

Minutes*

Faculty Consultative Committee
Thursday, October 17, 2002
6:00 – 8:00
The Depot

Present: Dan Feeney (chair), Muriel Bebeau, Susan Brorson, Arthur Erdman, Mary Jo Kane, Candace Kruttschnitt, Judith Martin, Martin Sampson, Charles Speaks

Absent: Gary Balas, Tom Clayton, Les Drewes, John Fossum, Marti Hope Gonzales, Marc Jenkins, Marvin Marshak, Mary McEvoy, Jeff Ratliff-Crain

Guests: Interim President Robert Bruininks, Executive Vice President Christine Maziar, Senior Vice President Frank Cerra, Interim Vice President David Hamilton

Other: none

[In these minutes: continued discussion of the intellectual future of the University]

Professor Feeney convened the meeting at 6:00 for one of the Committee's occasional discussions of the intellectual future of the University. The discussion focused initially on a set of questions prepared by Professor Martin concerning the instrumentalization of the University, questions that were drawn from the minutes of the past intellectual future discussions. The questions are appended to these minutes.

The Committee members and the senior officers touched upon a number of points during the discussion.

-- Is a broad view of the University "as a place to acquire job skills" versus "as a place to LEARN" really as stark a contrast as some think? Is the University comfortable with what employers want? Does the University ask what kinds of skills employers want? But people change jobs on average seven times in their lives, so what is the meaning of the answer?

-- Part of the issue in the state accountability movement is that states MEASURE things. It is difficult to measure whether graduates are liberally educated; it is easy to measure whether or not they got jobs. What the University does is influenced by what can be measured. It is easy to report the dollar amount of sponsored research funding; it is more difficult to measure more subtle factors, such as an informed and engaged citizenry broadly supportive of quality-of-life concerns.

-- The University often tries to sell liberal education in the wrong way; the goal is to be liberally-educated and one is almost tainted if he or she leaves the University with a marketable skill. Some parents want their children to leave with a marketable skill even if they have a liberal arts major.

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

-- The purpose of education is to make people better citizens, BUT they must also come out of higher education with a way to make a living. Part of the problem in some areas is the University itself: instead of emphasizing the discovery of knowledge, imparting knowledge to the next generation, and civic engagement, the University emphasizes patents, start-up companies, and economic outcomes. The University CREATES that expectation in the state; it contributes to the view of the University as an economic engine.

-- President Yudof changed the language some when he talked about educated students, not widgets. A larger problem (not confined to Minnesota) is in the disciplines at the undergraduate level: faculty talk with undergraduates about the disciplines but do not talk about how a degree program holds together. Faculty AND students come to perceive the degree as a checklist. However, there are divergent approaches; in some fields, especially interdisciplinary fields, it is essential to tell undergraduates to plan their program in a broader context.

-- In one course, a faculty member received an evaluation which said that nothing in the course would help anyone get a job.

-- In the change to semesters, in one college the faculty tried to change the focus to the skill areas they wanted to students to have at graduation; they tried to integrate as well as to identify what would change over time. These are what are called competencies in another area, the direction that some units are heading in.

-- Who is the audience for talking about the primary purpose of the University? Is it persuading ourselves or justifying the University to the legislature or to the broader community? What came up in earlier discussions was that there is no inherent economic value in, for example, a degree in English (a point made by a faculty member in English). The issue is the way the University argues about what it does beyond the professional schools and job training. In addition it educates citizens to participate in the life of the community and to have critical thinking skills in order to make the job changes that many inevitably will make.

-- It is a mistake to think about THE primary purpose of the University. It has multiple responsibilities that include both liberal education and job training. It depends on how one views education; one way to think about all levels--undergraduate, graduate, professional--is that education is putting tools in one's toolbox that will help students get through the rest of their lives.

-- Some community groups are interested primarily on the return on investment in the University but a lot understand the larger role the University plays in the community and state. If one issue is communication with stakeholders, the University must emphasize what is unique and what is better about it. It also needs to articulate 150 years of impact on the quality of life in Minnesota in order to have people understand the value of the University.

-- The University is sometimes unable to recruit the best students; what hurts it is the graduation rate. People will pay to send their children to a more expensive (and perhaps lower quality) institution because they look at the University's poor graduation rate. The University also does not do a good job of getting out the word that it is possible to get through in four years. The University must fix its graduation rate--and has taken a number of steps to do so. It will probably need to do more.

-- One concern of parents is that their children as students will never see these faculty who are creators of knowledge--they will have TAs and huge classes. There should be a conversation with Vice President Gardebring about this kind of perception; many of the people in the room DO teach undergraduates. The University needs DATA, which the Executive Vice President and Provost needs to gather.

-- It is a mistake to use the business model for education--something that is not as popular as it might have been a few years ago in light of recent events in corporate America. At the same time, however, the University still describes its students in terms of scores when it should be talking about outcomes and what students can do--and it should be appealing to PARENTS about liberal education.

-- Minnesota has an extraordinary heritage; it has made contributions to the world and has a university that is all out of proportion to its size. The foundation of those contributions is education--and that foundation is in danger.

-- There is much public and legislative goodwill for the University. Unfortunately, the legislature this year will be in a difficult situation as it balances competing interests. It is not a matter of regard for the University, it is the larger issues that will affect it financially in the short term.

-- 40% of the degrees granted by the University are graduate and professional degrees; the University is a vehicle to educate the next generation of scholars. That is one thing that makes the University unique; the other higher education institutions in the state do not do this.

-- One way to think about University's role is to try to imagine what the state would be like if the University were not here.

-- The University needs to weigh in on its core messages. It is losing the game in the elite private college-preparatory high schools. To do better there, again, it must improve its graduation rates--and market the better results. Part of this falls to the Committee on Educational Policy, such as the articulation of curricula, advising, and credit loads. Part of it is in service areas and what is provided to the customers (on the service end of the institution). Another thing it must do is increase merit-based financial aid. One problem that arises in recruiting new faculty is that not only will they be teaching students who can compete with the best at elite institutions but they will also be teaching students who fall in the lower part of the distribution. But if the University begins to attract students with higher ability, with more merit-based aid, standards will go up naturally without the University having to change admissions rules.

-- With respect to marketing, one Committee member thought about marketing an advantage of a University education with respect to developing creative problem solvers. What research faculty model (rather than the consumers-of-knowledge faculty at the liberal arts college) bring is the excitement in figuring out things that are important but yet unknown. She recalled her daughter's excitement when she called (from her small liberal arts college) to say she had read something in her psychology book about her work and her colleagues' work (at Minnesota) and she could actually say that she knew these people. There is something inherently appealing to young people to say that they actually know Professor X. This would be an interesting idea for an ad.

-- The University should have a comparative advantage give the metropolitan area in which it exists. It also needs more undergraduates from outside the state and outside the reciprocity states, and in particular the East and West Coasts. It needs to build its market share in these areas. The University is well positioned for the next 5-10 years to attract people who want to come to the University but it will take a long time for that advantage to pay dividends.

-- The problems the University faces with undergraduate students is more at the lower division than the upper division level. It needs to examine what freshmen and sophomores need.

Professor Feeney adjourned the gathering at 8:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota

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[From Professor Martin to FCC] Based on summaries of the Intellectual future discussions over the past 4 years, and mindful of the focus of this semester's discussion: the view of the University as an instrument of the state to accomplish x, y, and z (the economic engine argument), I propose that the following form the basis for our 10/17 discussion.

- How do we respond to the view that THE purpose of the university is to create jobs and economic development? Particularly if we de-emphasize the arts and humanities, the social, physical, and biological sciences and focus instead on professional and engineering programs, and the latter have priority in new facilities, faculty, and degree programs.
- How do we argue for improving undergraduate education in an environment where the volume of research activity, the number of research dollars, the commercial applications, the new patents, royalty income" and the economic benefits of these are the measure of the U's success?
- It is said that corporations value liberal education more highly than does the general population. But corporations are also now starting universities, and virtual universities have begun. A university is not a corporation, but some of the same measures are being applied. (Companies that survive have invested in building culture and are decentralized – does the U do the same?)
- Can research, teaching, and outreach survive as a mission if we fail to educate legislators and the public about why a liberal education matters or why "open dissemination of knowledge" serves society? Or if the University promises jobs and prosperity in return for investment in the University?
- The U's intellectual future is tied to external factors, such as the increasing accountability measures (how state funds are used, student progress, and outcomes for students and the state). Can these factors be counterbalanced in any way?