

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy  
October 13, 1988**

Present: Douglas Biggs, John Clark (chair), Jean Congdon, Roland Guyotte, Robert Jones, Steven Joul, Robert Kvavik, Marvin Mattson, Timothy Mazzoni, Gary Nelsestuen, Shelley Thomas

**1. Meeting Schedule**

Professor Clark confirmed and clarified the meeting schedule. The copy distributed at the meeting was incorrect; the October 27 and April 27 meetings will be held in Room 202, St. Paul Student Center. All others, as originally set, will be held in Room 624 Campus Club, although the need for the June 8 meeting will be reconsidered as the year progresses. (A revised copy of the schedule is attached to these minutes.)

**2. Mailing List**

The Committee agreed upon the list of individuals to whom its agendas and minutes would be distributed.

**3. Review of Agenda**

Professor Clark briefly reviewed the items on the agenda which had been mailed to Committee members. The major items include: The change from the quarter to the semester; the relationship between credits and class hours; liberal education, first year experience, and large introductory classes; centralization of advising and the quality and training of its personnel; the University's climate enrichment; and educational outcomes and evaluation. There were also about a dozen other more specific matters with which the Committee might deal during the year.

Professor Clark reported that Professor James Tracy, chair of the Undergraduate Education Committee, has indicated that his committee would be prepared to take up the issues of the first year experience and large introductory classes; Tracy suggested that liberal education either wait on the implementation of FASE (Faculty of the Arts, Sciences, and Engineering) or be examined by a task force which should be appointed by the Provost.

**4. Changing from the Quarter to the Semester**

Professor Clark noted that the Committee had on the table a motion to consider the change to the semester system; it was moved, seconded, and voted that the motion be taken from the table. The calendar of Academic Priorities which had been presented to the Regents, Professor Clark noted, called for action on this issue at the Winter Quarter meeting of the Senate; that would require that SCEP

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complete its work and forward a recommendation to the Senate Consultative Committee at its January meeting if the docket deadline of the Senate meeting were to be met. Committee members spent the remainder of the meeting discussing the matter.

Much of the deliberation revolved around the nature of the information that the Committee members should have before they vote on the motion. It was noted that the Committee already has copies of the Robinett report and the position papers prepared by Assistant Vice President Kvavik; the consensus of the meeting appeared to be that information from other institutions similar to the University which have made the change would be useful (such as Michigan State, Berkeley, Iowa State, and Florida State).

Assistant Vice President Kvavik agreed that the materials could be provided but pointed out that most of it is subjective; there is no rich body of data and it is probably impossible to ascertain anything like precise dollar cost figures. As far as cost is concerned, he pointed out, the switch to the semester should be considered as part of a much larger package of changes (FASE, the single entry point, centralized advising, etc.); in that context, the cost of the switch to the semester system is only a very minor part of the package.

Dr. Kvavik was asked how the other institutions had come to make the change. Berkeley, he said, had asked how the discussion could be framed so that the faculty and students could make the right decision. When push came to shove, however, they reported, the discussion all revolved around the calendar rather than the academic policy matters which should attend the question. Dr. Kvavik asserted that what should be asked is if the 14-week module, with its increased time for advising and for the faculty to get to know students in class, is academically sounder than the quarter system. Some, he said, have asked if outcomes assessment can be obtained; since assessment is only beginning, there is no information available. The quarter system could be made more "friendly," but there will simply not be enough advisors with quarters. Finally, he added, the national trend is that schools are moving from quarters to semesters; no institution is going the opposite way.

Asked about the impact on space, Dr. Kvavik said that there would be none in St. Paul and a little on the West Bank. The question cannot really be answered, he pointed out, until the credit module is chosen; that drives the amount of classroom space that is required. He said he does not believe space will be a problem.

One Committee member inquired about the possible impact on students: Right now they seem to oppose it; it would be useful to have something concrete to convince them it would be in their own best interests. The semester system could, for instance, interfere with the need of many students to work (especially with the projected possible tuition increases). Dr. Kvavik said there were no data but that experience elsewhere suggested there was no impact on student load; the module size has a greater impact on student schedules than does the semester versus quarter question.

Students who must take off time to work, it was pointed out, would have to take one-half the year off rather than one-third (one quarter). Dr. Kvavik responded that a recent study from Vice President Wilderson's office gathered data which demonstrated that there is no difference in the debt burden of students who do and do not work; it appears that students who work do not use the income to pay the expenses of college.

Committee members concurred that the data available were probably limited and that the Committee could not do a full evaluative study. They also concluded that to the extent possible, however, they wished to see some additional information, in reasonably concise form, from other institutions in order that they were not relying solely on the Robinett report and the Academic Affairs position paper.

Dr. Kvavik was asked what changes occurred, besides the calendar, at other schools, and what their summary of the change was; Berkeley, he answered, told him that there had been a lot of headaches and unanticipated changes but that the curricular result, in their judgment, had made it worth the trouble.

Dr. Kvavik returned once again to the broader academic questions; some, he noted, have argued that semesters provide fewer choices of classes. In his own discipline, political science, for example, it is more important to teach the paradigms of the profession and they do not need a smorgasbord of courses to do that.

In response to questions, Dr. Kvavik reported that the number of hours spent by students in class was about the same with either quarters or semesters and that the number of classes taken by students under a semester system averaged 3-4. As for the ecology classes that must be conducted in the late spring, he pointed out that those classes are very few in number and that it doesn't make sense to hold up the entire system for those few classes if the semester system is otherwise determined to be academically sound. Special arrangements for those classes can be made. He added that both President Sauer and Vice President Gene Allen now prefer the semester system.

One Committee member recalled that he had been an undergraduate at an institution when it had changed from quarters to semesters. The students had opposed the change, he reported, largely because they didn't know what to expect. There is, he pointed out, virtually no impact on "sequence" courses; what is put in three courses in a quarter system is put into two with a semester. The larger changes occur in the other courses. He agreed that from an undergraduate perspective the semester system had turned out to be better; there was more time with instructors, more time to do papers. There was less of an impact on graduate students. Dr. Kvavik added that there were also fewer exams spread across more time. He asked why the burden of proof seems to be on the advocates of change; why do not the benefits of better advising and longer time in class make it worth the change?

One committee member observed that many on the campus still see this proposed change as centrally-driven by the people who proposed Commitment to Focus; this opinion persists even though there are no data and resistance remains even with compelling arguments in favor of the semester. The perception exists that the administration wants this change and the administration will get it, which is unfortunate. The change will not be made by a rehash of old arguments; the Committee needs some additional information which it can use. Dr. Kvavik said he understood that that perception existed. It is bothersome, he said, because the central administration sometimes becomes focussed on specific or special interests to the exclusion of institution-wide concerns of significant importance. Then, when the administration does take up such concerns, such as the semester system and the ratio of class hours to credits, they are seen as centrally-driven. The focus, he repeated, should be on the educational question: Are students getting a better education? It was suggested to Dr. Kvavik that while the decision should turn on that question, there are other interests at stake as well.

Dr. Kvavik agreed to find out if there were data from other schools on cost, space, curriculum,

teaching load, and so on. He repeated that the data are likely to be sparse; he recalled that when he asked the Berkeley people whether or not they saved money, their response had been "we think so." He also recalled that Provost Benjamin had pointed out that if the only question was whether or not the shift to the semester should be made, the answer would be no; raised in the context of the other University changes, however, it should perhaps be a different answer.

Asked about the impact on the other systems in the state and the possible problems of converting student transcripts, Dr. Kvavik noted that of those who graduate from the University, about one-half come from (1007) other schools; changing transcripts is not a big deal because we already do it for half of the students. The other systems in the state will be watching the University in deciding what to do.

Dr. Kvavik suggested that it might be useful to bring to the University the people from Michigan State who had recently gone on a national tour to visit institutions which had made the change; they could visit with the Committee and relate what they had discovered. He agreed to contact them and try to arrange a visit; if the visit is possible, the Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs and the Senate Consultative Committee would be invited to join a meeting inasmuch as they will also be dealing with the proposal. Dr. Kvavik repeated that the argument for a semester has to be seen as a package of issues rather than standing alone.

It was agreed that if any Committee members had requests for information not voiced at the meeting they should contact Professor Clark in the next few days; he would relay the request to Dr. Kvavik. It was also agreed that fora about the change should be held on the campus, although the Committee agreed to wait on deciding who should sponsor them until it had additional information. There were concerns about whether or not the press of time would preclude holding such fora in a credible fashion; the Committee decided to take up those concerns in two weeks.

The Committee adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota