Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs
Tuesday, February 12, 2013
2:30 – 4:30
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Scott Lanyon (chair), William Beeman, Arlene Carney, Randy Croce, Jennifer Fillo,
               Joseph Konstan, Frank Kulacki, Theodor Litman, Rishabh Mishra, Joe Ritter, James
               Wojtaszek

Absent: Ben Bornsztein, Kathryn Brown, Dann Chapman, Carl Flink, Sophia Gladding, Amy
               Lee, Karen Miksch, Benjamin Munson, George Sell, Pamela Stenhjem

Guests: none

[In these minutes: (1) grading; (2) MOOCs]

1.   Grading

       Professor Lanyon convened the meeting at 2:30 and began by noting a draft memo that the Senate
Committee on Educational Policy (SCEP) has prepared to send to Vice Provost McMaster about grading.
SCEP has been discussing grade compression/inflation and grade reporting (that is, providing context for
grades) over the last year; the memo addressed only grade compression/inflation. It advises the vice
provost what to pay attention to, especially that faculty members in departments talk about grades. SCEP
intends to get the vice provost thinking about reporting the context of grades as well, Professor Lanyon
said, and SCEP believes it important, but not by changing transcripts. SCEP backed off the idea of
providing contextual information on the transcripts because only a few institutions do so and University
of Minnesota students could be put at a disadvantage if Minnesota but no other institution does it. There
were also significant problems with PeopleSoft in adding contextual information to transcripts.

       Professor Konstan recalled that Professor Cramer, then chair of the Faculty Consultative
Committee, brought up this issue a couple of years ago and said that the information about context should
be provided at the course level. So if one receives a B+ in a course where only 1 A was awarded and
there were 83 C's, that would be perceived differently from a B+ where everyone else in the course
received an A. The Senate receives grade reports by department and course level each year and it is clear
that there are variations by college in grading practices.

       This is a very nice document, Professor Konstan continued, and it will be summarily ignored. It
affirms the faculty role in grading, which the faculty already have; it indicates faculty should review
grades. If it makes SCEP feel good, that's fine, but nothing will change. Professor Kulacki agreed and
said that committee statements like this have no effect.

       Professor Lanyon said the point of bringing the memo to this Committee is to keep it informed
and to identify any problems it might see.

Professor Beeman wondered how a unit, in the course of a program review, would answer a question on the standard used to award A grades, as the memo suggests. How would such standards be determined? And by whom? Especially in upper-level courses in seminar format, A-F grades are silly. Professor Konstan added that one cannot answer the question if it is left up to individuals; all one could do is look at syllabus language.

Committee members raised a few questions about wording in the memo; Professor Lanyon said he would transmit them to the SCEP chair. One question was whether the call for a review of grades that deviated from certain norms meant deviated from a standard where C is the normal grade or deviated from grades in similar courses.

Ms. Fillo commented that the undertone in the memo is that "lots of A's are bad." She said she was given no guidelines on how she should distribute grades in classes she teaches. She does grade on standards, and if all the students met the expectations, they could all earn an A (something that does not happen). The memo implies that that is bad and that too many students receiving A's is bad. What SCEP likely intended, she surmised, is that students receiving A's they do not deserve is bad.

Professor Ritter said the tone also is that there should be undergraduate program discussion of the norms for A grades. There may not be consensus within a program on what those norms should be but norms could make it easier for faculty members inclined to do so to adopt tougher standards. Sometimes there is a need for collective action. In the case of a program review, Professor Konstan said that often only 3-4 faculty members would be involved, which is very different from saying that there should be a department culture around norms and standards.

Professor Wojtaszek said he was concerned about the emphasis on the C grade implied in the language of the draft memo. He agreed on the desirability of encouraging discussions in programs but pointed out that there will be differences across programs. He also observed that sometimes new instructors/junior faculty members may have good ideas about grading that senior faculty should hear about, so it should not be assumed that the senior faculty will tell the junior faculty what to do. The language should call for discussion.

2   MOOCs

Professor Lanyon asked Committee members to return to the discussion of MOOCs begun at the last meeting; he provided a set of questions that Professor Cramer had prepared.

1. How does the University of Minnesota's partnership with a national MOOC project expand the reach and reputation of the University of Minnesota?
   a. Admissions – Is there any evidence that an increased number of highly qualified undergraduate and graduate student applicants are drawn to the University based on this effort?
   b. Is the University seen as a more progressive, innovative institution, offering high quality education based on participation in this effort?

2. How can we use the enhanced learning analytics from MOOC student assessments to reformulate how key concepts are taught within a course?

3. What can we learn about how to structure video/lecture segments for the most effective learning outcomes?

4. What can we learn about building better online assessments?

5. How can we leverage what we learn from the MOOC project to inform the design, development, and delivery of more conventional online and blended courses?

6. How practical is it to repurpose the video segments created for the MOOC for resident instruction (blended/online)?

7. How well suited would U of M MOOC offerings be for advanced Minnesota high school students?

8. How can MOOCs be used as part of the content for U of M courses in a "flipped" classroom design?

9. How much time and effort are required, and what are the best practices for providing design and production support for the development of MOOCs?

Committee members offered a number of comments and observations in the hour of discussion focused on MOOCs.

-- It was said that a MOOC or online course takes about 300% of the time that a traditional course takes; such courses must also be maintained and updated, and an instructor cannot be expected to handle the technical elements of doing so. There is a need for technical specialists as well as editors and other staff. The idea seems to be that one can prepare a MOOC or online course once and then cash in on it without further effort. That is ridiculous.

-- Some faculty who have done online courses agree that they need maintenance but would not necessarily agree about the big multiplier in terms of workload compared to more traditional courses. They take a lot of work the first year but not in years 2-5.

-- If the University takes advantage of MOOCs from other institutions, it can avoid the costs but use the MOOCs to supplement University courses; the drawback is that the faculty member does not deliver the material.

-- There are four places where extra costs accrue: videotaping stand-along lectures require a lot of attention and need to be updated every year or every few years; MOOC are geared to small, digestible chunks of information, which can save on updating when it can be done in small bits; evaluation techniques for MOOCs, which do not involve using TAs, will involve some other schemes; and the management of a large number of students.

-- One successful model is the National Technological University, concept that works in certain fields with a clientele. Lectures are broken into pieces and sold to registrants who earn credits by exams that

have proctors. There have been a number of examples of online education from the 1970s, and they will work if the institution is dedicated to them and has a separate accounting for them.

-- The real question about MOOCs is when the other shoe will drop. The companies sponsoring them are not making money—but they intend to. MOOCs may be based on the consumer electronics model: Get customers hooked so that they can't live without the product, then charge them for it. There is something in it for the University; if it can reach a million people, perhaps the cost can be reasonable. But it must also be concerned about quality and not offer a dumbed-down degree.

-- The 5 courses that Professor Cramer mentioned at the last meeting are highly specialized, almost training modules for highly-trained specialists. Those are not a fair test of what will transpire. A MOOC won't work with 18-25 students; they need 5,000 students in an introductory course.

-- People are thinking about MOOCs as a non-paying enterprise or as a traditional online class. The question is how to monetize them, and it can be done: Professor Cramer's course could have 10,000 students, some of whom will be at the University of Minnesota and who can take tests and pay tuition. One need not think that either one must get 100,000 students enrolled, each of whom will pay $20, or there is nothing at all.

-- A MOOC is enormous; 20-50 students in a course is online education, not a MOOC.

-- The Committee can't answer Professor Cramer's questions. He's asking questions that should be used to evaluate MOOCs if the University decides to offer them. But right now the Committee would be answering out of ignorance.

-- Contrary to another opinion, MOOCs can range from an introductory course to one that is highly specialized. In many fields, the benefit of great specialization is that that is where the University can compete with Harvard. It could be difficult to compete with other institutions in offering an introductory humanities course, but the University may have the best people in the field in a number of areas. The question is how to deliver a MOOC with not a lot of hands-on support and in a way that it can be used on campus. The mission should be a harmonious fusion so that it pays off for the students on campus, too.

-- One can argue for hybrid courses. They work well for smaller classes, 10-30 students, where interaction is important. In some cases, they reportedly have stronger interactions than live classes, especially if the students are graded on participation. If there could be components of a MOOC where students can participate and be graded on the participation, and if there were video that enhanced the course, that would be a benefit for students.

-- The benefits of interaction are not just teacher-student but also student-student; those are left out of MOOCs. One can also worry about how learning will be perceived by MOOC students in addition to how the University will be perceived. In a class, one expects students to have done the reading; MOOCs could create the expectation that everything will be taught in the course. The format could affect how students perceive what learning is—that they just receive information.

-- In a blended classroom, an instructor will use a variety of digital components, which is great. But now students are being asked to do a lot more outside the classroom; it is possible, for example, to spend less

time lecturing on jargon and definitions, to push those out of the contact hours so there is more time for discussion. How will the academy avoid massive inflation in the time demands on students?

-- A large state university cannot pick winners and losers. Stanford and MIT are the most "publicly-traded" schools and they can throw out courses that people will look at. Harvard, Wharton, etc., can do the same. But few faculty members in general have that throw weight. The support for MOOCs, suggested by question 9, will be important.

-- The upfront time is 300-400%, both here and at other universities. In trying to keep courses contemporary, about one-half of the material (in one discipline, in any event) needs to be replaced each year. Moreover, anyone preparing a MOOC lecture must be extremely articulate and precise, more so than in a lecture, where there can also be Q&A exchanges. It takes a lot longer to write and tape MOOC lectures than it does to prepare materials for traditional classes.

-- A big unknown is the role of the book. Students had to change when professors went from lectures alone to books plus lectures. That could escalate. Or book time could be dropping and a course would use a lecture from Stanford; students may consume a different media mix before they get to class—and it could be better. But students have a block of time they can allot to a course; if a MOOC is an add on, that would need careful discussion.

-- Unless the work contributed to a MOOC is valued in the University, MOOCs will create friction. In earlier times, it was clear that administrators di not count contributions to online learning as scholarly work; it was fun, and a hobby, something one did on one's own time, and it did not contribute to getting tenure. It is likely that MOOCs will be produced by tenured faculty; for the more vulnerable non-tenured faculty members, administrators and departments will have to write in blood that MOOC contributions count just like a book or paper.

-- One possible carrot: Because MOOCs, etc., take so much more time, instructors could be paid more by the college or central administration or the situation will be unfair.

-- One colleague gave a TEDX lecture and said he had never put in so much work for such a short talk. The payoff is that if it is good, a talk like that will be seen by 1 million to 100 million people. MOOCs can be seen as just another stage of the University's commitment to support faculty members for high-visibility, high-outreach activities. It can be the lecture circuit, it can be a MOOC, it can be writing a book. Giving a talk is treated differently. If one publishes, it is treated as scholarship. If one gives a talk, it doesn't count for much. As there are more educational resources to consume, faculty have a role to play in the University's reputation as well as in scholarship. And if a talk counts, it is assessed by venue. (There is no way to evaluate Congressional testimony, or testimony before the state legislature.)

-- The ways to review performance can be broken down two ways. One, ways to review faculty who are doing atypical things (is there flexibility in the system to consider such things?) and two, things for which the University might want to provide incentives for faculty members to do (could there be incentives for e-learning?).

-- This is like interdisciplinary research; it is a lot more work to start and what results from it is not the coin of evaluation in one's discipline. But the University clearly states that it supports interdisciplinary collaboration, has a number of policy statements about it, 7.12 statements support it to remind people that

interdisciplinary work counts. The faculty know the academy is doomed if they stay in their silos. It could be that these new ways of teaching and reaching the public could have the same effect: They will be seen as so important that the University or the colleges will provide seed money for projects and will reward the work with merit.

-- Another model is work for hire; hire someone to do the MOOC and not worry whether it counts for scholarship and tenure. It would be helpful to know how much MOOC work is done by contract faculty and how much by tenured faculty members.

-- It is not clear that work on a MOOC should count at the University. It does not pay and it does not measure educational output; it is wise for the University to take a venture capital approach and it should not reward the activity yet. Hybrid courses generate local tuition revenue. There could be some public relations value, such as a course on honeybees by the University's expert, but it nothing is paid for, what does the University get out of it?

-- Setting aside MOOCs, is the University prepared to invest so that faculty will invest in blended learning? Should there be incentives? Or the University could contract the work out. What does the Committee think about e-learning generally?

-- In a time of tremendous change, the venture capital approach is the best. Faculty should be paid for specific projects—but they should also integrate new technology in their regular teaching as well.

-- One colleague of a Committee member has been doing e-learning for 25 years—and is still an associate professor. E-learning models rise and fall, and case studies have report how some have gone on the rocks. The University should not get into e-learning because it is a "neat" thing to do.

-- This may not be true, but if the University provides too many incentives, will that send the message to the faculty that if the institution wants significant educational change, they must be paid for it or else it won't happen? The flip side is that the University has had a lot of small grants for research and no one asks about the payoff for the University. The idea is that faculty-generated ideas for research are a good thing, even if they don't directly benefit the University; the idea of a pool of dollars to support e-learning won't enrich the faculty but will allow them to pursue an idea they otherwise couldn't and that the University should support initiatives in e-learning. Peer review may be appropriate, but the support shouldn't exclude "wacky" initiatives nor should it be so generous that there is a disincentive to faculty to experiment with e-learning unless they get such support from the University. The Committee should find out what resulted from the work of the TEL Council and if there was any change in behavior as a result of its grants. It could be that some small grant program could be started to help faculty interested in e-learning. (There is one now, and a large one, in addition to grants in the Office for Information Technology.)

-- New faculty often ask about how to get started, and they are not even facilitated in writing a grant proposal, so Dr. Carney hopes for funding for new faculty to help them get started. The University has to decide on the best use of the money, and she would suggest erring on the side of helping new faculty, but in balance with helping more senior faculty as well.

-- People talk about MOOCs destroying places like the University, but that is not likely to happen. At the same time, it would be foolish of the University not to address what it can and cannot get out of them, and that may involve providing incentives for the faculty.

-- When there are many famous modules out there to be used, and a faculty member wants to put them in his or her course—which, apart from the business aspects, would seem to be the best of both worlds—when does the faculty member become the travel agent? At that point, students could say they could get the material themselves, just as people are buying their own airline tickets.

-- Professor Lanyon said he worries, in terms of student expectations of learning, that one semester he will show up for class and the students will have entirely different learning expectations and he won't know what they are. One does not have a sense of what students are learning, what skills they are acquiring, in other courses.

-- When there are changes in a course, people pay attention to student evaluations; should faculty members be given credit for experimenting with courses? That is why the University should not put all its eggs in the student evaluations basket; the University has one of the best statements around on peer review but faculty members may not be using peer review enough (which does not mean just sitting in on someone else's class). Faculty members could write up what changes they want in a course and their goals for making them; other faculty could evaluate the proposal. There is a useful short peer-review document developed with the Academy of Distinguished Teachers on the provost's website; peer review should be used in conjunction with student evaluations.

-- A MOOC should not have to be done by a single faculty member.

-- MOOCs will not happen if the responsibility is thrown onto departments without senior administrators putting money behind the effort. It comes down to the use of time and how people are recognized. Chairs may say one can do a MOOC—but they must also watch enrollment; if a faculty member is put on a project such as a MOOC, the department loses enrollment.

-- Who is in charge of MOOCs? Provost Hanson, Dr. Carney reported, and she has hired Professor Cramer as faculty liaison and Dr. Rubinyi responsible for e-learning. Professor Lanyon said that Professor Cramer is taking a venture capital approach to see what the University learns.

-- It may be that MOOCs may be more applicable to some colleges than others.

        Committee members discussed with Dr. Carney the administrative organization around e-learning and the desirability (or not) of coming up with central goals for e-learning—and having conversations about establishing such goals, if any.

        Professor Lanyon adjourned the meeting at 4:05.

                                        -- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota