

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, October 17, 2012
2:00 – 4:00
238A Morrill Hall

- Present: Alon McCormick (chair), Thomas Brothen, Lee-Ann Breuch, Megan Chock, Emily Combs, Charlene Ellingson, Robert McMaster, Nic McPhee, Thomas Michaels, Tim Olson, Jane Phillips, Elaine Tarone, Cathrine Wambach, Susan Wick
- Absent: Barbara Brandt, John Cwodzinski, Kristen Nelson, Leslie Schiff, Henning Schroeder
- Guests: Professor Chris Cramer, Bob Rubinyi, Chris Scruton (Office of the Provost); Professor Patricia Schaber (Classroom Advisory Subcommittee)
- Other: Suzanne Bardouche (Office of Undergraduate Education); Susan VanVoorhis (Academic Support Resources)

[In these minutes: (1) request for proposals: enhancement of academic programs using digital technology; (2) subcommittees; (3) report from the Classroom Advisory Subcommittee]

1. Request for Proposals (RFP): Enhancement of Academic Programs Using Digital Technology

Professor McCormick convened the meeting at 2:00 and welcomed Professor Cramer to brief the Committee on the Request for Proposals (RFP) that he has drafted for consultation. Professor Cramer introduced Drs. Rubinyi and Scruton, who are members of the staff in the provost's office responsible for matters related to e-learning.

Professor Cramer explained that Provost Sullivan has asked him to spend 50% of his time this year working on digital education/e-learning, primarily at the undergraduate level, to find ways to invest funds to move the University beyond where it is today. There are a number of wonderful success stories at the University but they tend to be one-offs, with a "let 1000 flowers bloom" approach—but there isn't a garden. He and Provost Hanson have developed a Request for Proposals (RFP) to systematically incorporate e-education in undergraduate programs.

Professor Cramer described the RFP and asked what Committee members see as the best areas to target, places where the University will get the biggest bang for the buck. The goal is to invigorate faculty program-wide, not enhancement or modification of individual classes.

Professor Brothen asked for amplification. Professor Cramer said the expectation is that proposals would address the collective set of courses leading to an undergraduate degree. RFPs range from (1) asking for exactly what one wants to (2) not being sure what is wanted and waiting to see what bubbles up. This RFP is in the latter category. Some programs are enormous and the resources

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

will not be available to change every course, but they could help start the process; it may be that a larger percentage of the courses could be changed in smaller departments. It will be up to the selection committee to evaluate the proposals. He affirmed, in response to a query from Professor Tarone, that foreign-language programs interested in technology and teaching could apply for funds. He said they avoided using the term "department" in the RFP.

Ms. Phillips expressed concern about the long-term sustainability of the changes. The infrastructure can change and then the changes can't be used; staff will be required. She expressed hope that the proposals when implemented will be sustainable. That is a valid issue, Professor Cramer agreed. There is much new leadership at the University that likely has a greater interest in coordinating information technology for educational purposes; the responsible offices in the past have been more fragmented than may be the case in the future. He reported on various changes at the central level that should lead to more technical support for faculty interested in e-education. The libraries are anxious to help and may be able to obtain technology more cheaply than departments or individual faculty members.

Professor Wambach commented that she saw a distinction in the RFP between efficiency and quality. The institution could have important efficiency goals (e.g., providing courses for seniors so they can graduate); why is the RFP not interested in those goals? Professor Cramer commented that much of the original discussion about efficiency was about bottleneck courses, for example, but it turns out there aren't many such courses. His own bias is that getting faculty more enthusiastic about e-education is more likely if they see an improvement in the quality of what is delivered to students. In the past, one question was how to generate revenue, but few faculty members put together a course to generate revenue. What they want to offer is a high-quality course. In his view, program faculty are more likely to view the RFP favorably if it focuses on quality.

Dr. Olson asked if there was thought about moving away from Moodle and commented that in his college faculty are using a number of different systems, which makes coordination difficult. Dr. Rubinyi said that the Office of Information Technology (OIT) supports Moodle at the University for courses, and most institutions only support one system. He said it likely that the administration will only support one course-management system and it will be up to the colleges to decide if they wish to provide support for additional systems. Dr. Scruton said there is a policy issue with respect to what colleges adopt; he reiterated Dr. Rubinyi's point that the administration's approach is to select and support a single system. When there are compelling reasons (as exist in the Medical School), a college may choose to use a different system.

The approach relying on multiple systems reflects "1000 flowers blooming," Professor Cramer commented. It is Vice President Studham's view that there are areas where consolidation is needed in order to provide better services and he prefers to see OIT support one system well.

Professor McPhee expressed concern about how the non-Twin-Cities campus would fit. Centralized support is great for the Twin Cities; access to support resources is a significant issue for the other campuses. He also agreed with Ms. Phillips' point about sustainability. Professor Cramer said there is no silver bullet for support for all campuses; there is likely to be a need for more support for digitally-enhanced courses and they are looking to build the nucleus on the Twin Cities campus. He said that support will grow and agreed that there will need to be support staff on the other campuses or some way for those campuses to have access to the support. Professor McPhee

commented that developing e-education courses is difficult and one must often sit for hours with technical staff in order to accomplish it. Professor Cramer said that site visits may be needed.

Professor Breuch said she liked the idea of the RFPs and asked if there are any overall guiding principles. It sounds comparable to the Writing Enriched Curriculum, but in that case there is a writing requirement in place. It is more difficult for online courses because there is no requirement. To ask for program-wide proposals is a big call; one principle could be that it would include some courses, it could be blended courses, but not individual courses. Another principle might be the elevation of the quality of learning. Professor Cramer said that in his ideal world, a department head calls together the faculty at a retreat to think about what they could do and what learning outcomes they seek and what they could put together that would be creative and take advantage of the seed funding provided by the RFP. Any proposal must address more than one course. Professor Breuch commented that the Writing Enriched Curriculum is a very intensive experience that departments are asked to go through; she encouraged Professor Cramer to use a pilot approach.

A perfect proposal will be one where the faculty have some vision and reach out to contacts and resources, Professor Cramer said. The funds from the RFP will go to faculty released time, research assistants, and to bring people from OIT and Human Resources (for project management) to ensure a successful program. He said he would want to be able to go to the *Daily* and other media and play up the success stories.

Vice Provost McMaster said it will be important that human infrastructure experts come to departments and help them flesh out proposals and work with them to assess outcomes. Professor Breuch said departments will need help in identifying that infrastructure. Professor Cramer said the provost is committed to providing the needed infrastructure and sustaining it over time.

Professor Cramer asked what amount of money would make a difference to a department. For example, in his department (Chemistry), it would need to be about \$100,000 for a proposal to be able to make a difference.

Professor Michaels said he was glad to hear about the enhancement of quality; he said he did not see that in the RFP and encouraged Professor Cramer to include it as one of the selection criteria—and how it would be measured. He also said that programs should be asked to describe how they would share what they learned. Professor Cramer said he hoped that people would take ownership of their successes and offer workshops, and that there would be a workshop sponsored by the Academy of Distinguished Teachers, for example.

Professor Wambach asked if there would be any funds for "stuff," such as providing students with iPads. Professor Cramer said they would not rule anything out. This is a "ready, fire, aim" approach and he said he hopes the committee that reviews proposals will be excited about something that may not have exact milestones.

Professor Tarone asked how many grants there would be. Professor Cramer said he did not know. The Writing Enriched Curriculum approach involved three or four per year; this could be about the same.

Ms. Ellingson asked if there might be an intermediate step. Sometimes organizations have materials that teachers can check out and use. That might be an efficient way to proceed, like having mobile modules from the library. Professor Cramer said might fall in Professor Wambach's "stuff" category and he wouldn't be opposed to such a proposal.

The Committee voted unanimously to endorse the RFP. Professor McCormick thanked Professor Cramer for joining the Committee to consult on the RFP.

2. Subcommittees

Professor McCormick reviewed the subcommittees that are at work on various matters.

- Educational program assessment: Professors Breuch, Tarone, Wick.
- How to ensure instructors and advisers are well educated about financial decisions: Ms. Chock.
- Questions about grading to be forward to Vice Provost McMaster to forward to the deans: Professors Wambach and Wick.
- Definition of a credit hour: Ms. Bardouche will report on discussions with Provost Hanson.
- Student rating of teaching/publishing results: Ms. Phillips, Dr. Falkner

It was agreed that the October 31 meeting would be cancelled and the subcommittees would use the time to further their work.

3. Report from the Classroom Advisory Subcommittee (CAS)

Professor McCormick welcomed Professor Schaber, chair of the Classroom Advisory Subcommittee (CAS), to report on topics CAS is considering taking up this year. She reviewed the charge to the subcommittee and noted the items on its list of potential issues. A number of the issues are being carried forward from discussions last year.

- general purpose classroom upgrades and renovations: technology, furniture, lighting
- study space renovation and additions
- general purpose classroom scheduling; final exam scheduling
- classroom virtualization project
- cell phone and wireless access in classrooms (eliminate dead spaces); some might argue they should go the other direction
- active learning classrooms and faculty development funding
- University Space Utilization initiative
- departmental classrooms versus general purpose classrooms responsibilities and scheduling
- year-round academic calendar; impact on classroom management
- accessibility in renovated and new classrooms.

They are working closely with Jeremy Todd, Director of the Office of Classroom Management (OCM), and have representatives from the Office of Information Technology and from Disabilities

Services. Professor Schaber invited Committee members to let her know if they have additional ideas about what CAS should be doing.

Committee members discussed the scheduling program used for classrooms (not the same for general-purpose classrooms and departmental classrooms) and final exam scheduling. It is possible the PeopleSoft upgrade may have an effect; Professor McCormick said that if a policy change is required, the Committee will need to discuss it. There is also a need to reconsider the final exam schedule, given alternative assessment methods that are now used; it is no longer just lectures followed by an exam.

Professor McCormick noted that an issue that has come up in discussion at the Committee is ways to encourage faculty to use the technology that is becoming more and more available in classrooms. In his experience, faculty members learn and try something new when they see examples and can watch the use of technology in practice. Professor Wick said anyone can come to Foundations of Biology, 8:00 – 12:00 MWF. Ms. Phillips added that anyone is welcome to come to any Biology class. Professor Tarone suggested it would be useful to have an event for faculty members, perhaps a "happy hour demonstration of tools." And have students present to show what they do with the technology, Ms. Phillips added. Professor McCormick said that perhaps an event could be arranged following a Committee meeting.

Professor Michaels said the Committee needs to watch for a trend in departmental classrooms. In his department, they have space but not enough money to do big things with technology, so they are adding things on a piecemeal basis with vendors. That practice runs contrary to the idea of having standard classrooms—his department can use it but it is more difficult for others. There should not be a lot of non-standard classrooms so that it is difficult for instructors to move from classroom to classroom.

More and more, Professor McPhee commented, the technology is coming with the students into the classroom—they have it with them and it may come down, in the classroom, to display and microphones. It may be a matter of leverage over what students have rather than what the University purchases.

Professor Wambach said she thought what Professor Michaels' department is doing is great because if there is too much standardization that all are forced to follow, innovation can be stifled. Different classrooms allow more variation.

Ms. Phillips said that the University has been dealing with the problem of classroom technology and maintenance for a long time and it needs to provide the proper funding for the Office of Classroom Management. Ms. VanVoorhis reported that a projector failed in one classroom and it cannot be replaced immediately; there are no replacement costs provided for when buildings are built but when the equipment is used nearly 24/7, it fails before the end of its expected life cycle. There was a day when departmental classrooms were better equipped than general-purpose classrooms because departments had money, Professor Wambach recalled. Then OCM started receiving funding, so the general-purpose classrooms were better equipped and maintained. If the situation reverts to departmental classrooms being better supported, and OCM lacking the funding it needs, departments will take the classrooms back because they won't tolerate bad classrooms. (Professor McPhee reported

that the media services unit at Morris does a good job of looking after classrooms and keeping them up to date.)

Professor McCormick said that discussion of the issue of how OCM is funded resides with the Senate Committee on Finance and Planning; the question for this Committee is how the funding (or lack of it) affects teaching and learning. If the Committee can craft a resolution that would be helpful, it should do so and should link to educational objectives. Ms. VanVoorhis reported that while the OCM budget has not been cut, it has to start repaying a loan made last year, which cuts into the money available for classrooms. [Subsequent to the meeting, she reported that OCM will receive assistance in repaying the loan.]

Another question for the Committee to consider is how classes are structured and what it might be imagined will be needed in the future, Professor McCormick said. Will classrooms as they exist now be needed? Who is looking into that question? Professor Wambach said Professor McCormick's question will come back to the credit-hour model. Universities are tied to the idea that there should be a relationship between a certain number of contact hours and number of credits for a course. What if the decision is to move to more hybrid models, with students more outside the classroom? There will a different form of contact and it may not need to be in University spaces—it could be virtual. But there is the tradition that faculty members must meet classes. Professor Wick suggested the Committee might look nationally; she has seen calls to action from NSF and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the humanities could do the same.

Professor Tarone agreed with Professor Wambach that instruction has traditionally been tied to a teacher's hours in the classroom. In online courses, an instructor may spend many more hours dealing with students than in face to face instruction, while students' hours may vary though they may be more engaged. The question is whether one can shift from counting hours (either teacher's or student's) and measure learning. That, she concluded, is difficult.

Professor Schaber said that she is in a hybrid program where students are on campus less than 50% of the time and classroom use is down, but they do use the University's measure of student effort (three hours of work per week per credit). They measure objectives to be achieved—and said, in response to a query from Professor Tarone, that it probably takes students longer than the faculty think it does. The University rule has two components, Professor Breuch pointed out: Three hours of effort per week per credit plus an expectation of instructor face time with students. Those are two separate questions, what faculty do and what students do. As for contact hours, she added, it may be a matter of redefining "contact." It could be Skype, asynchronous forums, etc.

Ms. Bardouche followed on Professor Breuch's observation by noting that there are two separate policies, one an expectation of work per credit, one about instructional time, and both of them say the expectations are the same regardless of the method of delivery. The University has a standard definition of a credit hour that is used by the federal government. Would changing that definition too much endanger student financial aid, Professor McCormick asked? As long as the University can define a credit hour, it will likely be acceptable to the Department of Education, Ms. VanVoorhis responded.

Ms. Phillips commented that she is not convinced that policies precede change. The University often changes policies after change has occurred, so it is not clear how one can get policies

to predict what will happen. Policies are not innovative, they codify the world. What needs to change, Professor Breuch asked? The question is whether the policies can be interpreted to cover the variety of means of delivering education, Professor McCormick said. Ms. Bardouche said she would bring back clarification of the questions about the definition of a credit hour once she and Vice Provost McMaster have had a chance to talk with Provost Hanson.

Ms. Ellingson asked if there had been any studies of the impact of the active-learning classrooms. Informally, Professor Wick said. She finds that she loses much of the C-D-F-W grading tail; there are still the A students but she is seeing more B grades. One study that was done showed no significant change in learning but another one did show changes. Ms. Ellingson said she was concerned about that question because she is skeptical e-learning will work well with the most fragile students. Professor Wick said that they have a fairly heavy-handed approach: There is peer evaluation and students must demonstrate (and document) that all contributed to the work of the team. That requirement forces students to interact on the content. Professor Wambach said when students are put in a novel learning environment, some are very excited and some are not; students tend to be conservative and to reject new technology.

Professor Schaber said that there will be less pushback now because technology in the high schools is changing so much. It has changed dramatically in the last five years so that e-learning is the norm and the expectation. Ms. VanVoorhis said that there is a difference in high schools, and some students struggle with technology because they do not have it at home—something the University needs to be aware of as it admits students.

Professor Tarone asked what the reactions of international students have been. There are cultural issues in what it means to learn. There are also issues related to plagiarism.

Professor McCormick said that one policy issue is funding, one is grading (if there are changes, are programs thoughtful about the changes and trends?), one is incentives to support faculty to do innovative things (e.g., if they try a new technology, should their student ratings be treated differently for that course?). A fourth, Professor Tarone said, is tracking international student preparation, what they are ready for. Ms. Phillips said they have no way to assess whether international students are ready, and have the language skills to work in an English e-learning environment. She reported that she has many international students in her class this semester and the majority do not understand the assignments. Thus, what they turn in does not match what is being asked of them. Without face time, Ms. Phillips said, she was not sure these students would be successful.

Professor Schaber said that CAS will follow up on the issues she itemized and return later in the year with a report on what has been done. Professor McCormick thanked her for the report and adjourned the meeting at 4:00.

-- Gary Engstrand