

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, December 2, 1998
1:00 – 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall

Present: Judith Martin (chair), Darwin Hendel, Gordon Hirsch, Laura Coffin Koch, Kathleen Newell, Martin O’Hely, Jeff Ratliff-Crain, Palmer Rogers, Richard Skaggs, Suzanne Bates Smith, Thomas Soulen, Craig Swan

Regrets: Robert Johnson, Christine Maziar

Absent: Shumaila Anwer

Guests: Interim University College Dean Gail Skinner-West, Dr. William Van Essendelft

[In these minutes: status of institutional measures; length of final exams under semesters; role of the IMG subcommittee and related issues; data on the first year of plus/minus grading on the Twin Cities campus; discussion with UC Dean Skinner-West]

1. Institutional Measures

Professor Martin convened the meeting at 1:00, welcomed new member Suzanne Bates Smith from University College, and then turned to Dr. Hendel for a report on the critical measures.

Dr. Hendel said he would comment on the INSTITUTIONAL-level critical measures, because those are the ones that were developed in consultation with SCEP and other committees. He reviewed the history of how the measures came into being and noted that there is an annual report on University progress, the Institutional Performance Report, on achieving the strategic goals set out by the measures. He distributed to the Committee a copy of the most recent such report (12/97; the next report will be presented to the Board of Regents in February, 1999).

Dr. Hendel also distributed copies of a report on “Overall Satisfaction of Minnesota Citizens with the University of Minnesota,” the result of a 1996 public opinion poll. He commented that in terms of surveys of Twin Cities undergraduate students, satisfaction levels are much higher than they were six years ago, so it appears that the undergraduate initiative begun by President Hasselmo has made a difference. Surveys of recent graduates and of faculty and staff also have been conducted. The intent is to do them periodically, not every year, although the cycle has not been established. The survey of faculty/staff and of graduates might be done every three years or so; it may, on the other hand, make sense to survey current students annually or every other year. He agreed that coordination of the student surveys with similar college efforts would be productive.

*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 represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate or Assembly, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

When the critical measures were first proposed, Dr. Hendel recalled, it was never assumed that they were carved in stone; there may be some that should be revisited and perhaps changed. He outlined six issues related to the question of reconsidering the critical measures.

-- A CIC (Big Ten universities plus the University of Chicago) committee looked at overall institutional performance measures used by nine institutions and identified a number of concerns (they are focussed on outcomes, not on how the outcomes are accomplished; they are not connected with each other; they do not take into account best practices; none looked at international issues; and some are not linked to important strategic planning issues for the next century).

In terms of the lack of focus on process, Dr. Hendel explained that the institution cannot effectively do something about an outcome unless it understands the underlying process that led to the outcome, and can take action on the process in order to affect the outcome.

-- The literature on institutional performance measures suggests that the measures need to be living and to evolve to accommodate changes in the institution.

-- The data base for one of the measures relies on information from other institutions; those data are now less available than before, so the institutional measure cannot be implemented as constructed.

-- The set of principles developed with the critical measures noted the need to take into account annual fluctuations in numbers; it is necessary to look at data over time, rather than on a year-to-year basis.

-- There may be a desire to include overall institutional quality and reputation measures; there was originally a proposal to include such a measure, which some favored and some opposed.

With respect to the information resources measure, the field is changing so rapidly that it is no longer as relevant and needs discussion in light of distance education, the libraries, and other electronic technologies affecting how the University conducts its affairs. There are other measures in the set that continue to be valued, but not implemented, such as those relating to outreach and to research/scholarly and artistic accomplishments.

Once the February, 1999, report on the measures has been made, Dr. Hendel said possible changes in them should be discussed in various venues, including Senate committees. He agreed that the office of Institutional Research and Reporting could not alone be responsible for evaluating and revising them; the question of staff is one that needs discussion.

What happens if the University does not hit the targets set out in the measures, asked one Committee member? Dr. Hendel noted that in some cases, the measures seem to push in contradictory directions. He recalled that there was one year when the University's performance on five of the measures was the basis for funding from the legislature. That experience conveyed the sense that it was neither easy nor wise to use the measures in that fashion. There are, therefore, no external funding implications for not meeting the goals; what is most critical is that the institution have measures in place which inform it whether it is moving in the directions it intends and wishes. There is less emphasis on what happens if the goals are not met, but the institution should address the reasons for the failure to meet them. Either the goal was unrealistic or the institution should evaluate what it must do to reach it.

Professor Martin thanked Dr. Hendel for his presentation and asked that he let the Committee know whenever he needed it to talk about the issues associated with the institutional measures and their revision.

2. Length of Examination Periods

Professor Martin next reported that she had received an inquiry about the possibility of holding 3-hour exams once the change to semesters has been effected. Should the policy be amended to permit longer exams? There are some number of classes, slightly over 30, that now conduct 3-hour exams; they are primarily classes in I.T.

It was recalled that the Committee had a lengthy discussion of this subject when the semester conversion standards were adopted; some thought exams should be longer, some believed it would not be possible to fit enough 3-hour examinations in a 6-day exam period (at least for the Twin Cities campus).

Committee members inquired if those courses (perhaps primarily in math) required more computation time, or were more difficult; what should be the criteria for allowing longer exam times—simply a request for one? What if, for a particular student, a 3-hour exam overlapped with a 2-hour exam scheduled to follow it? The current rule, reported one Committee member, is that (supposedly) only 5-credit courses can offer 3-hour exams.

It was agreed that the Committee would consider a draft amendment to existing policy. [It was learned subsequent to the meeting that the Senate-approved Semester Conversion Standards contain this language: “Final examinations normally shall be two (clock) hours long; instructors may schedule longer examinations with the approval of their department.”]

3. Graduate and Professional Award Nominating Committee

Professor Martin read a list of names of individuals who might be asked to serve on the nominating committee for the graduate and professional teaching award. The Committee approved the names; Professor Martin said she would contact the individuals.

4. Incentives for Managed Growth (IMG)

Professor Martin called now on Tom Soulen for a report and questions from the IMG Oversight Subcommittee. Professor Soulen said that he had asked for time on the agenda because the Subcommittee had discussed how broad its charge is and wished guidance from the parent committees (Educational Policy and Finance and Planning). Should the Subcommittee deal only with IMG as a resource allocation system, or should it also take up other related issues that have arisen? It has encountered a number of issues that are not directly IMG-related, but that should be addressed.

Professor Martin observed that SCEP’s interest is in the impact of IMG on educational programs across the institution.

The IMG Subcommittee will be interviewing deans and department heads and those involved with inter-disciplinary programs, and will develop a list of “must” questions to be asked; he invited SCEP

members to suggest such questions. He also pointed out that IMG is a convenient explanation for a lot of problems that predated IMG; he said he would welcome any insights into how document the impact of IMG on the educational enterprise.

Dr. Hendel said he was working with other institutions on evaluating how budget system changes affect other measures in the institution. The challenge at Minnesota is that IMG is not the only major institutional change underway, and it may be impossible to identify the extent to which anything happened because of IMG in isolation. Professor Soulen agreed, but commented that his instinctive feeling is that certain things would not happen except for IMG.

5. Plus/Minus Grading

Professor Martin distributed copies of a set of tables of data provided by Vice Provost Swan which portrayed the distribution of grades during the first year that plusses and minuses were available. Dr. Swan said that it is clear that plus/minus grading is the official policy of the University, that in his view there are advantages to faculty in using it, but that the administration was not prepared to establish a "plus/minus police force."

Dr. Swan noted that the Duluth campus has had plus/minus grading for some time. The percentage of courses that included plusses or minuses was about the same on the Twin Cities (the first year of plusses and minuses) that it was in Duluth (after a number of years). There was no "learning curve"; it appears the use of plus/minus grading may have reached a steady state in the first year.

The data also suggest that any concern about an impact on GPAs was unwarranted; there appears to have been no significant impact on grades awarded. Following brief discussion of the data, the Committee agreed that it needed to take no further action on the matter. Professor Martin thanked Dr. Swan for providing the data.

6. Discussion with University College Interim Dean Gail Skinner-West

Professor Martin now welcomed Dean Gail Skinner West, along with her colleague (and former SCEP member), Dr. William Van Essendelft.

Dr. West began by presenting her philosophy of what University College is about. UC is engaged in strategic planning about the future that began some time ago, to redefine its vision. They will have conversations with constituents, both internal and external, about what they see as the appropriate mission and how UC can bring value to the University. In her view, it is important that UC be a partner and look at the interests of the University as a whole -- and that those can be accomplished at the same time.

Of interest to SCEP is the partnership degrees, which grew out of work between the University and MnSCU and interest in having students transfer to a 4-year degree program that is not oriented to graduate work; these are practitioner-oriented degrees. Dr. West said she did not know the history of views of the previous dean or provost, because she was not in University College; she and Dr. Bruininks, however, agree on the role of partnership degrees. This is probably not going to be an area of growth, and UC will not add many more such programs. There are existing programs, and a few in development; there is a University interest in responding to needs. It is clear that the community college presidents are interested in continuing these opportunities, and the University should do so, but carefully.

The partnership degrees work best when there is clear documentation through market research, a strong partnership between University faculty, MnSCU faculty, and industry, and direct college involvement that draws on the expertise of University faculty.

University College is developing an academic council, a faculty body with oversight and review responsibility for existing degrees and approval authority for any future degrees. A plan for the council will be provided to the Provost within the next month; it is to be named by the Provost, presumably from nominations provided by the deans from across the campus, and chaired by a faculty member. It is not intended to be a UC body, but an independent faculty body.

Discussion following covered a number of points.

-- Partnership programs in development have been reviewed by ad hoc committees; one, the bachelor of network administration, seems to have served as an example that should set a standard on how these degree programs should be developed. It is well-grounded both in the faculty and in industry.

-- One issue that has arisen is how the partnership degree programs should be named; this is perhaps an issue for SCEP to take up.

-- Two additional programs being considered have raised questions from the colleges, and it is not certain that either will ever become degree programs. According to Dr. Skinner-West, the proposals would not duplicate anything currently offered by Metropolitan State, in the view of the community college presidents, but complementarity is an important principle in considering these programs. Any decision to go forward will be made by the colleges, not by UC.

-- Partnership degrees must meet the same criteria as any other degree program proposal to the administration and Regents, and questions are raised about all with respect to duplication, need, and so on. Dr. Skinner-West noted that the degrees must be part of the University, but there will be a natural tension because these are not typical students and they have different needs.

-- There has been concern about the lack of faculty involvement in the Masters of Liberal Studies program. Run by the Graduate School, the faculty have been committed to teaching but not in governance. Students in the program appear not to have difficulty finding faculty to work with; a larger question is how to involve such students in the life of the academic community. Earlier, the students were not interested; now it appears they may be more so. On the other hand, some faculty may not see MLS students as regular graduate students, so may be uncertain how to fold them into the regular advising structure. In most parts of the University, faculty train graduate students in a field, to be like faculty; the MLS program is different, where people define their own path, so it may be hard to identify someone to work with. In addition, faculty time is valuable, and to add MLS students to regular research and teaching is a problem. Faculty are also saying that IMG creates pressure to not commit time to students who are not in their program.

-- Partnership degree students are not required to meet liberal education requirements (which is why they are not Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Art degrees). The intent, however, is that attention is paid to those requirements. There is a possibility, with community and technical colleges merging, that students would receive fewer liberal education courses; this is a possibility the University must keep an

eye on. There is also pressure on the technical colleges to offer more liberal education. UC programs are focussed on working adults, and it is expected that requirements can be met in alternative ways.

-- Those who have enrolled in the existing programs report that the degree helped them find a different job or advance in the job they hold. In the case of the Bachelor of Information Networking, people are hired away from the program. One principle of reviews of the partnership degrees is on that exact point. The programs are also not being used as stepping-stones to graduate programs – but that decision is always up to the admitting institution.

-- The needs of the metropolitan area need to be taken into account. Needs evolve; any strategic plan can identify a process, but not the degrees that might be needed. There is also question of which degrees it is appropriate for the University to be in, as against the MnSCU 2-year and 4-year institutions in partnership.

-- UC offers certificate programs for credit, which operate under degree program policies and procedures. The UC academic council will also oversee these programs. UC expects to explore the possibility of offering more non-credit certificate programs, because this will likely be an area of growth.

-- One question about partnership degrees is their appropriateness for the University; another is whether it is appropriate for the program to offer education at the baccalaureate level, it was said. Dr. Skinner-West agreed. The programs build on the 2-year degree; whether the CONTENT is appropriate for a 4-year degree is something upon which faculty are consulted. In the absence of the academic council, the precise nature of the involvement is difficult to identify, but faculty expertise clearly must play an integral role in the curriculum; the council could play a secondary review role. It must not be ASSUMED that a program is worthy of a 4-year degree, maintained one Committee member.

If the process works right, that is a question that will be asked, Dr. Swan said, and it HAS been asked about one of the proposed new programs (which may, in fact, be more appropriate at the Master's level). Because of the income return to 4-year degrees, however, there is pressure to make them baccalaureate degrees. There is a risk of credential inflation, cautioned one Committee member. The University must be clear about what it does as an institution, Dr. Swan agreed.

Dr. Skinner-West said that she has been disabused of the idea that the partnership degree programs generate revenue. They do not. If only for financial reasons, they require careful thought.

-- The UC academic council should have a representative from SCEP. The discussion today suggests the need for a curriculum committee as well. There have been such committees for each program, but they have been ad hoc; this suggests there should be a standing committee.

Professor Martin thanked Dean Skinner-West and Dr. Van Essendelft for joining the meeting, and adjourned it at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand