Professor Ng pointed out that there are two parts to the syllabus policy, one that itemizes information specific to the course that must be provided, and the other that itemizes the policy statements. In the case of the latter, the syllabus only has to refer to them, and the titles indicate to students what they are about. Many students don't know about the make-up policy, for instance. She expands on some of the policies in her classes. Professor Chervany observed that policies exist because something comes up and there is an issue to resolve; the policies provide the mechanisms for doing so.

Dean McMaster said he has always believed that students should be exposed to the most important University policies. He has brought up the idea of presenting them at orientation with Assistant Vice Provost Laura Koch because they speak to the rights and responsibilities of students. Professor Chervany suggested that they could then do critical incident discussions at orientation—and those could be fun sessions. Draw on the policies that address the most problems. Professor Brothen said the policies need to be made more palatable all the way around; Professor Tarone observed that the Committee has spent a lot of time on the policies because of the stories it has heard, so there should be stories to present them.

Professor von Dassow said that the question is whether the policy requirement is the most effective way to communicate the policies. If instructors put them on syllabi, that doesn't guarantee they are read by the students. If one wants people to know something, one doesn't tell them, one teaches them. She did not think clicking on a box on a website would be effective but she concurred with the idea that engagement in discussion along the lines of the RCR model is a good one. She observed that there are ten policies required, and the faculty would have to go through all of them the first day of class; that academic freedom, one of the most important, was the one that tripped the discussion demonstrates that replicating policies on every syllabus is an ineffective way to communicate their content. The policy can be left as is if the Committee has not been able to find

alternatives, but if it believes it is important for students to know about the policies, it might find better ways to communicate them.

Professor Nelson agreed but said she did not believe Professor von Dassow has raised a policy question—she has raised an implementation question. Whether orientation or teacher training, the communication has to be done by people. Vice Provost McMaster is in charge of the policy, she observed.

Ms. Bardouche said that from a legalistic point of view, the policies are required for the syllabus to protect and inform students and faculty members. She suggested the Committee not chip away at the policy requirement, which takes care of those issues, but enhanced delivery of the content would be a great improvement. Professor von Dassow said that University policies apply whether or not they are on the syllabus; knowledge of them is not guaranteed by repeating them on syllabi. Professor Nelson said she saw the syllabus doing both; it is a two-part contract.

Ms. Koonjbeharry said it is helpful to have the policies on the syllabus, formally, and not just a link. Cases and vignettes would be beneficial, she added. Vignettes and one link to the policies applicable to coursework, Professor von Dassow asked? Ms. Koonjbeharry agreed. She said she likes having the link there so she can refer back to them. She would also go to One-Stop to find them—but she is a graduate student, she pointed out, and does not know what a freshman would know. Professor Schiff suggested that there can be flexibility—some of the policies could be contained in a link and some could be highlighted with additional language to indicate how they relate to a particular class.

Professor Chervany said that whether there is one link or ten links, he surmised that most policies would affect the students in the context of the class. If they wonder what the policy says, the link is there. Professor von Dassow agreed that they do cover things that come up in class and reiterated the point several had made earlier that there are a number of mechanism by which to reach students, such as orientation. Professor Nelson agreed that orientation would be a possibility but said that's like a blizzard for students, and that perhaps an interactive experience after they have been in school for a month, because there is an enormous difference between high school and college.

Professor Ng said it must be an ongoing process if students are to learn effectively about the policies. It cannot be only the syllabus policy that provides them. Orientation is a great place to start students thinking, but it can't be the only place, either. If the University wants the students to learn the policies identified in the syllabus, there is only one way, and that is by having students hear about them over and over. And not just students, Professor Tarone suggested.

Professor Brothen concluded that the Committee suggests that orientation is one way to take up the policies with students. He adjourned the meeting at 4:00.

-- Gary Engstrand