

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy  
Wednesday, December 4, 2013  
2:00 – 4:00  
300 Morrill Hall**

Present: Alon McCormick (chair), Michael Anderson, Nicola Alexander, Erich Beckert, Karla Hemesath (for Barbara Brandt), Thomas Brothen, Charlene Ellingson, Timothy Earns, Gayle Golden, Kenneth Leopold, Keith Mayes, Robert McMaster, Nic McPhee, Kristen Nelson, Moshe Volovik, Susan Wick

Absent: Gifty Amarteifio, Lee-Ann Breuch, Elaine Darst, Janine Grebin, Sally Gregory Kohlstedt

Guests: Belinda Cheung, Vicki Field (Graduate School); Susan Van Voorhis (Academic Support Resources); Associate Vice President Andrew Furco (Public Engagement); Suzanne Bardouche, Leslie Schiff (Office of Undergraduate Education); Vice Provost Arlene Carney, Assistant Vice Provost Ole Gram; David Langley (Center for Teaching and Learning)

Other: none

[In these minutes: (1) update on Graduate School initiatives; (2) Student-Rating-of-Teaching (SRT) form; (3) public engagement issues; (4) policy revisions; (2) SRT, continued]

**1. Update on Graduate School Initiatives**

Professor McCormick called the meeting to order at 2:00 and welcomed Ms. Field to discuss Graduate School initiatives.

Ms. Field began by noting that she serves as Associate to the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Education and as Director of the Graduate School's Office of Interdisciplinary Initiatives. She expressed appreciation to the committee for the opportunity to speak about several of the Graduate School's current activities and turned to interdisciplinary initiatives first.

The Graduate School has an 11-member faculty advisory committee appointed in spring 2013 by Vice Provost Henning Schroeder and co-chaired by Professors Mary Jo Kreitzer and Susan Galatowitsch. The committee's role is to advise the Graduate School on issues in interdisciplinary graduate education, on best (and promising) practices, and on ways to enhance opportunities for graduate students whose research and scholarship is interdisciplinary. The broader goal is to prepare the next generation of interdisciplinary scholar/researchers. The committee is keen to gain insight into student perceptions about opportunities to pursue graduate education and research outside their major fields and contributed to the design of a brief survey that the Graduate School circulated to all graduate

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students the day before this meeting. The survey results will help inform the work of the advisory committee.

Ms. Field reported that with the help of the new committee, the Graduate School also just circulated a brief survey to directors of all interdisciplinary research centers and institutes to better understand how they involve graduate students in their activities, if they are interested in involving students to a greater extent and if so, in what ways. The idea is that providing more pathways to interdisciplinary opportunities through centers and institutes creates valuable networks for students and adds to their learning experience. The goal is to extend these benefits to more graduate students

With input from the advisory committee, the Graduate School will circulate two Requests for Proposals, Ms. Field said. The first, a call for innovative ideas in interdisciplinary graduate education, just went out and any member of the graduate education community is eligible to submit a proposal. They will provide small awards, up to \$5,000, to help launch each of the best three ideas. Proposals are due February 14, 2014. In January they will issue a call for funding for existing interdisciplinary graduate groups, which are groups of faculty, students, and staff who share similar interdisciplinary interests and are committed to exploring and advancing them. These groups exist outside the traditional department/college structure, so they are free from some bureaucratic constraints. In the past, the Graduate School has provided seed money (typically \$3,000 - \$4,000) to the most promising groups to help get them underway (e.g., for symposia, a speaker series, brown bag discussions), and the groups have yielded grant proposals and new interdisciplinary courses and minors, for example.

Professor Nelson asked about the trends over time in the level of interest in the groups. It has been fairly consistent, Ms. Field said; there are currently about 29 groups, which may be somewhat more than are at some of the University's peers. Other schools that have adopted this mechanism to foster interdisciplinary inquiry may have fewer groups, which may allow the institutions to invest more in each one. Some graduate groups here have not been as active as they could be and the Graduate School will consider weeding out the less active (or inactive) ones this spring.

Ms. Ellingson asked how a group is created and how people would know about them. The Graduate School has entertained proposals about every other year to establish an interdisciplinary group, Ms. Field said, and vets them with a faculty review committee. The successful groups are featured on the Graduate School's website with brief information about the intellectual focus and membership of each. The call in January will be for funding proposals for established groups, rather than for new groups. Following this year's call, they will assess whether a call to form new groups might be warranted next year.

Professor McCormick asked if she sees any policy issues that could come to this Committee from the advisory group. Possibly, Ms. Field said; the group is new, but once it gets going and examines the survey results, it may have recommendations that could come to SCEP. The advisory committee would also be interested in the review of interdisciplinary teaching by this Committee, Ms. Field said. She wondered if the Special Committee on Graduate Education that Professor Lanyon is chairing might also make recommendations with policy implications for interdisciplinary graduate education.

Ms. Field reported that the Graduate and Professional Education Assembly (GPEA) will meet on April 2, 2014, and the general topic will be graduate education in a digital age.

[[http://www.grad.umn.edu/deans-office/projects\\_initiatives/gpea/](http://www.grad.umn.edu/deans-office/projects_initiatives/gpea/) ] There is a 14-member planning committee that is broadly representative of digital activities and interests on campus s that will narrow the focus of the issues to be taken up at the GPEA. She asked for suggestions for topics and speakers. Professor McCormick suggested that Committee members send suggestions to Ms. Field ([field001@umn.edu](mailto:field001@umn.edu)). Professor Nelson offered one: publishing in digital media for graduate students, access, where they need to go, and thinking about it over their career. Another suggestion was the electronic publication of data sets as equivalent to journal publication.

Vice Provost McMaster asked what is meant by "digital graduate education." A host of things, Ms. Field said, including such things as the digital humanities, digital tools and methods (e.g., mega data sets, crowd sourcing), how to represent oneself as a scholar in digital media—it will be difficult to rein in the topics because there are so many.

Professor McCormick thanked Ms. Field for the update.

## **2. Student-Rating-of-Teaching (SRT) Form**

Professor McCormick noted that the proposed changes to the SRT form will be on the docket of the Faculty Senate for discussion on December 5, for information only, and the body will be reminded that it is a discussion document. He asked Committee members if there were issues that remained a concern to this Committee and whether or not it wished to endorse the direction or the details. What is the Committee's posture, he asked?

Professor Brothen said his impression is that people like the general direction but there are a lot of "ifs" and questions.

Ms. Golden said that the results are used in part so that instructors can make changes for the next course. With respect to the use of "fair" or "clear" to describe the grading in a course, she said she would not be sure what to do if the feedback she received was that the grading was not "fair," but she would know what needed to be done if it was not "clear." The word "clear" gets at the point quite well, she said.

The Committee took no position on the proposal at this time.

## **3. Public Engagement Issues**

Professor McCormick welcomed Associate Vice President Furco to the meeting to review items of relevance to this Committee in public engagement.

Dr. Furco recalled that one of the items of interest was metrics that would capture the scale and scope of public engagement work at the University. Currently, there is no system to collect data on the number and types of courses that include a community engagement component. In 2007 the Committee approved a service-learning designation for courses that included a community service component; it was never implemented for various reasons. The Public Engagement Council—the University's consultative committee on public engagement issues—revisited the proposal and concluded that a service-learning designation would be too cumbersome and challenging to implement. A system for reviewing courses would have to be established, and Dr. Furco and the

Council believe that at this time, such as system would be burdensome for faculty and academic units. Instead it suggests the establishment of a community engagement "attribute"; faculty members can select community engagement as an attribute, something that can be accomplished in ECAS. This would be one way to begin to capture part of the University's public engagement that is tied to academic courses.

Without specific standards and with self-reporting, do they care how little or much public engagement there is in a course, Dr. Schiff asked? One thinks about the desire to get bodies in seats; public engagement could be a good hook, but require different levels of engagement across courses. Ms. Golden asked if a field trip would count.

Dr. Furco said that public engagement in a course varies by discipline. The Office for Public Engagement is developing language to describe what community engagement is, clarifying distinctions between different types of community engagement experiences. He noted that there are many community-engaged experiences in different courses under many names. Therefore, it would be a slippery slope to start identifying what counts and does not count. Dr. Furco asked the committee: who should decide what counts and doesn't count? He suggested that for this first phase of work to let the attribute process proceed and at some point do spot checks on courses to see what is being called community engagement. Based on data about how faculty across disciplines are defining community engagement attributes, there may then be a need to identify minimum standards at some point. Ms. Golden said it would be helpful to offer guidance on what community engagement is.

Professor Nelson said she would pose three questions to be considered in evaluating community engagement in a course. One, is the community engagement part of one of the student-learning objectives? Two, what percentage of the course does a student spend in a community-engaged setting? Three, how is community engagement integrated into the components of the course (e.g., assignments, exams, reflection).

Professor McCormick asked if there could be local standards and the community-engagement attribute required to have department or college approval. Professor Nelson said they could review the course but did not believe a formal approval process over and above current review standards would be required. There could be an itemized list of elements of community engagement and instructors could check off those that apply to his or her course. Once that has occurred, there could be peer review or submission to a curriculum committee (those steps should perhaps be implemented if a college or department sees slippage).

Ultimately, one could build a definition from the disciplines, Professor McCormick suggested.

Professor Alexander asked what percentage of a course should be community engagement to consider it for the attribute. Professor Nelson said there is no specific expectation nor does it appear that there is any norm. If 10% of a course is deemed community engagement, what should be done, Professor Alexander asked? What is the threshold? Dr. Furco said that is a good question that he would appreciate guidance on. Ms. Golden said that tying community engagement to a learning outcome is a good idea because that way it would have to be addressed in more than a brief way.

Professor McCormick asked if there will be a faculty body to help with standards, perhaps parallel to the Council on Liberal Education. Dr. Furco thought not, at least not at this point, and it

would need to be formed; if it were, it could advise but it would not be in the business of review and approval.

Vice Provost McMaster said that in the case of the liberal-education requirements, there are standards that must be met before a course will be approved so it is robust. He said he believed that the Public Engagement Council should establish criteria for course to be labelled as community engaged or providing service learning—or else there will be many courses with little community-engaged content. He said he would like to see the attribute attached to courses where community engagement is infused in the course.

Dr. Furco said that there are basic standards and practices for service-learning and other community-engaged pedagogies; these are published and are widely espoused in the community engagement field. But they are interpreted differently by faculty and disciplines. Dr. Furco asked, who should decide which standards should apply and to what extent? Dr. Schiff said that the Public Engagement Council should decide; it is their attribute. If there is a clear set of guidelines, then it would be the responsibility of college curriculum committees to review courses described as community engaged—so there would not be someone in central administration making the decision.

Dr. Furco summarized the committee's conversation stating that he understood it to say that the Public Engagement Council should propose a set of standards about what counts as community engagement in a course and do some education with the colleges about work that meets the standard.

Mr. Becker asked if there already some percentage of a course that must be community engaged (versus in the classroom). There are some data that are collected by the Community Service Learning Center, Dr. Furco said, but many faculty who incorporate community engagement in their courses do not work through that Center, others do not go through any process at all except the usual department and college procedures, and not all community-engagement courses are service-learning.

Mr. Volovik said he would be concerned about specific criteria because they will stifle innovation; the goal will be to meet the criteria. Dr. Furco agreed and said that is why they have been hesitant about specific criteria. He also raised the issue that community engagement in courses is typically used as an instructional strategy, like technology is. Therefore, it is often at the discretion of the faculty member who teaches the course whether course objectives will be achieved through a community engagement component or through some other instructional strategy. He noted that in not every faculty member who teaches the same course teaches it with a community engagement component. Once an attribute like community engagement is connected to a course, Dr. Furco asked, does the course need to include that attribute if another faculty member teaches it?

Ms. Golden said she was unclear how criteria could stifle innovation. Vice Provost McMaster agreed with her and said there need to be standards. Professor Nelson said that every college has ideas about what community engagement means, which is why she suggests linking it to a learning outcome and a percentage of a course.

Dr. McMaster suggested that Dr. Furco work with the Public Engagement Council to develop standards. Dr. Furco said that a common metric used is hours in the community, something they are trying to avoid. Ms. Golden said she did not see that requiring a percentage of a course be devoted to community engagement, if it is to carry the attribute, could stifle innovation; it would help faculty

members understand how to do community engagement and might even encourage it. If the criteria for the attribute were left to colleges, with different standards, might colleges end up competing with each other on the community engagement imprimatur, Professor McCormick asked? Dr. Furco thought that might be a possibility.

Professor Leopold asked if the goal is to enrich the curriculum through community engagement or to show everyone what the University does. What people want to know? Dr. Furco said both are goals, and students are seeking opportunities to connect their academic experience with the community—and don't know where to find them. The University is applying to be re-designated as a community-engaged university through the Carnegie Classification and is being asked to provide about the number of students engaged in course-based community engagement, number of community-engaged courses, and so on, and they do not have the data, Dr. Furco said. Legislators ask about the number of University students who work in their cities/counties.

Dr. Cheung asked if the discussion applies only to undergraduates, or also to graduate and professional students. (Both, Dr. Furco said.) Then it may be necessary to look at course level as well, Dr. Cheung said. There are different learning outcomes for graduate students, and the Graduate School would be glad to be involved in the discussions of possible criteria or standards. Dr. Furco observed that many graduate programs have practica, clinical work, and so on, so there are community-engaged activities at all levels, and each may need its own standards. Dr. Cheung suggested that at the graduate level, community engagement may not be captured through ECAS, so there may need to be a different way to track it.

Professor McCormick asked Dr. Furco to remind the Committee what the difference between public engagement and community engagement is. Dr. Furco said that public engagement is an umbrella term for everything the University does to connect with outside communities, businesses, and individuals across teaching, research, and service. The work is local to global. Community engagement tends to signify more local activity, typically. Service-learning is one form of public engagement, but there are many other forms of community-engaged teaching. The Office for Public Engagement is working on a set of definitions, but all are under the umbrella of public engagement along with community-engaged research activities, outreach, extension work, etc.

Dr. Furco said that approving an attribute for courses is an important step because the question about the extent of community-engaged learning comes up year after year; this will help in being able to count what is being done. He thanked the Committee and said he would return later with criteria and standards, probably by level, in early spring. He said he did not know, at this point, whether he would recommend policy, or simply administrative recommendations, or something even less formal.

Professor McCormick thanked Dr. Furco for joining the Committee.

#### **4. Policy Revisions**

Ms. Bardouche brought three proposed policy changes to the Committee. These come about as the result of the regular comprehensive review of policies and the changes have been reviewed with the Policy Advisory Committee and with the policy owners.

In Teaching and Learning: Instructor and Unit Responsibilities, the changes are primarily to clean up the language and to add one additional item:

#### H. Maintain the Classroom Environment

Instructors are expected to leave the classroom and its equipment in good order (e.g., white/blackboards clean, chairs arranged, electronic equipment shut off).

Professor McCormick suggested checking one provision of the policy, about discussing scholastic dishonesty, to be sure that it does not conflict with the Board of Regents policy definition of plagiarism. [Following the meeting, Ms. Bardouche did so, and they are consistent.]

Professor Wick said that in the case of one paragraph in the policy, requiring instructors to accommodate legitimate student absences and student exam conflicts with other policies governing intercollegiate athletics, make-up work, and scheduling exams and finals, a number of students have approached her to tell her that faculty members do not adhere to the requirement. Ms. Bardouche said they could easily add a link to those other policies within this policy.

Professor McCormick noted that there is little in this policy about syllabi because they are covered in a separate policy, but recently the Faculty Consultative Committee had a discussion about not requiring all the policy statements in each syllabus but instead sending an overall communication, perhaps from Vice Provost McMaster, to all students noting the existence of policies related to classes and courses. Ms. Golden said she thought the policies are important and worth reminding students about in each course. Professor Mayes asked about a template for including policies in syllabi; Ms. Bardouche said there is one; it is at [http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/SYLLABUSREQUIREMENTS\\_APPA.html](http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/SYLLABUSREQUIREMENTS_APPA.html). It is syllabus-ready and can be cut and pasted into a syllabus. Professor McCormick suggested there could be reminders to faculty each semester about the template. Professor Wick said she sees quite a number of syllabi that do not contain the important policies; Professor McCormick asked Ms. Bardouche if she has heard complaints about that problem. Ms. Bardouche said the most popular policy, in terms of inquiries and comments she receives, is the one on make-up work for legitimate absences; she hears nothing about syllabi. She also reported that they review the template document for syllabi every year to be sure it is up to date.

Dr. Schiff reported that she has been on the provost's committee on student mental health; students say how powerful it is for the institution to include on syllabi the policy on mental health and stress management—and more so to mention that policy in a positive way on the first day of class.

Ms. Golden said that if a policy statement is not on a syllabus, a student could appeal a decision about them; the presence or absence of a policy statement on a syllabus could make or break the appeal. She said she was aware of one case where an appeal was not successful chiefly because the applicable policy had been included on the syllabus. That is especially true for group work, Professor Wick added.

The Committee voted unanimously to approve the changes.

The second policy with a proposed change, Withholding Diplomas and Official Transcripts from Students, is the addition of an FAQ indicating that a student's degree would still be posted to his or her record even if the student owes money or a judicial sanction is not met.

The third policy with changes, Using Email as Official Student Communication, contains only editing changes and an FAQ about social media and websites (indicating that information communicated in that fashion should contain the same information as emails, but that the email is considered the official information).

Ms. Van Voorhis said she would raise with the Office of Information Technology and the Senate Committee on Information Technologies questions about retaining student email accounts for longer than 90 days after they leave the University (if students graduate, they can retain their University account indefinitely if they use it). Professor McCormick pointed out that there a number of reasons the University might wish to stay in touch with students, such as for placement information and for Alumni Association purposes.

Professor McCormick reported also that Vice President Studham has confirmed that instructors may communicate private information to individual students (their own data) using University email (from umn.edu to umn.edu) because it is secure. One can also exchange grade lists with TAs, for example, for the same reason. Professor Alexander asked about a student who sends an email request for a grade to be sent to a personal email account. Instructors should not send information to such accounts, Ms. Van Voorhis said.

Ms. Van Voorhis also noted that if a student forwards University email messages to a personal email account, the student is still responsible for the information. Ms. Bardouche said that if she receives a message from a student sent from a personal email account, she will look up the student's University email address and respond to that address and send a cc to the personal account, and include in her message a statement about the University of Minnesota email account being the official address for communication with students. Ms. Van Voorhis pointed out that personal email accounts are not secure, although it is acceptable to send information to such an account if it is not private data. Ms. Ellingson suggested this be made more clear in the policy. Mr. Becker suggested adding language to the effect that if a student does not use a University email account, he or she has no guarantee that there will be a response.

The Committee voted to endorse the new FAQs and policy language. Professor McMaster thanked Msses. Bardouche and Van Voorhis for bringing them to the Committee.

## **2. Student-Rating-of-Teaching (SRT) Form, continued**

The Committee was joined by Vice Provost Carney and Drs. Gram and Langley for a continued discussion of proposed changes to the SRT form; Professor McCormick recapped the comments earlier in the meeting.

Dr. Langley said that Ms. Golden's comment about the diagnostic value of the SRT is very important, and the Center for Teaching and Learning helps instructors address the feedback they receive. Some tells an instructor what to do; other may not.



Professor Wick recalled that what is proposed is that the results for some of the SRT questions would be released, conglomerated for the course, and there would no longer be individual student-release questions. In the past, the information was by section. She said she did not like the idea that students pick the easiest course, but lumping all the information together makes it less valuable and does not provide the information students need to make intelligent choices. Much depends on how the information for courses and sections is coded in PeopleSoft, Dr. Carney said.

Professor McCormick said people have asked him if there could be an opt-out provision in the system. Dr. Carney suggested that would lead right back to the current system, with instructors opting out and leaving students upset. It was also noted that if the General Counsel determines that the information from the results proposed for release is public, one cannot "opt out" of providing public information. Professor McCormick said there will be need for final check and approval from the Office of the General Counsel before any proposal goes forward to the Faculty Senate.

In terms of helping students make informed decisions, Professor Leopold said, it would be a big improvement to require departments to post syllabi online. Professor McCormick noted the Committee had touched on that topic at its last meeting and will revisit it. Dr. Carney said that while that would be a good idea, and putting syllabi or excerpts from syllabi in the Course Guide, students want the information from the SRT data.

Ms. Van Voorhis said the Course Guide will be going away and there has been no decision yet about tools that will replace it, pending the PeopleSoft upgrade. The syllabus could be linked from the Course Guide or other sites.

Professor Brothen inquired if the proposal is as the Committee has seen it or will there be additional items? He said he didn't see anything better coming and there is no perfect answer to what should be included. Professor McCormick said questions could be added. Dr. Carney pointed out, however, that every time questions are added there are financial implications, and from a student perspective, they have to do them at the end of the semester when they are tired, and the process is repetitive. The participation rate will decline as the number of questions increases. As questions are added, the costs to colleges and departments increases, and not every unit has the appropriate skill to add psychometrically sound questions.

Professor McCormick asked if it would be possible to have at least a limited number of optional additional questions that instructors could add. Dr. Langley recalled that several years ago he and others developed 62 optional questions that instructors could draw from; the questions are aligned with the student learning outcomes. So they do already exist, but he agreed with Dr. Carney about the drawbacks to adding a large number of additional questions. Ms. Golden observed that it is possible for instructors to solicit feedback on other issues at different times during the semester.

Dr. Carney said she is regularly reminded by faculty members about survey fatigue. All faculty members received a reminder about the COACHE survey but the response rate has been very low, so the University is very unlikely to make changes based on the results because they will be bad data. Students face survey fatigue as well. She agreed with Mr. Becker that it is possible to administer the SRT at the beginning of class, not the end, which is something she always did. Professor McCormick suggested adding a note to that effect to the directions.

Committee members returned to the wording of specific questions; they raised questions and offered comments. The question of whether the data proposed for release are about instructors as much as courses arose again and whether the spirit of the law was being met; Professor Leopold thought perhaps not, and that the data might be about instructors as much as courses, but said that this would be a far more humane way of providing information that students want than ratemyprofessor.com and the University should adopt the proposal. Ms. Golden said the spirit of the law is accountability for publicly-funded activities, so some information should be released. Committee members also discussed whether "not applicable" should be an option for at least some questions. There was also repeated sentiment on the part of several Committee members for including a question about how much work the student put into the course as a way to help evaluate the other answers from that student.

Mr. Volovik asked why some questions were eliminated. Dr. Carney said the ones that were eliminated meant getting rid of repetition, which is something students complain about.

Dr. Carney affirmed that the data released to students would not go into promotion-and-tenure files, and what sometimes goes in at present can be problematic (e.g., averages from all the questions, but they were never intended to be averaged, or the results from only one or two of the questions), and the same department may use different metrics for different people. The student-release data, however, may \*not\* be included. She also reminded the Committee again about the need for balance between the cost of adding questions and how critically important they are. If in future meetings there are sentiments in favor of adding two or three more questions, that balancing will have to come into play.

Professor McCormick thanked Vice Provost Carney and Drs. Gram and Langley for joining the meeting, and adjourned it at 4:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota