

Minutes*

Faculty Consultative Committee
Thursday, November 1, 2012
1:00 – 2:30
238A Morrill Hall

- Present: Sally Gregory Kohlstedt (chair), Linda Bearinger, Avner Ben-Ner, Peter Bitterman, James Cloyd, Chris Cramer, Will Durfee, Nancy Ehlke, Michael Hancher, Scott Lanyon, Elaine Tyler May, James Pacala, Ned Patterson, Rebecca Ropers-Huilman, George Sheets, Richard Ziegler
- Absent: Brian Buhr, Russell Luepker, Alon McCormick, Jeff Ratliff-Crain
- Guests: President Eric Kaler, Provost Karen Hanson
- Other: Amy Phenix (Chief of Staff, Office of the President), Sarah Dirksen, Ken Savary (Office of the Board of Regents), Jon Steadland (Office of the President)

[In these minutes: the intellectual future of the University (the public good and the role of universities, MOOCs)]

The Intellectual Future of the University

Professor Kohlstedt convened the meeting at 1:00, welcomed President Kaler and Provost Hanson, and noted that a number of questions for discussion at this meeting had been considered; what rose to the top were ones related to (1) the public good and the role of universities, and (2) MOOCs and e-education. [MOOC = massive open online course]

Professor Kohlstedt began by commenting that with respect to the public good, one might most often think about the land-grant mission of the University, but most universities and colleges believe that they contribute to the public good. She said there are three things to keep in mind: People (faculty, staff, and students) not institutions engage with the public and through departments, research institutes, and outreach; engagement benefits the University as well as the public in multiple ways; a "good" is not an obvious, singular, or unambiguous goal.

President Kaler said that historically there has been acceptance of the idea that an educated population is a public good and that democracy can only exist when the citizens have a certain level of education. That issue is complicated today by cost and the question of who pays. When higher education was cheaper, people thought it was good for society. As the price has increased, attention shifts to the private benefit and shifts public attention away from the public good—economic issues become foremost. When the emphasis shifts to career preparation, then paying personal taxes that benefit another seems less fair, especially when the price of that education is high. The president said he was not certain that the University can change public perception; it has changed because dollars drive and distort the discussion.

* 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.

Part of the problem is the perceived relevance of all education (including the University) to communities, Professor Kohlstedt said. Across the country there is less perception that an educated population is required for a democratic society. Moreover, universities have not emphasized their contribution as good for society and are being pushed to discuss degrees as commodities. The tough question is how to establish priorities and values.

As well as charity/giving back to the community, President Kaler added. One senses that selfishness plays a larger role in public debate, in society, and especially in political dialogue. He reported that one response, in a request to alumni to support the University's request at the legislature, was that the person would not do so because he did not believe in taking a dollar from one person and giving it to another. So "what we do in higher education" is even more important to articulate to students and to the public, Professor Kohlstedt responded

Another indicator of a new climate is the dispute around the breadth of the institutional role, Professor Sheets maintained. One example is the recent proposal by the governor of Florida to charge differential tuition based on the job prospects in the field (the lower the job prospects, the higher the tuition to be charged), unlike in the past, when differential tuition was typically based on different program costs. The Florida proposal penalizes the liberal arts and possibly lowers costs in STEM fields. That suggests that the question is not whether higher education is a public good but rather what the proper syllabus should be. Some policy makers want to remake the mission by penalizing the study of certain subjects—in addition to recognizing the private interest in the high cost of higher education.

Provost Hanson commented that in the past, in anyone's reckoning, education would have to count as a public good in the technical sense of the term: Someone's receiving this good does not diminish anyone else's enjoyment of the good. Part of the erosion of this common understanding stems from the high cost and, more specifically, the funding mechanisms for higher education. If tuition dollars are redistributed to cover financial aid or other costs, the underlying thought is that funding higher education means taking a dollar from someone and giving it to someone else, who will have a better life as a result of the transfer. Higher education comes to be thought of as something that is a good private to the individual who partakes of it, and others are seen as shut out or paying a penalty to support someone else. Higher education *is* prima facie a public good, but its current institutionalization, with declining tax support, can hamper that perception. Once society loses sight of all the ways in which an educated citizenry is good for society as a whole, people end up taking not only a more individualistic but also a more instrumental view of the value of higher education.

And MOOCs exacerbate the problem, Professor Sheets said, because if the liberal arts are expendable, one can make them up through free online courses.

Professor Hancher wondered how society got to this point from the Morrill Act of 1862 [that created land-grant universities]. How did these universities become subject to the critique of being a private good? They were a public good when they were created and when states invested in them, and they remain a public good now. It is puzzling why they are not seen as such now. It is partly because of the rising cost for an individual to participate in higher education, because of how costs are apportioned, Provost Hanson surmised.

One can ask when the support for higher education began to erode, Professor Kohlstedt agreed. When did the sense that the more educated it is, the better society is begin to dissipate? Professor

Cramer speculated that it began when President Carter urged everyone to turn down their thermostats in the national interest: The notion of shared sacrifice was contrary to the view of American exceptionalism, and the idea that Americans could have whatever they wanted, and cheaply, that was revived with the election of Ronald Reagan.

Professor Ropers-Huilman said that the question of higher education's purpose within and relation to society is a historical question that society has engaged in for a long time. Her concern is that higher education and the larger society are now answering the question differently, focusing more on serving businesses, being an economic driver, and satisfying workforce needs and less on developing democratic actors and strengthening communities. Both foci are important, but the balance has shifted recently to prioritize the needs of business. She said she is in higher education because she believes it can transform society. When she thinks about higher education as a public good, she thinks about the roles that the 4,000 higher education institutions across the country can play in creating a better society for our kids. She is troubled when academic decisions are made only by considering how the market will respond to the decision. When that occurs, higher education has lost its sense of what it believes is the public good and is instead responding to economic drivers that enrich the public good for some people and not for others. The question of who higher education is good for, given differential access, is a valid one here. Finally, she said, there is much research on the effects of college on behavior, and what it has found is that college students develop behaviors positively related to civic engagement and democratic participation.

Professor May said she has been thinking a lot about this question lately. The big question is why anti-intellectualism is so widespread—and it is not just the University of Minnesota, it is national. How can it possibly be turned around, perhaps by working with other institutions? It is a very daunting prospect. We educate people for citizenship, not simply for jobs. But citizenship has come to be understood as consumerism of government policies. It is the reverse of President Kennedy's challenge to ask what you can do for your country; now people ask what the country can do for them. The same perspective seems to permeate public attitudes about higher education. What can higher education do for me, rather than how can universities contribute to the public good? The faculty and students at the University do interesting things; why is our work so invisible to the broader public? She said she has small ideas about what can be done but is uncertain about what can be done to enhance both the public good and the University's intellectual future; the institution's fate is bound up with other things, such as the budget. She comes back to the question of how education fosters good citizenship, and how to make the case for the University's contribution to the public good.

President Kaler suggested that the change to a more selfish society is at the root of the points that Professors May and Ropers-Huilman made, and one can see it everywhere (in economic impact, economic externalities, etc.). It has grown in the country and he said he does not know how to get away from the loss of sense of community and the increased perception that it is all for oneself. Professor Kohlstedt pointed out the positive stories on the University's home page on the web, which identifies many people doing good things. It is a puzzle why the larger culture does perceive the fundamental message of greater good.

Professor Durfee said that if the root of the problem is a selfish society, it may be that people just need to wait it out, because in general the students he is teaching now are different—they like to volunteer and they are optimistic about what the future holds. And that is true beyond those who are students.

There are also mega-trends in American society that are having an effect, President Kaler proposed, such as a greater inequality in wealth and a lack of growth of the middle class.

Professor Lanyon said that there is another underlying theme: Human population growth is at the core of problems that society is not addressing but the population pressures will continue to increase for the next 50 years and contribute to selfishness. Professor Lanyon asked what the University believes its role should be; it could have a discussion of population growth and its effects.

Professor Pacala said he would be interested to know from the president about the perspective of the participants in the Itasca Project in terms of workforce needs versus building a better society. It is clear that legislators and the governor see higher education as workforce development. What do the Itasca participants and the regents and others think about that question? The president said it is his impression that employers are *eager* to talk about the alignment of higher education with their workforce needs and they are *willing* to listen to him talk about an educated society and the value of a liberal-arts education. It is a matter of eager versus willing. They accept the value of an educated society. But the idea that one goes to college, majors in something, and therefore gets a job is dead in these leadership groups.

Professor May asked if the University has data on where its graduates work, but undergraduate major. If companies were to look at its skilled labor force, would they be surprised at where their employees come from? The University has good data on graduates in business and engineering, the president said, but less so in the liberal arts.

Professor Hancher reported that following an earlier discussion he checked on the educational backgrounds of this year's candidates for president and vice president of the United States. All four were liberal- arts majors. The question is, who else who is running things has a liberal-arts education. That was Professor May's question, he said.

Professor Ben-Ner said that the answer to the quandary about the growth of selfishness is that it is part of social trends and could be part of the University's intellectual future discussions: Articulate where the growth of selfishness came from and the role of education as a broad-based good for society. It can try to articulate an understanding of how society is fragmented and fractioned, what are the consequences of this situation and what intellectual and educational role may the University play in ameliorating some of its negative aspects. Social fragmentation has many implications for organizations: People care less about each other, are more self-centered, and need stronger and more expensive incentives to get them to engage in desirable behaviors. This is an issue that most organizations need to confront. Perhaps the University can contribute to fostering a more harmonious and less fragmented society and community for the benefit of all. (The University's concern for the broad issue of diversity is a step in this direction.)

Provost Hanson said she believed Professor Ben-Ner was correct. At present one sees higher education withdrawn from public conversations. One sees the concept of the public good lost ("I built this" and the rebuttal in the presidential campaign is an example). The culture is not ready for the idea of the public good and educators should lead the discussion.

Professor Sheets said he thought Professor Ben Ner's point regarding the inverse correlation of social fragmentation with receptivity to the notion of a public good was perceptive. Tying the general principle back to a more limited context, knowledge production and dissemination, bears directly on the

role of the University. Its mission is necessarily broad because all forms of knowledge are interdependent. Especially as applied to real world problems, no area of knowledge is entirely autonomous. This is ultimately the best defense of the liberal arts, which can be thought of as a kind of glue that holds all other areas of knowledge together and gives shape to the entirety.

President Kaler said he wondered if the emphasis on workforce issues may be heightened today because in the past someone could major in one of the liberal arts disciplines and be hired by a company. He speculated that things may have changed because the information cycle is now so short; the gap between what one knows and what one needs to know is highlighted more today because of the pace.

Professor Pacala said that the president was probably correct but more narrowly-focused, job-specific education could provide the wrong set of skills for the long term, to understand the interdependence of knowledge or span the gaps between the disenfranchised and the privileged. But that does not make people ready for their next job, the president observed. Professor Pacala agreed but said that graduates with specific job readiness apply without any knowledge about the rest of society—and broader knowledge is not addressed when one acquires a job. Instant readiness contributes to fragmentation and selfishness.

Professor May said that the University cannot change the mega-trends but there are small things it can do. The faculty teach problem-solving skills and critical thinking, for example, and those are important for all sorts of jobs and professions. They are not simply training students to have particular skills for particular sorts of work. To get its message out, perhaps the University should consider being proactive in terms of public opinion, rather than simply reacting to questions and requests for interviews when the media request them. Maybe the University can suggest to local newspapers and other media that they establish some sort of "here's your university" feature, where students, faculty, and alumni can address key issues of the day. Maybe it can begin to reclaim the sense of ownership and positive identification that most Minnesotans once held toward the University. This should go beyond the website and digital media to include in-person sorts of activities as well as media. In the past there was a series called "Have Lunch with a Professor" that took place downtown every month or every week, with different faculty, and people working downtown could just drop in. These sorts of things are good PR. The president commented that the University can reach people who want to hear its message, but the question is how to reach those who may not. It needs to figure out how to do that.

Professor Ropers-Huilman said it is important to think about who the University serves. In her view, there are at least four groups: individuals, businesses, communities, and the world. Right now, she said, the conversation seems to be unbalanced in favor of business.

Professor Kohlstedt turned the discussion to MOOCs. She observed that she could not recall any curriculum question that had received such widespread attention so it is one that should receive the University's attention.

There are many moving pieces, President Kaler said, and he has several concerns:

-- Many Big Ten schools have signed on with Coursera but Minnesota has not; what does that say about the University?

- MOOCs may present a real threat to the university's fundamental business model, because universities own the certificate of education. What if employers are willing to take a certification of completion of three MOOCs instead of a college degree?
- If the University is to deliver MOOCs, how will it pay for the infrastructure required to deliver them?
- Given the pace of change, the University could be left behind.
- The University's ability to certify what students know is not well developed.

Provost Hanson offered a transitional comment from the previous topic: The MOOC question intersects with the question of private goods versus public goods. A MOOC appears to be broad outreach but it is individuals connecting with cyberspace, not with individuals. If the University pursues MOOCs, it should also re-ignite the social dialogue about the value to an individual and as a social good, but also the value of the institution. It seems inevitable that the University will participate in offering MOOCs, but if one is not mindful of other University contributions to learning, there could be problems. She said she is confident that the main model of education will survive. She also said she had no doubt that MOOCs would soon be monetized but they would not be a replacement for the current delivery of education. They cannot represent the whole academic enterprise of teaching and research.

What the University has done with eLearning has been modest, Professor Kohlstedt said, and the question is how to get engaged in MOOCs without enormous resources and capacity. MOOCs are a way to create something new, but if the University cannot do them well, it should not do them.

What puzzles him about MOOCs, Professor Lanyon said, is that they are seen as a challenge to current higher education delivery mechanisms. But the strength of MOOCs is the efficient delivery of facts. The public seems not to understand that a significant part of higher education is teaching concepts, analysis, and application of these ideas to novel circumstances. MOOCs are, therefore, yet another new tool for higher education to employ, but not a replacement for higher education as a whole. That said, it is puzzling that institutions such as Harvard would spend so much money to adopt this means of delivering facts to students, when teaching concepts is so much more challenging. Provost Hanson said that in some cases online education can be useful for delivering skills, through academic exercises that one must pass. That is useful but limited.

Professor Hancher had begun to read the recent Pew report (“Bricks and Clicks: What is the potential future of higher education and the Internet by 2020?” [http://www.elon.edu/e-web/predictions/expertsurveys/2012survey/future_higher_education_Internet_2020.xhtml]). “Transmission of knowledge” is what the report talks about. But a book transmits knowledge. Faculty in the classroom do more than just that: they help students develop skills and construct knowledge. If the University gets into the MOOC business, he hoped that that practice will be sustained. Provost Hanson agreed and noted how rare the accomplished autodidact is.

MOOCs are a major competitive issue for the University, Professor Ben-Ner maintained, and regardless of the true benefits involved, to be left out of MOOCs could be detrimental to its positioning among leading universities. Higher education has many niches and the University will survive as a face-to-face educational institution because some people do not want to study alone and value the interactions with professors and with each other. But there are financial pressures on what the University delivers in

the classroom, including large class size and extensive use of adjuncts and graduate students in the classroom. While these measures deliver savings, they erode the relative value that the University offers as compared to MOOCs and other alternatives. The University could be caught on both sides, not competing in its own niche and not being able to hold its own in the on-line realm. The Committee has discussed before how to bring richer teaching methods to the University, but at the same time must make moves into the MOOC arena, even in the absence of a clear business model at this time.

Professor Pacala agreed with Professor Ben-Ner. Medicine is in trouble because it tends to respond to change by modifying what it has always done: a patient visits the doctor. But modern medicine needs to ask what people really want. They want good health, but medicine has not stopped making the doctor consultation about a problem at the center of its activity. In education, there is the professor, the dorm, the classroom, the book bag, but young people are thinking they want to be educated, a process that might not include the classroom and the book bag. A MOOC is one possible tool by which to become educated and people are likely to turn to it. The University has to get into the MOOC business.

President Kaler agreed. MOOCs may change how people are educated and could turn classrooms inside out. But as Provost Hanson observed, the University has been in business a long time because what it does is far more than what occurs in the classroom. If one asks people to think about an event they most remember from college, it is likely it will be an event outside a classroom. The University can use the highest quality MOOCs and it must also be a MOOC exporter.

The faculty could be invited to participate in MOOCs that are not offered by the University, Professor Bitterman said. How will it deal with that? Will it invite other faculty to participate in its MOOCs? If it does not engage, it could be left behind, he agreed. But those questions will have to be addressed. Provost Hanson said there is a group working actively on them. She said that the University cannot have its own faculty members preparing classes for other institutions and being paid by other institutions. President Kaler said that Stanford is way out in front on MOOCs but can't sell a course elsewhere—that gets to intellectual property ownership. The University celebrates its connection to the faculty every pay day. The provost said there would be a proposal to review very soon.

Professor Kohlstedt noted that the provost had said she thought University involvement in MOOCs was inevitable. There could be a number of faculty entrepreneurs willing to get involved.

Professor Ropers-Huilman reported that her dean asked all department chairs to take one MOOC, staying with it at least through its first week. She did so and did not find the experience as productive as she had hoped because the presentation was very fragmented and she needed to access many related sources through other venues. At the same time, she pointed out that she used to feel negatively about the possibilities of on-line courses for promoting students' learning, but she is willing to believe now that perhaps her view is not true for students given changing technology and younger students' increased familiarity with that technology. Professor Hancher said he likes high technology, but asked if the platform is good enough for a MOOC. Is it flexible enough for the teacher and the learner? Moodle is not yet fluid; when MOOCs become common, one hopes the system is Steve-Job-smooth. And if it is done, is it for the teacher or the student? Professor Ropers-Huilman said there are some positive elements of MOOCs; for example, one benefit of the MOOC that she is participating in is an opportunity to hear from mid-level staff and faculty around the world. Still, she experiences the MOOC as fragmented rather than coherent.

Professor Bitterman suggested that when gamers get involved in MOOCs, changes will happen and there will be different levels. The faculty will adapt quickly; the students are already ready. No one ever said anyone must have a computer on their desk. No one ever said that everyone must use PowerPoint. Who sent that memo? These things happened organically. But they will happen fast, the president said. The cell phone is cheaper because they are produced in the millions. Once there is a base, with many students, and they can be sold, MOOCs will take off. Professor Bitterman maintained that the University has the production experts and the content experts and could produce MOOCs.

Professor May inquired if there would be a TCF Organic Chemistry course. Professor Cramer asked how much they would pay. Professor Ropers-Huilman said the exchange goes back to the question of dollars versus principles and of basic mission. The financing is not always direct sponsorship because much of the income on blogs comes from simply the number of people accessing a site and thus generating advertising revenue, Professor Kohlstedt said; one makes money based on the number of clicks to the site; and the same might become true with MOOCs. The test is not one of quality. If one receives a lot of hits, advertisers want to pay to advertise on it.

Professor Cloyd observed that there are immediate challenges but the University also should be thinking ten years ahead; too often, the faculty and staff are thinking about next week or next semester. One must realize that the University in ten years will not be the University of today. Are Silicone Valley and venture capitalists the University's competition? Will all colleges and departments be equally involved? Who will be potential college students in 2020? What kind of for-profit competition will come from Silicon Valley? What if a certificate from three MOOC courses is good enough to satisfy corporate employers? The University needs to alert its constituencies about coming changes and begin to make plans. The future is not just MOOCs.

Professor Ropers-Huilman said that while she did not like the MOOC she took professionally, she might take one outside her area of expertise and said she is excited about the opportunities for people as citizens. Does the University want to be in that arena? It has offered informal education for a long time.

Professor Durfee offered an analogy with the Metropolitan Opera live broadcasts in theaters. It broadens the Met's audience to the world and it provides a different perspective—they are all front-row seats. Purists would argue that one can only see the opera in Lincoln Center, but the live broadcasts provide other opportunities. MOOCs open up tremendous possibilities.

Professor Bearinger said that no-compete and conflict-of-interest issues will come up very quickly and the University will need to be clear what is and is not acceptable.

Professor Kohlstedt thanked the president and provost for joining the meeting and adjourned the meeting at 2:30.

-- Gary Engstrand