

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, March 5, 2014
2:00 – 4:00
510 Morrill Hall**

Present: Alon McCormick (chair), Michael Anderson, Nicola Alexander, Lee-Ann Breuch, Elaine Darst, Charlene Ellingson, Gayle Golden, Karla Hemesath, Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, Kenneth Leopold, Keith Mayes, Robert McMaster, Nic McPhee, Thomas Michaels, Kristen Nelson, Moshe Volovik, Susan Wick

Absent: Gifty Amarteifio, Erich Beckert, Timothy Gearns, Janine Grebin

Guests: Professor Scott Lanyon (chair, Special Committee on Graduate Education); Associate Vice Provost Suzanne Bardouche; Chris Bremer (Office of the Provost); Tina Falkner (Academic Support Resources), Angela Bowlus (CLA), Amy Gunter (CSE)

Other: Steven Hawks (Office of the Provost); Associate Vice Provost Leslie Schiff

[In these minutes: (1) report of the Special Committee on Graduate Education; (2) accreditation and assessment; (3) revision to policy "Teaching and Learning: Instructor and Unit Responsibilities"; (4) policy change on the course drop deadline; (5) award winners; (6) policy on "Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences"]

1. Report of the Special Committee on Graduate Education (SCGE)

Professor McCormick convened the meeting at 2:00 and welcomed Professor Lanyon to discuss the recommendations of the Special Committee on Graduate Education (SCGE). He provided a brief review of how the SCGE came to be appointed jointly by the provost and the Faculty Consultative Committee, following a number of discussions last year at the latter.

Professor Lanyon said that early on in the work of the SCGE, concern arose about the relationship between graduate education and the governance system, a matter he posed to the Committee last year. One idea was that this Committee focus on undergraduate education and a separate senate committee be chartered to address issues of graduate education. Following discussion here, the SCGE recommended consideration of two subcommittees of this Committee, one for graduate education and one for undergraduate education, which would meet together and separately, as needed. The advantage of two subcommittees is that there are issues that cross all of education at the University; the downside is that there is so much on the agenda of this Committee related to undergraduate education that graduate education may not receive the focus it needs. The Graduate Education Council (GEC) resembles governance but it is advisory to and reports to the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Education and it stands outside the governance system. At this university, governance carries some clout; his view is that the GEC advises the vice provost, who in turn carries issues to the provost. If there were a senate committee on graduate education, there would be two

* 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.

voices speaking for graduate education: the committee and the vice provost. Vice Provost Kohlstedt agreed that these are muddy waters, and while there will be contested elections to the GEC, the body remains advisory to the vice provost and dean.

Committee members expressed a variety of views on the proposal. It is worth exploring, but many faculty members are involved in both undergraduate and graduate education and they overlap, so two committees or subcommittees meeting jointly might not be workable; perhaps an expanded committee with additional graduate students should be considered. But the two are so intertwined it could be hard to separate the committees. It was also noted that in the past, the Graduate School had the Policy and Review Councils, so many issues were resolved at that level and less came to this Committee; it may be that since they have been eliminated, a structural change may be needed. Dr. Falkner said that in the past the existence of the policy and review councils meant that this Committee really did deal primarily with undergraduate issues. Since those councils went away, this Committee has been dealing with both. That evolution might explain why some people have had the experience that SCEP deals only with undergrad matters while other people think that SCEP has been dealing with both.

Professor Lanyon reiterated the concern of the SCGE: a separate committee would, by definition, deal with graduate education; as part of this Committee, graduate education might not receive the attention it needs, so a structural change might be needed. Past graduate student members of this Committee have indicated they are not sure why they were serving because little on the agendas had to do with graduate education. Dr. Kohlstedt reported that the graduate student leadership feels strongly there should be a separate committee; she said she can see the logic of establishing one in order to make graduate students and graduate education the focus of attention. Professor Lanyon added that when the word "education" is used in higher education, that means undergraduate education in most cases, and graduate education is an afterthought. A separate committee would add visibility for graduate education.

Professor McCormick asked Professor Lanyon to talk about the need for more visibility for graduate education and what a changed committee might look like. More diversity in representation of post-baccalaureate students and thoughtfulness on the part of the Committee on Committees in identifying members of this Committee to cover the range of education offered at the University, Professor Lanyon suggested. Even when one talks about graduate education, one question is whether it includes professional education; the institution has problems communicating about the diversity of post-baccalaureate education.

Professor McPhee noted that the discussions about graduate education do not apply to his campus (Morris), so more discussion about graduate and professional education by the Committee gives Morris less reason to participate, so it would help them if the responsibilities were split in some way.

Professor Lanyon concurred that there are costs to a separate committee; he asked how full the agendas of the Committee are now with items related to undergraduate education. If there are many, are there matters the Committee does not get to? If so, that would suggest two committees could better focus. It was noted that there has been a change in the balance over the years; more recently the agenda items have become more balanced between graduate and undergraduate education.

If there's to be a new structure, the Committee size must increase to accommodate more diversity, with more people who know much about graduate education, Professor McCormick maintained. The Committee may sometimes think about policy implications for undergraduate education and neglect to anticipate the impact on graduate education. Professor Lanyon agreed, said the Committee needs to remind itself it speaks for both, and said the SCGE would like to see governance "own" graduate education more; how it does so is up to this Committee. He asked that it deal with the question before the end of the academic year. Professor McCormick suggested that what the Committee hears regularly about with respect to undergraduate education it should also hear regularly about with respect to graduate education; the Committee concurred. Professor Lanyon pointed out that the recommendation of the SCGE is that there be a senate committee that regularly deals with issues regarding graduate (and more broadly post-baccalaureate) education, and that such a committee consist of members with experience across the diversity of graduate and professional education. How this is structured—whether it is a separate senate committee, a subcommittee of SCEP, or a formal structuring of the SCEP agenda—is really up to SCEP and FCC to decide. He requested that SCEP decide soon so that any change can be implemented before the end of the semester.

There is worry about the finances of graduate education and peer institutions often seem to conduct capital campaigns to support it; Professor McCormick asked if that will be a priority in any University capital campaign. Professor Lanyon expressed the hope that it could be; it may be difficult to raise money for graduate education because many potential donors do not understand what it is. Vice Provost Kohlstedt said it would also be worth reminding the legislature and other potential funding sources about the importance of graduate fellowships; Professor Lanyon noted that while graduate students are a "product" of the University when they graduate, they are also important to undergraduate education and faculty scholarship—and it would be very hard to find a better return on an investment than the money that supports graduate students.

Professor Lanyon encouraged the Committee to use the SCGE report at every opportunity when it has discussions with the academic officers and others. They would like to keep the report off the shelf and in people's hands. [The report can be found at http://www.academic.umn.edu/provost/graduate/2013_Special_Committee_on_GraduateEducation-Final_Report.pdf]

Professor McCormick asked if there are other issues in the SCGE report to which this Committee should be attentive, such as intercollegiate barriers to graduate education. Professor Lanyon said that interdisciplinarity meant to the SCGE that graduate students could work with whomever they wished; in terms of intercollegiate barriers (which are not restricted to graduate education), anything the Committee could do to lower them would be important. One advantage of the University is that it is so large; one disadvantage is that it sometimes cannot achieve the synergies that should be possible. What about addressing policies or barriers internal to a college, which the Committee does not typically do, Professor McCormick inquired? Only to the extent that colleges are making decisions or policies that discourage students from doing work outside the college, Professor Lanyon said. That means asking students if they are having difficulties in doing intercollegiate work. Professor Nelson observed that in recent reports on graduate education, most of the focus is on interdisciplinary education; the SCGE report reinforces the idea that that is the future of graduate education and the faculty must figure out how to do it.

Professor McCormick thanked Professor Lanyon for joining the meeting for the discussion.

2. Accreditation and Assessment

Professor McCormick turned to Vice Provost McMaster to lead a discussion of the upcoming accreditation of the Twin Cities campus. [Note: Dr. McMaster used a similar set of slides (more information on the actual accreditation process was used) for this meeting as he had for his meeting with the Faculty Consultative Committee on February 20; the structure and process points will not be repeated here but these minutes will record additional points and the discussion at this meeting.] Dr. McMaster introduced Steven Hawks, director of undergraduate assessment, then reviewed what accreditation is, its roles, what it includes, and the process (which leads to an on-campus site visit by a team, likely in October or November, 2015). The University will submit materials to the accreditor in May, 2015.

-- The Higher Learning Commission (HLC; part of the North Central Association, the University's regional accrediting agency) holds a conference every year in Chicago; University representatives attend to have conversations and learn about the HLC's approach to accreditation.

-- The Twin Cities campus is accredited every 10 years; the University obviously would not want to lose its accreditation nor does it wish to be identified as requiring a return visit in four years because some part of the review was problematic.

-- On the matter of assessment governance, there was comment from the Faculty Consultative Committee about the lack of faculty representation (that is, faculty members without administrative appointment) on the executive committee; Dr. McMaster said he had taken that view under advisement and was not opposed to the idea of adding faculty. Ms. Golden urged him to add faculty members early because in her field they encountered difficulties with assessment because the faculty saw it as evaluation of their classroom performance.

-- Most of the focus of the Office of Undergraduate Education is on criteria three and four ("Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support" and "Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement"); the latter contains this language: "The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement." What the University of Minnesota learned from the discussions in Chicago is that the HLC wants evidence that an institution is measuring student learning, discussing it, and has feedback mechanisms to improve it.

Professor McCormick asked if this language also applies to graduate education; Dr. Kohlstedt mentioned that graduate programs will be developing educational goals specific to their programs and indicated that she was scheduled to return to SCEP to talk about the process. Ms. Golden asked if the HLC will take into account the independent assessments of student learning made through accreditation in a number of different fields. Dr. McMaster said that when units prepare assessment plans, they will leverage information and data from accreditation (e.g., ABET, the accrediting group for engineering programs). Units can also highlight certain learning outcomes; they do not need to address all seven of the ones adopted for the Twin Cities campus. Colleges have been given significant flexibility in how they document student learning. Professor McCormick asked if the

Student Development Outcomes will also play a role in accreditation; Dr. McMaster said they would not; the HLC criteria focus on student learning, and the University has not identified an accurate and valid way to measure the Student Development Outcomes.

-- Dr. McMaster provided information on how the undergraduate-admitting colleges are undertaking assessment activities.

-- How far into rank and file faculty has the message about assessment gone, beyond the associate deans on the Assessment Steering Committee? Dr. McMaster said he thought that most faculty who teach undergraduate courses are aware of the assessment project. In some colleges, the process of involving the faculty may have just begun, Professor Michaels said.

-- Committee members and Dr. McMaster discussed the nature of the objection of some faculty members in CLA to the assessment project. Dr. McMaster agreed with Professor McCormick's question about whether it would be reasonable to assume that down the road, as part of the University's continuous improvement, there would be discussion about what assessment is done and how it is done. This is the first time the campus has gone through accreditation with such a focus on student learning; Dr. McMaster said the University has been moving towards a student-outcomes approach for several years now, based on the Faculty Senate's endorsed SLOs. After this accreditation is completed, there could likely be a campus-wide discussion on how to assess student learning.

-- Ms. Golden suggested that there should be an entity at the campus level that gathers information from the colleges and academic units on what they have learned from accreditation of their programs. Dr. McMaster said that because accreditation of degree programs is more common in some colleges than others (e.g., more in Science and Engineering and Design, less in CLA), it is probably more appropriate for that to occur at the college level.

Professor McCormick thanked Vice Provost McMaster for the information.

3. Revision to Policy "Teaching and Learning: Instructor and Unit Responsibilities"

Professor McCormick turned to Ms. Bardouche to present revised language concerning instructor and academic unit responsibilities when an instructor is unable to conduct class, regardless of the reason (whether because the instructor had to be away, was sick, the campus closed because of weather, a building closed because of a chemical leak, and so on).

Following discussion about precise wording, the Committee voted unanimously in favor of the change proposed.

CURRENT LANGUAGE IN POLICY:

When instructors know in advance that they will be unable to attend particular class sessions, they are responsible for working with their academic unit to make appropriate alternate arrangements.

PROPOSED:

When instructors are unable to attend class sessions, or if classes are cancelled for other reasons,

instructors are responsible for working with their academic unit to make appropriate alternative arrangements to address the missed learning opportunity.

4. Policy Change on the Course Drop Deadline

Professor McCormick turned to Dr. Falkner to start a discussion of a change in the deadline for students to drop courses without approval from 8 weeks to 10 weeks. Dr. Falkner introduced Ms. Bowlus (Assistant Director of Advising, College of Liberal Arts) and Ms. Gunter (Director of Academic Advising, College of Science and Engineering).

Ms. Bowlus explained that she and Ms. Gunter are part of an intercollegiate, undergraduate policy group headed by Dr. Falkner that examines undergraduate policy related matters from an academic advising perspective. One question that arises consistently is how students approach the question of progress in a course. When students face the 8-week deadline, they withdraw if they do not believe they can finish the course successfully, and advisers talk to students about whether or not they should withdraw. Without fail, every term students get a message from an instructor that they should withdraw or they do not have enough information by the deadline to know whether they should withdraw. If the deadline were pushed two weeks later in the semester, they believe the problem would be mitigated and would give students more time to assess their performance. Moreover, the mid-term alerts come out very close to the 8-week deadline; moving the drop date would give students more time to consider options and what they might do to be successful in a class. They also hope that moving the deadline could reduce the number of once-anytime drops undergraduate students are allowed (available from week 8 to the last day of instruction). Related to withdrawing but not necessarily pertaining to changing the drop deadline, the committee is standardizing practices across all Twin Cities colleges for late withdrawals (after the drop deadline) and retroactive cancellations (those after the term has ended).

Ms. Gunter said that mid-term alerts are usually for 1XXX courses; sometimes it may come after only one exam, and a student will drop a course even though he or she might have succeeded.

Professor McCormick asked if they anticipate any arguments against the change that might come up. Dr. Falkner reported that faculty at Crookston suggested that faculty should give more graded work before the end of 8 weeks of class—and pointed out that that is beyond the scope of her responsibilities. Ms. Bowlus said she hopes it would continue to be a goal to provide students more information earlier in courses. Dr. Falkner reported that she also looked at the policies at peer institutions; some have an earlier drop deadline, some have the same one as the University's current policy, and some have a later deadline, so this change would remain within the norms of peer institutions.

Ms. Gunter said that the change would not affect shorter courses; Dr. Falkner added that shorter courses are not covered by the current institutional policy, which speaks only to semester-long courses. But they could consider making changes within the student information system to cover shorter courses if that was determined to be desirable.

Mr. Volovik inquired under what circumstances a student receives a mid-term alert. Dr. Falkner explained that it is sent when a student is in danger of receiving a D, F, or N in a course. Instructors can deliver the alert in any way they wish, but Ms. Gunter pointed out that when they use

the University's system, advisers are also alerted, can see if there is a pattern, and can reach out to the student to help him or her with other resources.

The Committee agreed to take up the proposal again at its next meeting. Professor McCormick thanked Mses. Bowlus and Gunter for joining the meeting.

5. Award Winners

Professor McCormick welcomed Ms. Bremer from the provost's office to present the nominees and winners of the Morse-Alumni and Graduate-Professional Awards. The Committee approved them unanimously.

6. Policy on "Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences"

Dr. Falkner provided copies of proposed changes to the policy on Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences, which policy had come up for the routine three-year comprehensive review. The proposed changes are clarifying, not policy changes, in response to questions that have come in over the years. They also propose adding more FAQs.

Ms. Bardouche reported that in her position she receives questions about policies. This is by far the most popular policy about which to ask questions, she said; they present the proposed changes and FAQs to the Committee after identifying the kinds of questions that arise most frequently.

Given the lateness of the hour, the Committee concluded it wished to lay the matter over until the next meeting.

Professor Nelson asked the Committee to express its thanks to the staff for his work with it. Committee members gave him a round of applause.

Professor McCormick adjourned the meeting at 4:00.

-- Gary Engstrand