

Minutes*

Faculty Consultative Committee
Thursday, April 12, 2012
1:00 – 3:00
262 Mondale Hall

- Present: Chris Cramer (chair), Avner Ben-Ner, Peter Bitterman, Thomas Brothen, Colin Campbell, Carol Chomsky, Janet Ericksen, Caroline Hayes, Walt Jacobs, Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, Russell Luepker, Elaine Tyler May, Jan McCulloch, James Pacala, George Sheets
- Absent: Linda Bearinger, Elizabeth Boyle, Nancy Ehlke, Richard Ziegler
- Guests: President Eric Kaler, Provost Karen Hanson, Professor Michael Hancher
- Other: Chief of Staff Amy Phenix, Jon Steadland (Office of the President), Ken Savary (Office of the Board of Regents)

[In these minutes: The intellectual future of the University]

The Intellectual Future of the University

Professor Cramer convened the meeting at 1:00, welcomed President Kaler and Provost Hanson, and announced that the discussion would be off the record in order to encourage free-wheeling and open debate. He explained, for the benefit of Provost Hanson and new Committee members, that the "Intellectual Future" discussions, held twice per year, are a time when the Committee and its guests extract themselves from the daily hurly-burly of University business and focus on larger issues.

In advance of the meeting, the President had offered four questions he thought it would be useful to discuss:

1. How can we best deal with the need for remedial education for our entering students?
2. What will be the role of alternate credentialing for students at a R1 institution?
3. What is the future of the liberal arts and humanities?
4. What is magical about 120 credits?

Committee members, the President, and the Provost held a two-hour discussion that touched on, among other topics, alternatives to the baccalaureate degree for students seeking credentials for various purposes (especially given the high cost of higher education), the (contested) perception on the part of some some—primarily in the business community—that the skills employers need are not part of student learning at the University, issues associated with writing skills and writing instruction, increasingly specialized knowledge and how it can be embedded in pedagogy and brought to bear on solving problems, the role of the arts and humanities and the (inappropriate) way the debate is framed about the value of such studies, the nature of the conversation with the business and external community, faculty

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responsibility in determining what it means to be educated in the 21st Century both in general and specifically with respect to each of the disciplines in which students may major, the extent to which the structure of disciplines may not match the desired outcomes of a college education, the need for a clear distillation of the Student Learning Outcomes that can be understood by the public at large, the need for more training in teamwork in many disciplines, the pipelines from community colleges to the University, coordination and collaboration with K-12 education, the need for broader education at the graduate level (while not abandoning training in the field), the increased importance of critical thinking because of its centrality in gaining access to—and evaluating—specialized knowledge, the outside demands on students (e.g., work), the apparent general decline in the amount of school work students do outside of class ("homework") and corresponding pressure on the faculty to reduce academic demands (versus the view that demands should not be reduced, in part because students are paying more and should not be given less for their money), and whether the budget model hinders increased interdisciplinary course offerings.

Professor Cramer thanked everyone for the lively discussion and adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota