

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, April 7, 1999
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, Tina Rovick, Richard Skaggs, Suzanne Bates Smith, Thomas Soulen, Steven Sperber, Craig Swan

Regrets: Robert Johnson, Christine Maziar

Absent: Shumaila Anwer, Laura Beauchane, Angela Bos, Darcia Narvaez

Guests: Susan VanVoorhis (Registrar)

[In these minutes: calendars; unapproved grade changes; transcript changes with the change to semesters; the X grade; PeopleSoft and the policy prohibiting enrollment in overlapping classes; classes without classrooms; policy on classroom expectations; clarification on the S]

1. Issues of Grades and Calendars

Professor Martin convened the meeting at 1:00 and turned to Ms. VanVoorhis to lead a discussion of several items.

CALENDARS Ms. VanVoorhis began by distributing copies of the 2000-01 and draft 2001-02 calendars, and said she was working with the coordinate campuses to develop calendars four years into the future. Committee members inquired about several items on the drafts, and asked that Ms. VanVoorhis reformat the calendars to include study days, the day of the week that classes begin and end (in addition to the date), and the number of instructional days in each term.

GRADE CHANGES Ms. VanVoorhis recounted that a question had been raised with her about whether or not it is possible for unauthorized grade changes to be made, because one of the news stories about the difficulties in basketball contained an anecdote about a student filing a large number of illegitimate grade change forms. That event occurred in 1980, Ms. VanVoorhis related. Now there is an NCR form that the instructor and department head fills out; the form is either delivered to her office by a staff member (not a student) or send by campus mail. The change is made by the Registrar's office and copies of the form are returned to the department to let them know the change has been made. They recommend that departments audit such changes.

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Problems arise when people in departments share their secure IDs. Departments do not want to pay the \$8 for more secure IDs. There is also a training issue; her office wants departments to monitor when students have access to the system. SCEP concurs that this is essential.

In response to a question, Ms. VanVoorhis said it was her sense that the system is working. Whether or not notification of a grade change is provided to the faculty member varies with the department, she said. In the future, more changes will be made electronically, but before they move in that direction, they want to be sure the system is secure.

TRANSCRIPT CHANGES Ms. VanVoorhis next reported that she had been informed of a rumor, primarily among AHC students, that transcripts would be converted from quarter course entries to semester equivalents. That is NOT the case, she assured the Committee. There will be a conversion term to calculate equivalents, but that will not appear on the transcript. After this summer, of course, transcript entries will be on semesters.

THE "X" GRADE Professor Martin next observed that a question had been raised by the Crookston campus staff about the meaning of the X grade and how it is used. (The X grade is used for courses in a sequence, when no grade is awarded until the sequence has been completed.) What happens to an X grade earned by a student who does not complete the course sequence? One suggestion is that it, like the I, lapse automatically to an F after one year.

-- It is possible and permissible to graduate with an X on the transcript, if a student has otherwise accumulated enough credits and met all other degree requirements. The X carries no credit (and could not be left on the transcript for a required course).

-- The Committee did not know how many courses used the X grade; the assumption was that it was a very small number.

The Committee agreed that it did not wish to recommend any change in the use of the X grade, and that it should NOT lapse to an F. The Committee also discussed briefly the K grade, but took no action on it, either.

2. Overlapping Classes

Ms. VanVoorhis next reported that the policy prohibiting students from enrolling in overlapping classes as well as classes that have less than the normal passing time between end and start time will not be completely enforceable with PeopleSoft. If one course ends at 8:50 and another (not adhering to the required class schedule) were to begin at 8:50, PeopleSoft would not see that as a time conflict. If a class were to end at 8:50, and another begin at 8:49, that would be interpreted as a conflict and the student would not be permitted to register without the permission of both instructors.

Professor Martin and others on the Committee expressed some dismay at this change. Professor Martin commented that she has a number of students in her class (which starts at 11:15) who have class UNTIL 11:15 on the St. Paul campus, so they always come in late. Ms. VanVoorhis reported that it used to be possible to implement the policy, but a number of universities complained to PeopleSoft about this program, so it was changed. As a result, Professor Martin pointed out, students who self-register will now be able to do exactly what the policy was intended to prohibit.

Committee members inquired about a number of possible remedies, none of which seemed feasible in the short term. One problem is that departments are not all adhering to the class schedule, which leads to starting and ending times which do not coincide with other courses. The fact that Tuesday-Thursday classes are run on two different schedules adds to the problem.

Ms. VanVoorhis expressed the hope that since the PeopleSoft system DOES prevent a student from registering in overlapping classes, perhaps most of the problem will be solved. If SCEP learns that the problem continues next year, it will need to make inquiries about how the system can be altered. Another key action would be to prevent classes from being scheduled at "odd" times, thus increasing the likelihood of overlaps.

3. Classes without Classrooms

Professor Martin next asked Ms. VanVoorhis about the number of classes without classrooms for Fall Semester. Originally she had about 660 such classes, Ms. VanVoorhis said; now the number is down to 399. If the Newman Center becomes available, it will accommodate 100 more, and if departmental classrooms can be used (after departmental needs are met), there will only be 30-40 classes without sites.

4. Policy on Classroom Expectations

Professor Martin turned now to Professor Koch, who distributed a first draft of a proposed policy on classroom expectations. She began by reflecting that this has been on the SCEP policy agenda since 1995, but had never been taken up. The draft is for discussion purposes, and the language is drawn both from other universities as well as from college handbooks.

One Committee member inquired why this policy was drafted; another inquired if should be something less than policy but more than guidelines. In response to the first question, it was explained that the Senate office, student ombuds offices, and other individuals consistently receive questions about matters related to what happens in the classroom. In response to the second, one Committee member later argued that there is value in having such a document on the record as University POLICY. Another Committee member said that when the University is hiring a lot of new (and young) faculty, and trying to adjust the culture to emphasize teaching and learning, it would be a good idea to have such a policy in place.

It was noted that:

-- Where there is a disagreement between a student and an instructor, it is often because the instructor has changed expectations in a course, with the best of intentions and often at the suggestion of students.

-- One item that is consistent in surveys of students is that they want more feedback about their performance.

-- The Bush program on teaching and learning includes a strong directive to faculty to do more mid-term course evaluations and to try to improve them as the term progresses; this policy should not preclude such changes.

The Committee then moved to a point-by-point review, providing comments and suggestions to Professor Koch for revision.

One question that arose was how long faculty or departments should keep student papers and academic records. Another was about the ownership of papers submitted (not of the copyright, which is presumably owned by the author).

It was agreed that once the Committee has agreed to a draft document, it should be circulated to the Center for Teaching and Learning and to the Academy of Distinguished Teachers. After that, it should go to members of the Senate and to departments for comment and feedback.

Professor Koch agreed to bring a revised draft back to the Committee at a meeting in early May.

5. Reorganization Policy

Professor Martin next distributed copies of a redrafted reorganization policy and reviewed the changes that had been made, in accord with suggestions from Executive Vice President Bruininks and Vice Provost Swan. The Committee approved the suggestions; the item was then approved for submission to the Senate Consultative Committee for placement on the Senate docket.

6. Athletic Academic Counseling

It was suggested that the Committee request an annual meeting with the Director of Academic Counseling in athletics.

7. Clarification of the S

Professor Martin asked the Committee to approve an editorial clarification in the Uniform Grading Policy, which confirmed that instructors have the discretion to set the standard for an S at any level. The Uniform Grading Policy only requires that the standard for the S may be no lower than a C-.

The Committee approved the clarification, which will be reported to the Senate for information.

Professor Martin then adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota