

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy  
January 28, 1993**

Present: James Tracy (chair), Victor Bloomfield, Thomas Clayton, Megan Gunnar, Michael Handberg, Kenneth Heller, Robert Johnson, Andy Kuehnel, Lois Regnier, Clark Starr

Guests: Darwin Hendel, Vice President Anne Hopkins

[In these minutes: revised policy on the ratio of credits to contact hours; evaluation of teaching--peer review and student evaluations.]

**1. Revision, Senate Policy on Credits and Contact Hours**

Professor Tracy convened the meeting at 1:25 and turned first to Professor Heller's draft proposal, following discussions at SCEP last year, revising the Senate policy calling generally for a 1:1 ratio between credits awarded for a course and weekly contact hours. He recalled that there had been discussion with Dr. Hopkins last year about how to carry out the policy; the drift of the conversations had been that perhaps the policy itself was not a good one and that a revision should be proposed.

One Committee member commended the draft as meeting the objections of those who disliked the mathematical equivalence. Correspondence from faculty exists, Professor Tracy recalled, pointing out that when the change to the 4-credit module was made in the early 1970s, some courses were apparently simply offered for 4 credits rather than 3--with no additional work. The Senate policy attempted to restore the relationship between credits and work. Professor Tracy said he would attempt to contact those who had identified the problem.

One possible objection to making a change is because it will appear that faculty members do not wish to be held accountable for teaching, at a time when the University is trying to keep its relationship with the legislature in good repair. The impressions created to allay legislative concerns, however, may be seen by some to represent the triumph of expedience over what the faculty actually believe is most pedagogically wise, observed another Committee member. In any number of disciplines, individual reading and thought by students may be worth more than additional contact with a faculty member that consists of writing notes from lectures.

Dr. Hopkins made a number of points about the existing and proposed policies.

The practice in a number of departments, primarily in CLA, is to offer 4-credit courses that meet 3 hours per week; additional work is to be assigned outside of class. In the view of one Committee member, that is perfectly acceptable at a place such as the University, which is discipline-centered and learning-centered.

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Student members of the Committee generally supported the revised policy, on the grounds that a single rigid policy for the entire University was probably unworkable and that the extra work assigned was required--although, in the case of the latter, there may be abuse in a number of CLA departments, it was said. There would probably be practical problems with rooms and faculty time, if CLA were required to move wholesale to a 1:1 ratio. But students would learn more with an additional hour in the classroom, argued one of the student members of the Committee.

The more an institution tries to centralize control over these activities, the more trouble it will be in, asserted another Committee member; the value of an educational experience should be determined at the departmental level, both in terms of content and credits offered. By the same token, the departments should determine if faculty have appropriate teaching loads for the work to be done.

Another Committee member supported the change, noting that the 1989 policy obscures the older definition of a credit (3 hours of work per week per credit awarded); the revision makes that definition clearer.

One problem confronting faculty members is that students can see the University as an extension of high school; once they walk out of the lecture, they forget about the course. Everything should be done to encourage students to realize they will be engaged in lifelong learning, that the faculty are a resource, and that most of their learning will occur outside the classroom. It ISN'T clear that students learn more if they sit in the classroom an extra hour; it may subtracting from time they should be spending thinking about a subject--but the faculty must demand it. Thoughtful discussions in class led by faculty would be an appropriate way to stimulate such thinking, responded another Committee member.

Three hours of learning effort per week per credit is reasonable, observed another Committee member, as long as everyone is honest about the equation. The proposed policy, interjected one Committee member, calls for annual estimation of student effort required in a course--if taken seriously, a faculty member should estimate how much work is expected of students. The discussion last year, it was recalled, noted that faculty who have taught the same or similar courses have a sense for the amount of work entailed; the involvement of the department is clearly a new element of the plan--and probably very good. It serves to reinforce the "community of scholars" notion rather than the carte blanche authority of the individual professor. It should encourage communication among the faculty as well as to the students what the department and individual faculty members find reasonable.

One Committee member expressed reservations: This policy would permit a faculty member to see students for one hour per week but ensure that students had enough work to do for the rest of the week. One could read the policy that way, it was said, but one has to rely on the good sense of the faculty and departments to not allow one 50-minute meeting per week for 4 credits.

Discussion turned to the possibility of making more explicit the elements that go into the delivery of instruction, such as lectures, reading, lab work, and so on. The language was amended to reflect this concern. It was also clarified that this policy speaks to the "average"; it does not offer a contract to individual students nor does it set a ceiling.

**On vote taken, the Committee approved the policy 8-1.** Professor Tracy said he would take the proposal to the Senate Consultative Committee for placement on the docket of the Senate.

## **2. Evaluation of Teaching: Peer Review**

Professor Tracy next drew the attention of Committee members to the revised motion on peer review prepared by Professor Wick. Several changes were made:

- In the documentation, the call for a one-to-two page self-assessment of teaching strengths and weaknesses was made a recommendation rather than a requirement.
- The "cumulative record" for an individual faculty member should generally include the records between promotions, and for at least a ("rolling") five year period after achievement of full professor rank, with the final determination to be left up to the individual departments. Better yet, determination of how long records should be kept may be left to each unit. The items in the "cumulative record" can be examples, not a comprehensive record.
- There was some concern about bureaucratization of the process, but Committee members concluded that generally the modifications that have evolved will prevent the growth of bureaucracy while at the same time setting in place useful procedures that permit intelligent judgment by units about their application.

The Committee, by common assent, approved the revised motion on peer review of teaching efforts.

Professor Tracy expressed deep thanks to Professor Wick for the many revisions the Committee had requested, an appreciation joined by the other Committee members.

## **3. Evaluation of Teaching: Student Evaluations**

Professor Heller distributed language synthesizing comments at earlier meetings about the information provided by Messrs. Jocelyn and Perry of the Measurement Services Center. Committee members worked for a considerable while on editing the language.

- The questions called for in the Senate policy are primarily summative, and should be recognized as such. Written comments, or other questions added by the instructor or department, will serve as the basis for course improvement in the future.
- Demographic information will be solicited, in addition to the required questions, and space must also be provided for additional questions developed by the instructor or the unit. The Committee agreed on the academic demographic information that should be sought (major, GPA, class year, whether the class is required or elective for that student) but dealt for some time with the question of what personal demographic information should be sought (e.g., age, race, gender); the uses which it would serve/benefits it would provide, were the subject of lengthy deliberation. The Committee resolved the matter by deciding the questionnaire should "request" students to provide information on race/ethnicity, gender, and age--but not requiring them to provide it.

- The policy will be appropriately implemented by the administration; that it will do so need not be a part of the policy itself. Responsibility for implementation of the policy will rest with each campus administration.
- The results of the student evaluations will also be provided to the department chair (providing that the Senate policy does not prohibit such a practice). Permitting the instructor to retain the results would defeat one of the major purposes of the policy, which is to develop departmental and collegiate norms. The administration, moreover, Dr. Hopkins said, would be unwilling to pay for student evaluations that are not used.
- It was agreed that the evaluations will be administered at the beginning of a class period, rather than the end, because students often have other obligations that require them to depart after class; the response rate could be significantly affected if the questionnaire is distributed at the end of the class. The Committee also agreed that the guiding principle is that the evaluations should not be "contaminated" between the time they are filled out and the time they are tabulated. Given the possibility that forms could be lost, it was agreed that a student should bring the surveys to the department office and that they should be logged in before being sent to the appropriate processing center.

It was agreed that Professor Tracy would provide a clean copy of the policy to the principal authors, and that the final version would be reviewed by the Committee one last time, on February 11.

The Committee adjourned at 3:15.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota