

Minutes *

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, January 3, 1996
1:00 - 3:00
Room 626 Campus Club

Present: Laura Koch (chair), Avram Bar-Cohen, Anita Cholewa, Paul Cleary, Elayne Donahue, Gayle Graham Yates, Jeffrey Larsen, Judith Martin, Glenn Merkel, W. Phillips Shively, William Van Essendelft

Regrets: Megan Gunnar, Robert Johnson, Thomas Johnson, Mark Schuller

Absent: Darwin Hendel, Ryan Nilsen, Helen Phin

Guests: none

Others: none

[In these minutes: Grading policy; semester conversion standards]

1. Grading Policy

Professor Koch convened the meeting at 1:05 and noted that the Committee had two agenda items: grading and semester conversion standards. In both cases, documents had to be completed by the end of the meeting in order that they could be carried to the Senate Consultative Committee for approval for the Senate docket of January 11.

Professor Koch then began to review the questions that had been raised on the floor of the Senate when the proposed grading policy was presented. One was whether or not the "D" grade should carry pluses and minuses. Committee members made several points about the question.

- D is a different kind of grade from A, B, and C. The S is now a C, while D is a passing grade. For transfer purposes, it is not true that C is a legitimate grade while D is not?
- The only argument for keeping the plus and minus is in terms of how it affects the GPA, and may not be worth keeping.
- One might make the policy more symmetrical by eliminating the D-.
- There is no strong argument either way; leaving the plus and minus in the policy permits those who want to use them to do so, while those who do not are not obligated to use them.
- If the Senate feels strongly about the issue, it can always amend the policy.

Professor Koch then noted that the Senate in 1972 had delegated to each campus assembly responsibility for setting grading policy; did the Committee wish to recommend that the 1972 action be

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reversed, or did it wish to suggest that each campus discuss the grading policy and express the hope that all would agree? Again, Committee members offered a number of comments.

- Whence the dictum that uniformity across the University is important? (When SCEP began reviewing policies, the administration asked for a single policy because there were so many in place, which is costly and unwieldy. SCEP has looked at the issue from an educational policy standpoint and such questions as student transfer.) The Committee has proposed a reasonable document; it should say it would be best for the entire University to use it.
- Does the Committee want uniformity, or is it prepared to accept that there will be different systems in use? (It is hoped all will discuss it and come to agreement.)
- Who pays the costs of using different systems?
- There are two arguments involved. One is a technical/cost issue, one is an educational policy issue. This proposal gives every campus the ability to do what it wishes, except for the substitution of the N for the F on the Morris campus. If there is no cost to flexibility, the coordinate campuses should have it; if there is, they should bear the cost.
- It may be awkward to assess the portion of the costs of the Registrar's office attributable to a coordinate campus having a separate grading system, although perhaps it could be worked out. The Committee might propose to the Senate that the University adopt a uniform grading policy; the cost of variances by college and campus were acceptable when money was not such a concern. If the Senate does not adopt a uniform policy, then this grading policy should be proposed to each campus assembly. It will also be difficult to get all the campuses to do something for the common good, since few people wish to do anything for the common good.
- The technical and educational policy issues should be separated, although they will not be separated in the Senate discussion. Discussion of uniformity will be "polluted" with a concern about what it will be. The proper response is that one does not know; there is a proposal from SCEP, but that need not be the uniform policy.
- The Committee has consistently taken the view that the proposed policy is a better way to tell students how they are doing, it is a finer grading system, and permits transfer more readily.
- The policy also clarifies the meaning of grades; that is part of the uniformity to be achieved. There is to be uniformity in the meaning of the evaluations. This is brought to the attention of the faculty because there seems to be no understanding of what grades are to mean. These definitions are not significantly different from current policy.
- The faculty at Morris need not use pluses and minuses, under this policy, but the problem of their use of the N rather than F remains unresolved.
- The definitions of the grades refer primarily to undergraduate education. No graduate instructor uses the "C" to indicate satisfactory course completion.
- The reason for the exemption of the Law School and (2) Medical Schools are that they have long-standing grading systems used in the profession. To standardize the grading system to all but those three would be a big step forward.
- One advantage to pluses and minuses is that it would permit expansion of grades in graduate courses from two to four--the actual range becomes A, A-, B+, and B, two of which now cannot be used. Even in honors seminars the C is not used to indicate a student met course requirements.
- Should someone speak with Provost Allen to learn if the professional schools endorse the proposal? (Of all the comments made about the grading system, no objection has been registered by any professional school faculty.)
- What is the goal? Will every effort be made to achieve uniformity, with compromises, or is this

- proposal going to be it, and those who do not like it obligated to seek an exemption?
- This policy should satisfy all objections at Morris except use of the N instead of the F; what about allowing each campus to use either the N or the F? Would that require separate programming, and thus become a cost issue? Morris could also remove students from the A-F system, re-register them on the S-N system, and award the N.
 - The University wants to buy an off-the-shelf program for grades; some of these variations may not be available.
 - Another justification for the uniform grading system is that grades mean the same.
 - Is the uniform standard important, or is it a worthy goal to be achieved with everyone happy about it? There either is a uniform standard or there is not; exemptions for law and medicine are granted for professional reasons, and any exemption should be for a serious reason. At Morris they do not like the F; is that serious enough? And sometimes things simply must be put to a vote, after a debate. If the Committee papers over differences to achieve a consensus, there will be disappointment later.
 - The Committee must keep its purview in mind. It should not propose things that cost a lot of money, and if it saves money, that is fine, but it should keep focused on the educational policy merit of the uniform policy.
 - This is part of a larger effort, it should be recalled, to simplify and consolidate many Senate policies.
 - There is also a systems issue that cannot be separated from the discussion; the computer systems will be unable to handle all of the grading systems being used.
 - The strong justification must be on education, and the Committee must know that this is an issue that goes beyond the University; the community looks at grades.
 - There needs to be confirmation that both the K and X grade are needed.

One Committee member made a set of three motions, amended slightly in the discussion, as follows.

MOTION I

There shall be a University-wide grading policy (excluding the Law School and the two medical schools).

MOTION II

The uniform grading system shall be as follows. [The provisions of and comment on the grading policy last presented to the Senate, slightly amended, were approved.]

MOTION III

In the event that Motion I fails, the Senate Committee on Educational Policy recommends to each campus assembly that it discuss and adopt the grading policy contained in Motion II. Included in any such discussion should be a consideration of the costs and benefits, both educational and financial, of not adopting a uniform grading system.

The motions were approved unanimously.

Committee members then turned to other provisions of the policy, in light of comments made at the November Senate meeting.

- It was agreed that there should be one opportunity granted to undergraduates to withdraw from a course at any time up to the last day of classes (one "get out of jail free" card). There may be costs involved in implementing this, because someone--or some computer program--will have to check to make sure the option is only used once by each student. The decision whether to implement this provision was left up to the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, depending on how costly it would be.
- In extreme cases, any student can petition for a withdrawal irrespective of whether he or she has used the "get out of jail free" option.
- It has been argued that the provision on repeating a course would work to the advantage of the well-to-do: they could afford to take a course, withdraw or take an N, and take it over, while students with less money could not afford to do so. That concern is probably addressed by the policy, which says that repeat enrollments in a course, and the grades earned, must appear on the transcript, and that only the LAST enrollment will affect the GPA.

2. Semester Conversion Standards

Professor Koch then drew the attention of Committee members to the revised Semester Conversion Standards document, prepared after the last meeting. A number of issues were raised in the ensuing discussion.

- The standards provide that a program may require up to 130 credits for a baccalaureate degree without any external review and approval; why 130? Are the programs that have accreditation requirements that would require exceeding 130?
- The language about liberal education requirements could be misinterpreted. The Committee agreed that a specific number of credits should be stipulated, rather than a fraction of degree credits; it set 40 credits (out of 120) as the minimum number of liberal education credits. The intention is that the requirement remain approximately the same as at present.
- Discussion of "double-dipping" in liberal education courses is continuing.
- The draft provision calling for a 60-minute class hour would lengthen the day by 45 minutes or eliminate one class period. There are (probably negative) implications for classroom utilization.
- One attractive element of the 60-minute class period is that starting times would be on the quarter hour and multiple or partial classes would be portions of an hour.
- The class period should be 55 minutes, with a declaration that the typical longer Tuesday-Thursday class will be 85 minutes (rather than 82.5!).
- These standards will drive the policy on classes, schedules, and final examinations that the Committee has labored at such length on; these decisions will require only minor modifications in the policy.
- There needs to be a definition at the beginning of the standards noting that terms such as "class hour" and "contact hour" and "hour" all refer to the 55-minute hour.
- It would be more fruitful to think in terms of courses rather than minutes or hours; courses are more appropriate when considering faculty and student educational goals.
- The standards should be workload-neutral.

- SCEP should not be the group that reviews data on the extent to which courses adhere to the 1:1 credits:contact hours ratio. There has been discussion in the Change to Semesters Committee about establishment of a Twin Cities curriculum review committee, perhaps jointly appointed by the administration and SCEP; that body might be a more appropriate group to do so. (The Twin Cities campus is the only campus which does not have such a body.) It was agreed that the provosts and chancellors should be identified as responsible for the implementation of the policies in the standards. The need for such a committee is partly because of the change to semesters and partly because of Responsibility Center Management: ALL courses will have to be proposed anew for semesters, and under RCM, there could be inefficient course offerings if units were to try to maximize tuition revenues. This would be an undergraduate curriculum committee, putting in place what already exists for graduate courses.
- The summer session calendar should be as flexible as possible, and there should be flexibility within registration periods. Such flexibility is a necessity for CEE. The 3-week interim term plus the two 5-week summer sessions offer a lot of flexibility.
- The interim term should not be in January. Allowing students to get out early in May will permit them to find jobs, rather than giving them an enforced month-long vacation in January.
- The interim increases the possibility that students will finish in four years in addition to working; it offers an opportunity to pick up an extra course.
- The interim term should not negate the principle of workload neutrality; interim courses could be inloaded, or part of regular teaching responsibilities, or overload teaching. One assumes it would probably be overload in many cases. There may be field courses that faculty would be REQUIRED to teach and students to take, but that could be incorporated in the faculty member's workload; departments could arrange such things.
- Departments could also offer courses that ran eight weeks, from the beginning of the interim through the first summer term.

Professor Koch said that the documents would be revised and presented to the Senate Consultative Committee the next day. The semester conversion standards would also be distributed widely across the University, along with materials from the Change to Semesters Committee. She then adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota