

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, December 1, 1993
2:30 - 4:30
Room 608 Campus Club

Present: Kenneth Heller (chair), Craig Bursch, Anita Cholewa, Megan Gunnar, Darwin Hendel, Michael Pawlicki, Carla Phillips, William Van Essendelft, Darren Walhof

Regrets: Thomas Clayton, James Cotter, Sue Donaldson, Robert Johnson, Manuel Kaplan, Gayle Graham Yates

Absent: Daniel Boler

Guests: None

Others: None

[In these minutes: Strategic planning, advanced placement credits]

[Correction: It should be noted that Darren Walhof, a graduate student member of the Committee, has attended every meeting this year; his name has been inadvertently left off the list of those present.]

1. Strategic Planning

Professor Heller convened the meeting at 2:30 and reported that he would have to depart early in order to attend an FCC meeting at 4:00. He then inquired if SCEP wished to say anything about the revised planning documents or the FCC resolution that had been circulated. He reviewed the FCC language and also pointed out that the revised mission and vision statement clearly "reflects the fingerprints" of SCEP.

All present agreed it was the sense of the Committee that it supported the FCC resolution on strategic planning.

It was suggested that Professor Heller should draft a message from SCEP for appearance on FacultyWrites saying that broad-based participation in the planning process is sought; this notion that things are being done in secret must be dispelled. The minutes of the Committee should also be posted it was said, and Professor Heller was directed to raise questions about the decision by SCC last year that minutes not appear on gopher. The process must appear and must be known to be open in order diffuse the free-floating negativism that pervades the institution.

Committee members discussed the extent of the changes in the planning documents. One

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

individual said that while Senate committees have been aware of the various iterations, other faculty appear not to be getting the information. A number of comments in one college meeting were appropriate to the first draft--but not this version. Faculty support might well increase if faculty members were aware of the current contents of the documents. Any identification of changes must be brief, warned one Committee member; faculty haven't the time to identify nuance changes from one document to the next. It was also suggested that FCC might identify one individual outside the administration to summarize the documents.

These planning documents are not final, Professor Heller told the Committee. Academic Affairs intends to edit them up to the point they are acted on by the Board of Regents in January. As a consequence, Committee members should feel free to make further comments on them; the revised mission statement demonstrates that these interactions do have an effect. Not every suggested change is made, but many were. Committee members should send any changes by email or give him a call, Professor Heller suggested.

Committee members then made a several suggestions for additional changes in the text of the mission and vision statement. Professor Heller agreed to collect these changes and forward them to Associate Vice President Kvavik.

It was suggested that the author of the missive to FacultyWrites conveying the concerns of freshmen be invited to participate in SCEP meetings. The issues raised should not be lost and the presentation was thoughtful.

2. CIC Document on Undergraduate Education

Professor Heller drew the attention of Committee members to the document prepared by the CIC (the eleven Big Ten universities plus the University of Chicago) on undergraduate education at research universities. This is a "lovely document" that the University should just use, commented one Committee member. It will be discussed at a meeting in the near future, Professor Heller promised--it says, succinctly and well, what the Committee has been saying, and it should be used to help formulate specific things the University should do in this realm under the umbrella of U2000.

The next important timeline is the legislative request. The Committee should think about what it would like to see in that request; this document should be drawn on for that discussion. The train is going down the track so the Committee must act quickly; it can help set priorities, identify what is realistic, and what should be done. It is to be hoped that the Committee will try to strengthen the link between the research mission and both undergraduate and graduate education.

3. Policy on Advance Placement Credit

Professor Heller then noted the proposed policy on advanced placement (AP) and international baccalaureate examinations; the recommendations were developed by a small committee that included Professor Heller among its members. It tries to make the policy uniform, simple, and transparent to everyone--and to encourage use of AP credits. AP students tend to be good students who should be encouraged to attend the University.

No department is obligated to award AP credits, it was pointed out, but the policy calls for departments that do not do so to explain to SCEP why they don't. The reasons might be interesting, and could raise questions about awarding such credits at all or about their decision not to do so.

That is the point, Professor Heller said. This establishes a standard policy, compatible with the practices of most units. A unit can decide NOT to award AP credits but must justify their reasons for the decision. It was agreed that the language in the policy calling for notification to SCEP should be strengthened so the Committee would be assured it was aware of any decisions not to award AP credits.

Several other points were touched upon in the conversation.

- The decision to eliminate partial exemptions from University requirements should not make the policy too rigid. The practice of granting differential numbers of credits, depending on the test score, would not be permitted--except in those cases where courses are clearly sequential (e.g., mathematics), where a higher score represents coverage of MORE material. SCEP could ask departments to justify a decision to award different numbers of credits for different scores on the AP test.
- The policy calls for "exemptions" awarded for AP test results to be an award of college credit for the course in question. This policy says that if a student has acquired the knowledge contained in a University course, the student will be awarded the credits for that course--that is the whole philosophy of AP testing and credits. Without credits, it wouldn't be AP. One can, of course, argue with the concept itself--should the University award credit for education it does not deliver?
- An alternative idea, said one Committee member, would be to permit students to get out of required courses which might bore them and go into courses that interest them--but not permit them to get out of the University any earlier. This is a very different notion of AP.
- Professor Heller was asked if the committee looked at data--do students coming in with 20 AP credits then only take 160 credits at the University? In practice, he said, very few students have very many AP credits--very few students have any AP credits. It is a carrot to attract good students, to allow them to come in with perhaps 4 - 8 credits from AP courses that will count in their degree programs. In a sense, this is a recruiting tool. One Committee member recalled seeing a study suggesting that students who come in with AP credits nonetheless end up taking 180 or more credits at the University anyway.

Professor Heller noted that the University has taken the lead on this issue in the state and suggested to the other systems that it develop a policy for their consideration. The State University System will act on it in February; it would be best if the University acted rapidly on a policy that it had developed.

One Committee member took exception to the policy, expressing "hearty disapproval" of the whole notion. If high schools were preparing students properly for university study, this might be acceptable. But there have been AP students who have tested out of the composition requirements who cannot write and others who have tested out of introductory disciplinary courses who don't understand the subject. Perhaps that cannot be changed easily, but one can see a continuing degradation of educational standards

and the failure to demand enough at ANY level. That, it was concluded, "is the dead squirrel on the picnic table."

In terms of the tests in specific disciplines, it is for that reason that departments may choose not to award AP credits, responded one Committee member. One can be confident that the History faculty, for instance, can judge what a student should know to achieve AP credit--and if they concluded the test is inadequate, they can decline to award the credit. Making that judgment, it was observed, may be easier in some disciplines (e.g., for calculus) than in others (e.g., the social sciences). The fact that the test in one discipline is inadequate, however, should not preclude other departments from awarding AP credits if they believe the process is acceptable.

Another Committee member expressed complete agreement with the view that the University should only award credits for what it has taught and that educational standards are sinking at all levels. But this is a national program and one cannot ignore the evidence that students who receive AP credits generally do well in college--even if there are glitches in some areas. The University wants to encourage bright students to come here. One can be confident, it was argued, that good departments will ensure that students have the knowledge required in their disciplines before they graduate.

A related problem, it was said, is the fact that there are 1000 high school students at the University--that is a lot, and one can worry that if all these high school students can succeed in University classes, our expectations are not high enough.

It was agreed that the Committee would take up the proposed policy for action at its meeting next week.

There being no further business, Professor Heller adjourned the meeting at 3:30.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota