

Minutes\*

**Faculty Consultative Committee  
Thursday, March 13, 2014  
1:00 – 3:00  
Room 238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Will Durfee (chair), Avner Ben-Ner, James Cloyd, Eva von Dassow, Jigna Desai, Janet Ericksen, Gary Gardner, Maria Gini, Tabitha Grier-Reed, Russell Luepker, Alon McCormick, Karen Mesce, Paul Ranelli

Absent: Linda Bearinger, Joseph Konstan, James Pacala, Ned Patterson, Chris Uggen, Jean Wyman

Guests: Vice Provost and Dean Sally Gregory Kohlstedt

Other: Belinda Cheung, Vicki Field (Graduate School)

[In these minutes: (1) Graduate School issues: metrics and program goals; (2) Benefits Advisory Committee nominees]

**1. Graduate School Issues: Metrics and Graduate Program Goals**

Professor Durfee convened the meeting at 1:45 and welcomed Vice Provost and Dean Kohlstedt to discuss graduate education issues.

Dean Kohlstedt began by thanking Professor Durfee for using a significant part of his February report to the Board of Regents to focus on graduate education and its importance to faculty for education, research, and attracting people to the University. Professor Cloyd asked if this information was news to the Board of Regents. Dean Kohlstedt said she did not know, but between her report to the Board and Professor Durfee's remarks, there was considerable interest on the part of Board members in graduate education. She said she also pointed out to the Board that 75% of its members have post-baccalaureate degrees and suggested that if they talked to each other about their graduate experiences, they would learn how distinct and important those experiences were. She also mentioned her appreciation for the service of Gary Engstrand that has been a critical component in shared governance at the University.

Dean Kohlstedt said she wished to talk about metrics and about graduate program goals. First, metrics, which were introduced in 2010. Before that, the Graduate School gave block grants to individual graduate programs based on data and narrative reports they provided. Beginning in 2010, the decision was made to give the block grant monies directly to the colleges which could then distribute them to individual programs and departments. The metric data had been used in the past but in a less deliberate and transparent way. As part of making the data available on attrition and time to degree, Mr. Bostrum in the Graduate School developed metrics, including the Bostrum Efficiency Index, that not only provided the actual data retrospective for ten years but also included a calculation of the timing of those who

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\* 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.

dropped out; the intention was to discover whether programs had in place mechanisms to identify those not likely to complete a program and thus encourage them to leave at an appropriate time.

Inevitably, perhaps, with a new evaluation program, there were questions raised after the first round of grants. This academic year was the second round and Graduate School staff identified problems for further consideration; she created a review committee with a number of associate deans who had been through the process. With respect to time-to-degree data, the committee recommended providing AAU data (because the norm in some programs is longer than in others) and asked programs for other comparative data where they were available. Its members also requested a narrative (and clarified in greater detail what should be included in it. They met in September with directors of graduate study and described the process and their expectations. What also changed, Dr. Kohlstedt related, was the attention to program size. Last time size was not a factor; this time it was.

The value of the process, Dr. Kohlstedt said, is, first, that the dollars were distributed, with a premium for the top 20% (18 programs) with Ph.D.s based on this quality assessment. There continues to be discussion about whether the funds should go to programs or to colleges. Second, the process of reflecting on the strength of programs continued even after the allocation of funds because she spent the last two months talking with each college about its data. In terms of program characterizations, there were 18 identified as "excellent," 7 that were "of concern," and the remainder as "successful." The discussion with deans helped clarify the issues facing the programs described as "of concern."

Professor McCormick asked if those assessments are a template for program reviews. Dr. Kohlstedt said that these assessments were narrowly focused on graduate education and they happen more regularly, perhaps every 2-3 years. The two processes are distinct; this one is an analysis of graduate education on a regular basis, a process that peer institutions use as well with close attention to patterns of change over time.

Professor Ranelli asked, apropos of the inclusion of size as a measure, whether it is possible to have an excellent but small program, or must a program be large to be excellent. Dr. Kohlstedt said that there were no tiny programs in the excellent category—nor were there any "mega" programs. Excellent programs have a clear record of achievement, show attention to the graduate experience in their programs, have ways to demonstrate the effectiveness of their advising and other activities, and provide information about the quality of their students and their effectiveness in launching them successfully. There was near unanimous agreement on the top 10 or so and discussion about the next 10-20, where there were advocates. But size did not figure into the determination of excellence.

Professor Ben-Ner asked what the characteristics of programs "of concern" were. Dr. Kohlstedt said that one indicator was a decline in the number of admissions to the program and a declining number of students in it. Another concern might be limited evidence of attention to advising; little evidence of academic achievement such a conference participation, publications, or outside awards and fellowships apparently; and sparse evidence indicating where its graduates go and whether they use their training. Sometimes the reports were simply thin, with no evidence of program quality; concern in that case might simply be a committee comment on lack of information. In cases where a program may have had 30 students 20 years ago, but now only has 2 or 3, these meetings with deans provided an opportunity for an explanation for the change, for example.

Professor Mesce said about how 2-year fellowships are given and said she believed stronger programs should receive more of them. Are they part of the block grants? Dr. Kohlstedt said that block grants can be used for fellowships. In the past, competition for recruitment fellowships was across the University; now presumably there is competition across the college. Also in the past, there were 1-, 2-, and 3-year fellowships; now the colleges almost all offer only 1-year fellowships. The provost was interested in knowing why that has occurred; the answer was risk. The Graduate School made three times as many fellowship offers relative to the probable acceptance because on average about one in three offers was accepted and it could commit for a longer term for outstanding candidates. With smaller fund pools in the colleges, there is greater risk if more are offered and accepted; another way to reduce risk is to offer only 1-year fellowships. She said she had almost achieved development of a broader risk pool, but then some of the colleges backed out. A couple of the colleges remain very keen on the idea of a broader risk pool, and this is a matter that may be revisited. It is a matter of concern for the provost and both she and Dr. Kohlstedt are very interested in more longer-term fellowships, which the University's peers offer.

Professor Ben-Ner said that it is his impression that the deans do not want to make hard decisions about fellowship funds so tend to distribute the money more thinly across programs. It does appear that way, Dean Kohlstedt agreed. She said she is also concerned that some units are giving out bits and pieces of fellowships, which was not the intent—they are supposed to go as a fellowship package to the best students. That is one reason she worked on the risk pool, because it appears that the funds are not being used in the standard way of university recruitment fellowships at major research universities across the country.

Professor von Dassow said she appreciated Professor Ranelli's question about the relation of size and quality, and said that she is in two programs that have both seen a decline in the number of graduate students, which affects what curriculum can be offered. A background worry with quality metrics is that they could be used to starve the weak and feed the strong, which could cause internal damage. To what extent is that true? Dr. Kohlstedt said they are rewarding excellence, which they can do with small programs. The question about size is whether the program has a critical mass. Some achieve it by joint programs or collaborations. There is the capacity to take creative steps if it seems that size is a problem.

Professor von Dassow wondered if metrics could promote the problems rather than address them. Dr. Kohlstedt said that the question of resources for graduate student support is critical (she provided considerable data to the Committee at a previous meeting). The president announced in his State of the University address that he was providing \$2 million for dissertation fellowships; the University had previously received \$6 million in state funds for three years that allowed , and the president has now extended the support for a 4th year. They are delighted to have the additional funding but it does not solve the longer-term problem. Any time they raise standards, they are making choices, and the colleges must make decisions about which programs are weak and what to do about them.

Professor McCormick said that part of the risk pool story is that big programs can benefit small programs. Dr. Kohlstedt agreed; when the risk pool was centralized, smaller programs could make more fellowship offers while larger programs were less dependent on the overall number because their scale gave them additional flexibility.

Professor Ranelli asked if a Ph.D. program's main purpose is to produce postdocs; could such a program be evaluated as excellent? Rather than looking at whether the graduates moved into jobs? That depends on the program, Dr. Kohlstedt said. Some are very proud of producing postdocs, but postdocs

are a stepping stone to careers. She has been discussing ways to follow graduate student placement and whether the Graduate School should develop a format to track where students go after graduation and perhaps where they are at specific intermittent intervals after that.. This issue of employment interests legislatures and the public and having contact information could help with a capital campaign. It would \*not\* be a way to raise money for the Graduate School, but if efforts are made to raise funds under a comprehensive plan regarding fellowships or other funds targeted for graduate students, a larger campaign could help individual programs raise money. Professor Ranelli observed that such an approach could feed the suspicion about ratcheting up requirements for jobs (i.e., why do you need a post-doc for this or that job? Is it overkill?), but there could be a social need.

Professor Grier-Reed asked if the criteria were used for new programs. Dr. Kohlstedt indicated that they received narratives from such programs, but if they were really young, no funds were awarded because the programs didn't have a track record. Her view is that it is a good idea to help new programs, but this particular process is about quality metrics based on historical patterns.

Dean Kohlstedt turned next to "Defining Academic Program Goals and Assessing Student Outcomes," which follows (between the \* \* \*):

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Defining graduate student educational goals and assessing outcomes is becoming the national standard for improving teaching and learning in higher education and figures prominently in the procedures used by higher education accrediting agencies. At the University of Minnesota, a committee established by the Graduate School under the aegis of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost has developed guidelines and other materials to help programs identify their particular educational aspirations for graduate students as well as potential measures of their achievement. Each graduate program should produce a clear statement of graduate student educational goals and a written process for determining how graduate students are meeting them. Collegiate deans are responsible for ensuring that programs produce a statement of their goals and a plan to examine students' attainment of them. These documents can remain works in progress as the program develops in the future.

#### **Statement of Purpose:**

- Encourage clear, transparent, and shared intentions for graduate programs
- Create productive dialogue between faculty and graduate students
- Respond to the public, legislative, and accrediting agencies' request for statements that detail what specific programs intend their courses, research experiences, and professional activities to accomplish
- Provide information to current and prospective students
- Prepare for accreditation review in 2015-16

#### **Components and Process:**

- Engage faculty and students through conversations, surveys or other methods in identifying the most significant and fundamental goals of the educational program in terms of student outcomes
- Identify the ways in which these goals are (or will be) put in place
- Establish a plan for determining how students are meeting the goals
- Produce and review a report

-- Develop a long term plan for comprehensive review and update

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Dr. Kohlstedt said that the process for developing the document began in spring 2012, with a committee that Vice Provost Henning Schroeder and Provost Karen Hanson appointed to do so. There are several reasons for this initiative: to link to a national movement in this direction (in part because the public and legislatures are asking what institutions are trying to accomplish with their graduate programs); to respond to issues likely to be part of the accreditation review in 2015; and to encourage graduate programs to be self-reflective and clear about their overarching goals. The committee produced an initial draft that was discussed by this Committee and many others; following those responses, it went back to the drawing board and developed this proposal.

Five volunteered to be part of a pilot project to test the "principles" identified as potential common goals of graduate programs. Another set of five pilot programs turned the process upside-down and were encouraged to have a discussion with faculty and students about their goals in order to create a document that would both identify their specific program goals and how those could be assessed. The statement needed to include the process used to develop the goals, what the specific program goals are for the students, and how the results will be determined.

The programs that participated said it was a reasonable process and that they learned about themselves and learned from students, Dr. Kohlstedt reported. None said it was not worth the time. This spring she has also discussed the proposal with the Graduate Education Council, the associate deans, and directors of graduate study and will also be taking it to SCEP. The plan is to have all programs positioned to undertake this assignment in the fall.

Why? It is becoming a national standard to try to improve teaching and learning in higher education and it was requested by the provost, Dr. Kohlstedt told the Committee. The statement of goals will be owned by the departments, with oversight by the college to be sure that every program has articulated goals. The Graduate School wants to facilitate getting them developed and will create a web page with examples from the pilot programs and commentary on how departments might plan to use them. Programs can use their statements however they wish; they are owned by the program, and the dean can ask to see them to ensure they are done. The provost agrees with this approach.

Professor Mesce said that programs she is affiliated with have had graduate student handbooks for years, and they mirror much of what it is in the document. She said she assumed all graduate programs had something similar. Dr. Kohlstedt said she asked the pilots following the streamlined approach to put their goals down in two pages. There were several goals of the pilot program statements emerged as common themes: (1) a primary goal is to emphasize knowledge attainment and creating new knowledge; (2) graduate education is to teach not just content but also fundamental methods, techniques, criticism, and ways of moving knowledge forward; and (3) graduates should be able to effectively communicate with peers and the broader public. Some mentioned interdisciplinarity, globalization, and integrity and ethics. Reports ranged from four to nine stated goals. Not all programs have a handbook that sets out what the program fundamentally is trying to do, and preparing the document provided an opportunity for them to talk about what larger vision might be incorporated. For those programs which already go through accreditation or have a sophisticated statement in a handbook, they may have little to

do. This project is not intended to reinvent the wheel, Dr. Kohlstedt said; some units already have articulated goals while others may need to do so.

Professor von Dassow commended the bottom-up approach but said that she was in one of the 10 departments; she described what happened. Internally, participants in the exercise opined that it was absurd, though acknowledging the process could nevertheless be useful. All of the departments will report positive results, but the time they can carve out for the process is inadequate to do it well. The approach the Graduate School is trying is good but from her experience the results may not be as valuable as Dr. Kohlstedt has been told. Dr. Kohlstedt said she has not heard that but that she was thanked by the programs and that they were all likely to continue to revise their documents. She said she understands that the initial results are not set in stone and likely to be revised; this is a living document.

Professor McCormick said that what he has heard, on a practical level, is that if a student is having trouble in a program, these kinds of goals can help identify where the problems are and how he or she must improve. Did they talk about that? They did not, Dr. Kohlstedt said; assessment is important and there have been discussions about what programs are already doing, and many already have milestones in place to measure student progress. The intent of this program is to ask whether, as students graduate, they have these talents and capacities. One of the Council of Graduate Student leaders was concerned that she would be held to the program standards in some explicit way. It not the intent that all students much check off each goal and this document simply points to the places where broad goals are likely to be assessed, Dr. Kohlstedt said; these are the general expectations for students in a program and they could be helpful for prospective students in choosing a program if they are on a program website.

Professor Grier-Reed asked Dr. Kohlstedt to amplify on preparing for the accreditation review. That is clearly in the background, Dr. Kohlstedt replied. All accrediting agencies are talking about goals and assessing whether institutions achieve them. In the past, the accrediting agencies were happy to know that institutions had good intentions; more and more, however, they want to know if they are being achieved. That is also the reason for the final bullet about long-term plans for comprehensive reviews.

Programs that rely heavily on training grant support have a very different view from those that do not, Professor Mesce said. Programs with training grant support must be meticulous about these matters; they may be foreign to programs that do not have to renew training grants, but these are things that the programs with training grants do all the time. Dr. Kohlstedt said the differences between programs that must go through accreditation and those that do not may well have accounted for some of the resistance to the initial proposal. Where accreditation is common, these are fine. Where not, more questions have been raised. Those differences are one reason the programs own the goals and that they are not set up as a checklist. What is being asked is that programs articulate their goals in ways that others can understand.

Professor Durfee asked about the timeline. Dean Kohlstedt said there would be a website by mid-April, an announcement to the directors of graduate study, and a letter to the deans and associate deans. There will also be workshops on April 30 and May 5 and perhaps additional ones later in the summer. The documents are due to be completed during the coming academic year, presumably by the end of the fall semester.

Professor Durfee thanked Dean Kohlstedt for her report.

## **2. Benefits Advisory Committee Nominees**

Professor Durfee closed the meeting in order that the Committee could identify two faculty nominees for the Benefits Advisory Committee, a task this Committee is charged to perform.

The Committee members agreed on nominees.

Professor Durfee said the Committee expresses its gratitude to its staff member for serving the body for over 26 years. The Committee gave him a round of applause.

Professor Durfee adjourned the meeting at 2:50.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota