

[In these minutes: Interdisciplinary Subcommittee report, Grading Trends, President's Emerging Scholars program, 2014-15 CLE membership, Approval of the Grading and Transcript Policy amendments, 2018-19 Calendar options, Approval of the Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences Policy amendments, Structure for addressing graduate education]

EDUCATIONAL POLICY COMMITTEE (SCEP) MINUTES

APRIL 9, 2014

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT: Alon McCormick (chair), Nicola Alexander, Lee-Ann Breuch, Elaine Darst, Charlene Ellingson, Timothy Gearns, Gayle Golden, Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, Ken Leopold, Keith Mayes, Robert McMaster, Nic McPhee, Thomas Michaels, Kristen Nelson, Moshe Volovik, Sue Wick.

ABSENT: Gifty Amarteifio, Erich Beckert, Janine Grebin.

REGRETS: Michael Anderson, Karla Hemesath.

GUESTS: Suzanne Bardouche, Tina Falkner, Laura Coffin Koch, Leslie Schiff, Stacey Tidball.

1. DISCUSSION OF THE DRAFT INTERDISCIPLINARY SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

Keith Mayes presented the draft report for the subcommittee which details the incentives and impediments to undergraduate cross-college teaching. The efforts noted in the report are not new but there is a need to make them more deliberate. He noted that one popular major – Biology, Sociology, and Ecology – is a purposeful attempt to bring the three topics together under one area of concentration. They are recommending that current efforts be studied, cataloged, and replicated in other areas, and that barriers be removed.

Charlene Ellingson noted that the recommendation is to have a subcommittee study current programs and interest, develop an incentive program to create additional programs, and work to eliminate penalties for faculty who wish to participate in these offerings.

Vice Provost McMaster said that his office created a small-scale model a few years ago called the challenge curriculum. This effort was to have been funded by the Bush Foundation, but that did not happen. Therefore there are only three courses offered now – water, immigration, and global food systems and security - and they are funded by his office.

Q: What is a solution to the budget model issue?

A: This is the reason that these efforts need to be housed in the Provost's Office. It will allow funds to be provided and prevent discrimination during the promotion and tenure process.

Members made the following comments:

- Effort going forward should be by a body jointly appointed by the faculty and Provost, similar to the Special Committee on Graduate Education
- Undergraduate barriers are different from those for graduate education
- Graduate interdisciplinary pathways should be used to develop undergraduate programming

- Liberal education technology in society theme was a way to bring together programs in CLA, CBS, and CSE
- This report is timely as it relates to the undergraduate grand challenges curriculum as part of the strategic planning process

Members agreed that edits will be taken and a final version will be presented for approval at the April 23 meeting. The final version will then be sent to the Provost, Vice Provost McMaster, and the Faculty Consultative Committee.

2. DISCUSSION OF GRADING TRENDS

Vice Provost McMaster presented the fall 2013 grade distribution for undergraduates for each of the campuses as well as the breakdown for the Twin Cities colleges. The distribution shows the number of grades awarded at each level, the overall GPA given in the courses, and the percentage of grades in the 'A' range.

He observed that the percentage of 'A' grades in 1xxx and 3xxx level courses in CLA seems high when compared to CSE but this is because CSE gives relatively fewer 'A' grades. However, as the University has improved the incoming class, there is the argument that this should translate into better overall grades. He is not sure if this is correct or if standards need to be raised to match the standing of today's freshmen.

Q: Are undergraduates who are taking 5xxx level courses usually bound for graduate school?

A: Not necessarily as some departments include 5xxx level courses in the undergraduate curriculum.

Members made the following comments:

- If current course requirements allow for half the grades in a class to be outstanding, and therefore receive an 'A', then perhaps course requirements should be revisited or the course should be changed to an 'S/N' grade scale
- The design of coursework also affects the grades since many writing intensive courses have revisions built into the course versus one attempt to score a good grade
- Current grade definitions allow for different interpretations by each instructor
- Guidelines should be created to develop course requirements at the program level, as was done for General Chemistry
- GPA has a different meaning in various departments and majors
- University hears that employers are less concerned with individual grades when hiring
- University should do an assessment report for each major/department to evaluate whether students are meeting or exceeding program expectations

Vice Provost McMaster then addressed the new grade distribution report that is available through One-Stop. These reports are in response to Faculty Consultative Committee questions last year and allow someone to make quick comparisons between courses at similar levels or across departments. However data for individual courses is not viewable so confidentiality is maintained.

Members made the following comments:

- Outside websites provide this information but they are not consistent
- Grade inflation is at odds with course assessment. The University wants assessment results to increase but it does not want instructors to award more 'A' grades.
- Contextual transcript was discussed by the Faculty Consultative Committee and SCEP last year, but the University does not want to be the only institution offering this information

Q: Who can access this report?

A: Anyone with the website.

Nic McPhee noted that Morris only offers one 2xxx level course in a department and that information is viewable.

It was noted that this issue was discussed with the committee when the grade distribution report was first implemented. If a course has the minimum number of students enrolled, it will be shown on the grade distribution report even if it is the only course offered by a department at that level.

3. DISCUSSION OF PRESIDENT'S EMERGING SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Vice Provost McMaster then distributed a flyer on the President's Emerging Scholars (PES) Program which is a step by the University to provide access and promote success to a group of approximately 500 students whose primary metrics are lower than others, but who the University feels have a strong probability of success based on strength of curriculum, leadership, and other elements.

After General College (GC) closed, the Access to Success (ATS) program was started in fall 2008 as a way to admit students with significant potential but whose metrics did not match those of the rest of the incoming class due to a lower high school ranking or test scores. 475 students were admitted in the first year, but only into CLA, CEHD, and CFANS.

There were a few concerns with the ATS program. One was that the college restriction was problematic as there was not access to the entire University for these students. Another was that each college developed its own programming for these students. A third was that there was no financial motivation to participate as scholarships were not offered. The last issue was that ATS was only a freshmen program and did not continue through the students undergraduate career.

His office looked at the strengths and weaknesses of ATS and morphed it into PES which admitted its first class in fall 2013. Five of the seven undergraduate admitting colleges participated this first year but CBS and CSE will be included in fall 2014. The program provides a \$1000 scholarship in the first year, and another \$1000 scholarship in the fourth year if the student has participated for four years and is on track to graduate. The hope is that this scholarship will provide motivation to stay on pace for a four-year graduation. PES also has a rich peer mentor and programming structure that leads to strong student participation.

Vice Provost McMaster said that PES also includes a one week optional summer bridge program in late June. Last year 70 students participated.

Statistics from this first class include:

- 67 percent reside in residence halls compared to 88 percent of the full incoming class. There is pressure for these students to live off-campus so they will be working on this issue going forward.
- PES students averaged 14.6 credits in fall 2013 while non-PES students averaged 15.4 credits
- The GPA average for PES students was 3.04 while non-PES student GPAs averaged 3.19

Q: Does this program help direct students to graduate work?

A: Yes. This one of the reasons for the peer mentors and seminars that are offered. The program wants students to think big and be ambitious.

Q: From where are mentors drawn?

A: There are the current Access to Success (ATS) students.

Q: What is the average incoming Twin Cities class size?

A: This year it was 5400 students, of which less than 10 percent are in this program.

Q: Are the demographics for this group different from the other 90 percent of incoming students?

A: Yes although there are qualities in the records for these students that show potential success.

Q: Who selects these students for admission?

A: The Office of Admissions.

Q: How do these students compare to ATS and Postsecondary Teaching and Learning students?

A: When General College (GC) was in existence, it admitted a larger number of students. This number was decreased a bit when GC closed and student were admitted to the general studies program. ATS admitted 475 students, but PES is admitting a slightly larger number.

Q: Is participation in PES activities mandatory?

A: Yes. A student must participate if they wish to remain in the program.

Q: How does the cost of attendance affect program participation?

A: The program offers the first year scholarship and many of the participants are also eligible for the Promise Scholarship and/or PELL grants. What is missing is funding to help with room and board costs. The program hopes to build in a housing scholarship next since there is evidence that students have increased success rates if they live on campus. However they understand that it is not always a money issue. Some students have to live at home due to family expectations and cultural issues.

Q: Do students know about this program when they apply?

A: Some students know through their high school networks, but they do not directly apply to PES. Students are selected through the admission's process.

Q: Does this program increase the University's racial diversity for the student body?

A: Yes.

Q: What filters are used when reviewing applications?

A: Admissions looks at the transcript, leadership, volunteering, and the rigor of the high school.

Q: Are there many PES participants who come from private high schools?

A: He is uncertain about this statistic.

4. REVIEW OF CLE MEMBERSHIP

Vice Provost McMaster presented the 2014-15 membership for the Council on Liberal Education (CLE) as the charge for the committee requires SCEP review. The members are meant to broadly represent the colleges and programs in the Twin Cities.

Q: Can only tenured faculty serve?

A: No, academic staff are also eligible.

Q: Will the upcoming accreditation change the workload for the eight year certification of courses?

A: In the short-term this workload will be reduced as the committee is taking a two year pause in mandatory recertification until accreditation is complete. However courses can still be sent to CLE for recertification if requested by the faculty.

Q: Are there challenges recruiting members from some colleges?

A: Yes.

5. APPROVAL OF THE GRADING AND TRANSCRIPT POLICY CHANGE - DROP DEADLINE

Tina Falkner said that this amendment moves the drop deadline for Morris, Rochester, and Twin Cities to the 10th week.

Q: Will this change simply allow students to put off making a decision and still result in a scramble later in the semester?

A: Possibly but students will have more information by this time, such as a second mid-term grade, on which to make a decision.

Q: Does this change a student's financial obligation?

A: No since the refund deadline is much earlier in the semester.

Q: When will this change be effective?

A: Possibly fall semester 2013.

A vote was then taken and the amendment was approved.

6. INFORMATION ON 2018-19 CALENDAR OPTIONS

Stacey Tidball stated that based on the models that were presented at the last meeting, she is working to create additional calendar options. However she would like feedback from the committee on which options to pursue. Therefore a survey will be sent to SCEP after today's meeting requesting feedback on three options.

7. APPROVAL OF THE MAKEUP WORK FOR LEGITIMATE ABSENCES POLICY CHANGE

Suzanne Bardouche presented the amendments to the Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences policy after they were discussed at the March 5 meeting.

Q: How are the FAQs created?

A: They are based on the questions that they receive on the policy.

A member asked about question 5 on the FAQs which states that an instructor does not have to tell a student if the makeup exam will be in a different format from the original exam. He believes that an instructor should be able to change the format, but that they should be transparent with the students. He recommended that this sentence be removed. He also asked that item 6 in the policy be changed to address instructors making teaching assistants aware of course policies so that they are implemented appropriately.

Suzanne Bardouche said that she would see about addressing these issues in a revised draft.

Alon McCormick said that the revised draft would be circulated for further comment after which it will be considered approved by the committee.

He then said that Boynton contacted him regarding an issue they are having with providing documentation for illnesses. Due to an increased request from faculty, the burden to provide this information has dramatically increased. Therefore Boynton would like to discuss options with the committee if the committee is agreeable. Members agreed that this topic should be discussed.

8. DISCUSSION ON STRUCTURE FOR ADDRESSING GRADUATE EDUCATION

Alon McCormick said that SCEP has been asked to consider how graduate education is addressed by University governance. Options that have been proposed include having SCEP focus on graduate education when planning its agendas, recommending creation of two subcommittees – one for undergraduate education and one for graduate education, and recommending creation of a separate committee to deal with graduate education while SCEP focuses on undergraduate education. He would like to see if the committee can come to consensus on these options today.

Vice Provost Kohlstedt said that governance of graduate education is currently morphing. The Graduate Education Council (GEC) is an advisory committee but its members will be elected this year for the first time. She believes that a more systematic and continued approach is needed for governance of graduate education. However she worries that two committees or subcommittees is not the correct approach.

Q: If SCEP handles both undergraduate and graduate education, will its membership be increased?

A: No. Instead the members that are appointed need to also be involved in graduate education, such as DGS.

Members agreed that SCEP handling both undergraduate and graduate education is the best option. The committee just needs to be deliberate in scheduling issues from both student groups and focusing on the larger issues while letting subcommittee handle the smaller items.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

With no further business, Professor McCormick thanked all members for attending and adjourned the meeting.

Becky Hippert
University Senate