

Minutes*

Faculty Consultative Committee
Thursday, October 28, 2004
1:15 – 3:00
220 Skok Hall

- Present: Marvin Marshak (chair), Gary Balas, Susan Brorson, Jean Bauer, Charles Campbell, Carol Chomsky, Tom Clayton, Gary Davis, Dan Feeney, Mary Jo Kane, Morris Kleiner, Judith Martin, Martin Sampson, John Sullivan
- Absent: Emily Hoover, Kathleen Krichbaum, Scott Lanyon, Fred Morrison, Jeff Ratliff-Crain, Carol Wells
- Guests: Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost E. Thomas Sullivan, H. Jeanie Taylor (Office of the President)
- Other: none

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

The Intellectual Future of the University

Professor Marshak convened the meeting at 1:20 and welcomed Senior Vice President and Provost Sullivan to discuss the intellectual future of the University, the focus of discussions by the Committee on a few occasions each year.

Professor Marshak noted that the strategic planning process is underway; the first two parts are done in draft and are on the strategic planning website at http://www1.umn.edu/systemwide/strategic_positioning/. There is also the summary of environmental scans that were provided by about 50 people. Now the process has reached the hard part—it has the values, the criteria, and the environmental scan. What is the University going to do? This is where the strategic planning committee is; it must develop recommendations for the President and Board of Regents.

The following five themes have emerged as a possible basis for moving forward: quality of faculty, quality of students, effective organizational culture, resource (money) acquisition, and public communications. Professor Marshak noted that the University of Maryland is going through a similar process and has identified these five themes: promoting access and academic success, achieving national eminence, creating knowledge/promoting economic development/advancing the quality of life of Maryland citizens, addressing the state's critical workforce and health care needs, and identifying new resources and practicing exemplary stewardship.

* 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.

Professor Marshak said he hoped that the Committee, independent of the strategic planning process, would identify what the University needs to do. He said he perceives there is general agreement the University needs to do something; the question is what. Are these the right themes? What do they mean? If these are not the right ones, which ones are?

Professor Feeney said the Committee has batted around the issue of ratings, which use different criteria, and their effect on tuition, etc. Is any of that going into the strategic planning process? Should the University be playing the ratings game? The Committee has talked about Nobel Laureates—are they in the plan? One hears different views about the effect of ratings on the ability of the University to attract faculty and students, raise tuition, and so on. Provost Sullivan said the process is not looking specifically at ratings but that the issues being discussed are, in part, measures that are relevant to the ratings. For example, in one of the worst ratings, those published by U.S. News and World Report, the two most important factors are SAT scores and the academic reputation of the institution; it does not measure academic quality in a comprehensive way. Both of those criteria (admission test scores and academic reputation) will be addressed through the enhanced quality of faculty and students.

Professor Marshak reviewed the three questions he had posed to the Committee in an email before the meeting:

1. Does the University need to undergo substantial institutional change, considering (a) that we have made do so far without it and (b) it will be risky, hard and painful? If we need change, why do we need change?
2. If change is to occur, are the ideas for change listed above reasonable, at least in an approximate sense? Should there be additions and/or subtractions?
3. What needs to happen to make sure that this process is successful, if we choose to pursue it?

He also reviewed the priority list developed after polling Committee members:

Highest Priority:

- a. Strengthen the infrastructure for research and scholarship.

2nd Highest Priority:

- a. Develop an appropriate mix of tenured and contract faculty
- b. Maximize resources through planned expenditures
- c. Ensure adequate support for the University libraries

3rd Highest Priority:

- a. Accelerate improvement of retention and graduation rates
- b. Eliminate disincentives for employing graduate students on sponsored projects
- c. Review market demand for Ph.D.'s in various fields
- d. Restore a rationalized curriculum
- e. Identify academic priorities for private fund-raising
- f. Design a priority-driven compensation strategy
- g. Improve the University's compensation rank to the median among peers
- h. Create incentives to use space more efficiently

Professor Kleiner noted that the highest priority is strengthening the infrastructure for research and scholarship. What students get here is research information that is available sooner than at smaller colleges. If the University is to play to its comparative advantage, it needs to strengthen the infrastructure to continue to present current research information to students since this what the University does best. That is consistent with all that has been said in the strategic planning process, Provost Sullivan said; the five themes must include the infrastructure. That is driving the whole strategic planning process.

Professor Campbell said the strategic planning should focus on hiring the best people and assessing them for promotion and tenure. Professor Marshak reported that one person at the most recent strategic planning meeting argued that the University is not hard-nosed enough in granting tenure and that it gives it too often. Compared with peers such as Michigan or Wisconsin, Professor Martin asked? Professor Marshak said there were no data provided. Those data could be obtained, Professor Kleiner said, and it would be interesting to learn if this is the case, and to learn if faculty leave because they get jobs at other comparable places.

What has not been done well at the University is assessment of programs, Professor Campbell said. There has been no assessment of graduate programs for the last several years, and when they were done, they were not used. They should be done, made efficient, and the results should be used. Professor Balas said the University got away from program reviews because there was no action, positive or negative, from the reviews. If a department is doing well, it needs to be rewarded; if not, perhaps it needs to be down-sized or change direction. Mostly, however, the report goes to the dean, who thanks the people who did the work, and nothing happens. Professor Sullivan recalled that he chaired the last review of his department; no one looked at the earlier report, the dean forgot that the department never responded to the review until later, and the process, he agreed, is generally worthless.

Have there been responses from people at the University about the strategic planning process, Professor Kane inquired? The responses have been very positive, Provost Sullivan said; they say it needs to be done, should be thorough, and the University needs to take action. There is some concern about "what will happen to me," not surprisingly. He said he has talked with a lot of colleges and departments, and now individual faculty are asking him if their individual research projects are core to the mission of the University. He said that the responses will be summarized and broken down by faculty, students, and so on. He also will hold town hall meetings at various locations on the Twin Cities campus with hookups to the coordinate campuses.

Provost Sullivan reported that he and Dean Bloomfield have reviewed graduate program numbers and information and have sent letters to the deans about closing or merging approximately 50 programs; they are still in the response period. Professor Balas said that the Policy and Review Council for the physical sciences received the list for those programs; he said he was shocked to see more than 20 programs that had only one student in them. He pointed out that he has argued for sunset clauses; like buildings, these programs need support and maintenance. There is a process to add graduate programs but none to end them. At the same time, there are faculty at the University who are here because they fit in a very small program, so there needs to be balance in examining them—but they do need to be looked at.

Is that also true of undergraduate programs, Professor Brorson asked? It is, Professor Balas affirmed. The reviews could be tied to graduate program reviews, Professor Brorson said. They did not

have program reviews at Crookston before about three years ago, but then began them. The results were disappointing; faculty put in a lot of time and nothing happened. People did not know what to do with the reviews.

Professor Kleiner said he applauded what Drs. Bloomfield and Sullivan were doing in terms of obtaining quantitative measures of graduate programs but asked how it was tied to the most important element of the process identified by this Committee, support for the infrastructure for research and scholarship. They will do so, Provost Sullivan said, but have not reached that stage yet. The dean of a college will have to make the case on quality for programs that have few students. Professor Kane suggested there needs to be a balancing act. If there are 50 nominal graduate programs, they may be consuming resources and it is probably useful to shut them down, but it is not likely this will save a lot of money. What does the administration say, after announcing it has cut graduate programs by X, to the response that "it is about time; what took you so long?" The University will not be rewarded for eliminating these programs. Provost Sullivan agreed it was a fair premise that closing the degree opportunity programs would probably not save a lot of money, but it is a matter of quality control, quality review, and periodically checking on the substance and merit. It is an important symbolic message, a part of what the University is doing that is central to the strategic planning process. Professor Kane said that the administration will have to be careful about the message; she said she sees it as good stewardship but others might see it as elimination of bloat.

Professor Sullivan said he thinks of this review of graduate programs as a four-fold table, with good and bad on one axis and large and small on the other. He said if there are small programs of high quality, they should be retained. His question is this: what about programs that are big and bad? And especially programs that are big and bad but essential to the mission? The question is balancing, Provost Sullivan said. One example from the health sciences recently was the determination a program was high quality but not core to the mission, and because there were opportunities to obtain the same education elsewhere, the program is being eliminated. Professor Sullivan said his preference lies in another direction, which is to opt for high quality even if the program is not core; he repeated that his worry is about the programs that are big and low quality and take money. Such programs could be eliminated, Provost Sullivan replied.

Professor Sampson said he viewed the graduate program review process as an enhanced status quo. There could be a dysfunctional program in an area important to the University; if the process relies only on numbers, one could risk killing a Ph.D. program that could help the University in recruiting. There is a question of what one wants the University to be in the future; there may be programs that are not high quality but that the University wants to keep. Provost Sullivan agreed and said that is why all of the criteria will be used to make judgments about the future; it is not just quality and core. Each criterion needs to be weighed and balanced, he opined.

There is a delicate balance needed, Professor Martin commented. If this review had been conducted 30 years ago, trying to assess what is core and where the University is going, the process probably would have missed a significant number of programs. In CLA there is a structure to accommodate a series of programs that are too small to stand on their own; the process might think about structures to bridge a number of disciplines. She said she worried about shutting down graduate programs that a star faculty member may care about; closing the program sends the message the University does not want that faculty member. The process needs to be structured so those kinds of needs can be met. Provost Sullivan agreed and said they fall in the category of academic synergies.

Of the five themes, Professor Balas asked what "effective organizational culture" means. Provost Sullivan said it means good managers and leaders and the right structures. Professor Marshak commented that department chairs and heads are important but are not rewarded, taught about their job, and some stay forever while others are gone in three years. Does this include the business side of the University, units like Sponsored Projects Administration, Professor Balas asked? The University needs to be a good manager with business people on the business side. It does include those units, Provost Sullivan said. Professor Kleiner recalled Professor Feeney's reference to rankings and data, which are clear and have a quantitative measure to them; the organizational culture questions seem to be fuzzier but the units should be held to similar standards as the others listed in the report. Measures should be developed for this criterion to evaluate management as they are for the others.

If one has been at the University awhile, Professor Feeney commented, one has been through strategic planning a couple of times. What is the target? To "clean up our act"? To get from X to Y in consumption of resources? Is the sum of money the same, to be moved around? Or will there be a decrease in resources, requiring the University to downsize and eliminate programs? Is there any merit in saying (if it what is needed) that the University needs to cut 10% off the bottom line because projected costs and overhead are going up and state funds are going down? Provost Sullivan said that he did not want to prejudge the outcome but the process is being carried out for two major reasons: (1) there is an urgency because of the changed financial circumstances of the University and the recent trend line in state funds, and (2) more important, it is the University's responsibility as stewards to be a wise manager of its resources. If one believes this is a world-class university, it must act like one, which means conducting regular reviews. It is obligated to do this and should do so with vigor and transparency, Provost Sullivan said. The ultimate goal is that the University will be better in teaching and research and the management of its resources—and higher quality. This is not just jargon, he assured the Committee, and the process is building toward excellence. In terms of the outcome, his guess is that at the end of the day there will be more expenditures, although the sources of funds may look different than in the past. The University can be more entrepreneurial in all that it does, but with the caution that it always must align its resources with its intellectual priorities. The strategic planning process helps to identify those priorities and where there is key management and leadership.

The Committee discussed with Provost Sullivan the role of business leaders in the community, the position that business leaders find themselves in, and the importance of the return on investment in the measurement of business leaders.

Professor Kleiner said he had a sense that there was a certain "back to the future" element to this process, because when he came to the University it was in the midst of the Commitment to Focus planning process, which proclaimed excellence as the goal. How is this process different? The President is committed to putting this process into action, Provost Sullivan said, and that may entail reorganization, reallocation, and consolidation. Because of the financial constraints and because of the University's stewardship obligations, it cannot continue to bleed slowly. The administration is absolutely committed to following through on the process. Will this mean a smaller group of excellent programs, a la Commitment to Focus, Professor Kleiner asked? It does, Provost Sullivan said; the idea is that the University perhaps will be smaller, slimmer, and better—but it will need more resources to be closer to excellence.

What about the Board of Regents in all of this, Professor Campbell asked? The Board at the time opposed at least parts of Commitment to Focus. Provost Sullivan said the President believes he has the full support of the Board.

Professor Martin said she worried about parts of the University that were addressed by the "Lighthouse" report (<http://www1.umn.edu/usenate/fcc/lighthouse.html>), units that cannot be defended on the basis of bringing in money, especially the arts and humanities programs that provide an enormous service function for the University. Those activities must be included in the criteria somehow or people may begin to think that others can perform them just as well. When one talks about what faculty do, many do undergraduate and graduate instruction simultaneously and it must be understood that many programs are dependent on undergraduate education even if they do not bring in big dollars. Provost Sullivan said he is aware that there are essential programs that the University needs to support that cannot generate their own funding; there are also units that are not core but that are essential to supporting the core, even if not by themselves core. He said the deans have been asked to identify programs in both categories. Strengthening essential support might mean more funds to support faculty.

In explaining this process outside the University, Professor Martin suggested it be noted that faculty are regularly assessed, students are regularly assessed—assessment is a routine piece of the University's business—but that the process has not been scaled up to programs. That would bring consistency to the strategic planning effort.

Professor Marshak said that Dr. Taylor is doing a lot of the work on the strategic planning process; this is the time to weigh in on it. He asked again if the Committee believed these are the right five themes and if there are others. If they are right, what should be in each category?

Professor Chomsky asked what is encompassed in "effective organizational culture." "Quality of the faculty" and "quality of the student body" are static measures. They address the inputs, but not the operation of the educational process. "Effective organizational culture" might address this issue, looking at the way the organization operates in research and teaching, and how faculty and students are helped in accomplishing their objectives, but that's not clear. In response to an earlier question, it was said that this item encompasses areas such as project management support. But does it also include assessing the teaching and research culture and how it operates? She said she did not know where that concern fits but wants to be sure it is part of the strategic planning process. Some might say that is becoming more and more difficult to get one's work done and it would be helpful to have that problem addressed.

These are all input measures, Professor Kleiner said; the outputs should be "what is the quality of the research and students coming from the University?" Quality can be inputs and outputs (e.g., rankings, how research results are cited and used for society). Is there anything that will look at outcomes? Productivity and impact will be singled out, Provost Sullivan said. Professor Kleiner said he hoped the process would look at the impact of research, where students go, what they do; faculty have impact by receiving national awards, serving as president of national societies, and so on. Provost Sullivan said they have talked about the Shanghai rankings (which ranked Minnesota 33rd out of 500 universities in the world). Minnesota does poorly on academic recognition awards. He asked why; he said he has been told it is because Minnesota is understated and not aggressive in nominating colleagues while other institutions do. How does the University turn that around so faculty and administrators identify talents and make sure they are rewarded with national recognition?

Professor Sampson said he had three points. One, the University does two basic things: it develops knowledge and communicates it in forms including publications and teaching. The five themes do not invite creative thinking about improving the relationship between these two basic endeavors of the University. Two, the words "impact" and "stewardship" should be (somewhere) in the themes. Three, there is a huge value to having internal discussions be as congruent as possible with the case the University makes to the state and Minnesota. Provost Sullivan agreed there must be confluence. Professor Sampson observed that would not necessarily happen; those inside the University are good at talking to themselves and but this effort is a vehicle for the university to restate its message about the implications if the state does not invest in the university. Professor Kane agreed that that message needs to be repeated. Professor Brorson agreed that the process needs to look at impact and output, and not just OF graduates, but also the University's impact on the state.

Professor Clayton said that the items in the list of themes, beginning with "Quality of Faculty" and "Quality of Students," ought to include entries beginning with "Quality of" for every University constituency, including academic-professionals, administrators, and civil-service staff. If we have the right personnel, the actions, with effort, tend to take care of themselves. The static list on the left has an implicit list of actions on the right, which are what really count, in the way of communication, development, and productivity as related specifically to the constituency.

Professor Brorson said the process needs to look at the evaluation of graduate and undergraduate programs and the importance of return on investment. Business might look at the short term, which is a problem in a global economy when the nation's competitors are looking long term. The University must be vigilant in looking at the long term; it would be a mistake to look only at the short term.

Professor Bauer said that she sees public communication as important. She has been at other universities as changes have occurred, and went through the changes in the Minnesota Extension Service. It is important that communication is clear within and outside in times of strategic planning. The perception of the people with whom she works is that the University is part of what they value and that they want to be a part of the University. Therefore, the University needs to communicate in a manner so people can be involved, not told what will happen. She said she also values the concept of stewardship and making clear that the University values the 30% of its funding that it receives from the state. The question should be what the University must do to deliver what is needed, rather than starting from the position that there should be X fewer departments or what ever group is selected. She said the University must use public relations and civic engagement models, of which there are a number.

With respect to the short-term/long-term view, Professor Campbell said, it is his understanding that much of the private sector has focused on the next quarter for the last 20 years. It must be understood that the University is the state's investment in the long term—basic research, educating future workers, and so on. If the University is forced to only look at the short term, it will be eating its own seed corn.

Professor Chomsky observed that there is no reference here or in earlier discussions to diversity and multiculturalism. Perhaps that is assumed, but as people talk about quality, they must think deeply about what they mean by the term and not draw lines. Dr. Taylor said the document consists of many pieces; diversity and a respectful community are embedded in the framing concepts. Provost Sullivan noted that he had said when Dean of the Law School that quality includes diversity and pluralism.

One question she has heard is "what's missing?" Dr. Taylor commented. The opposite question is "what's inspiring?" What will move people to action? The third piece, which is now under discussion (trends and benchmarks) should be the boldest and most inspirational part, Provost Sullivan said. If it does not inspire boldness with its vision, the process will have failed, in part. It is important to think out of the box, in an un-Minnesota way, he said. Professor Kane supported pushing hard on being bold. Part of what is inspiring is that the University matters and this is a fight for quality, Professor Sampson said. He said he hoped the process did not come down to "the University must close X" and that the argument would focus on a defense of quality. Professor Kleiner observed that unlike the Vikings, the University cannot leave the state; the question is, will this be a national/international university or one that is sunk in mediocrity? The University cannot leave but the faculty can, Professor Martin pointed out. Professor Marshak said the state has already decided there will not be universal access to quality; the question is whether there will be any quality at all.

Professor Marshak thanked Provost Sullivan for joining the meeting and adjourned it at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota