

MINUTES*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, January 13, 1999
1:00 – 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall

- Present: Judith Martin (chair), Shumaila Anwer, Darwin Hendel, Gordon Hirsch, Laura Coffin Koch, Christine Maziar, Darcia Narvaez, Kathleen Newell, Martin O’Hely, Jeff Ratliff-Crain, Palmer Rogers, Tina Rovick, Suzanne Bates Smith, Thomas Soulen, Steven Sperber, Craig Swan
- Regrets: Robert Johnson
- Absent: Laura Beauchane, Angela Bos, Richard Skaggs
- Guests: Peter Zetterberg (Office of Institutional Research and Reporting)

[In these minutes: allowing 3-hour final exams; allowing athletic teams exceptions to compete during study day/finals week; Crookston calendar exception; due date for grades Fall Semester 1999; academic progress policy; revised tuition proposal; improvement in graduate assistant fringe benefit charges]

1. Final Examination Policy Change

Professor Martin convened the meeting at 1:00 and began by reporting that she had received a number of requests concerning the possibility of continuing to hold 3-hour exams. A number of departments have such exams, and wish to know if they will be able to continue them after the change to semesters has been made.

It appears that there are fewer than 40 courses which have 3-hour exams, based on information provided by the Registrar’s office, Professor Martin reported. She distributed a proposed amendment to the Semester Conversion Standards; the legislation passed by the Senate permits longer exams, with departmental approval, and the amendment would require that any such longer exams be noted in the class schedule in order that students are put on notice when they register for a course, so may plan their final schedule accordingly.

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

The Committee approved the amendment unanimously. It will be presented to the Senate at the February 18 meeting.

2. Athletic Exceptions

Professor Martin distributed copies of letters from the Twin Cities men's and women's athletic programs reporting on exceptions they will request from the Senate policy that bars travel to or competition in athletic events during study day and final examinations week. The men's department had earlier requested an exception for a basketball game during finals week of Fall Semester, 1999; at SCEP's request, Professor Martin had written to the two athletic directors requesting that ALL expected requests for exceptions be presented to the Committee, in order that it not be confronted with making decisions on a piecemeal basis.

The first request concerned the men's basketball game. The game, at Oregon, falls in the middle of the exam period. In response to SCEP's request about what the consequences of cancellation would be, the potential liability could run as high as \$200,000. The men's department also provided a detailed schedule of how studying would be carried out, and informed the Committee that the time away from campus would be as short as possible.

Committee members deliberated over this request for some time, with some maintaining that the semester calendar had been known for a long time, and that it was not excusable for the department to have scheduled this game. Moreover, the course completion rate for men's basketball has not been outstanding; to put this burden on the athletes will do them harm.

The Committee voted 8-1, with one abstention, to approve the request, with the understanding that (1) the only reason it was granted was because of possible confusion arising because of the change to semesters, and (2) no such exceptions would be granted in the future. Committee members also expressed the hope that in the future, the Assembly Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics will exercise its oversight responsibilities in a fashion that such requests will be unnecessary, because the schedules that are approved will have no conflicts. It was noted that academic calendars are known for several years in advance, and that there is no reason, in the future, for conflicts with finals to arise.

The Committee then turned to a request for an exemption for two baseball games Spring Quarter that fell on study day. This request had nothing to do with semesters, it was noted, and was seen as opportunistic: the games were scheduled because the team had an opportunity to play in the Metrodome. These opportunities should be discussed BEFORE contracts are signed. While this was more acceptable because it did not involve travel away from the Twin Cities, and fell on study day rather than in the middle of finals, the Committee concluded that the rationale was thin and that it would not permit any more exemptions. The Committee voted 7-1 to deny the exemption.

In the women's department, the only likely conflict would arise if a team made it to the Big Ten or NCAA championships, but that eventuality would not require Committee action because the policy automatically exempts teams that are involved in a natural sequence of competition leading to a championship.

3. Crookston Calendar Exception

Professor Martin distributed copies of a request from the Crookston campus (calendar committee) for variation from the mandated spring semester starting day of the Tuesday following the Martin Luther King holiday. The request was premised on a variation in the length of the winter break, which could vary between 19 and 26 days, depending on the year. The student members of the Crookston committee, it was reported, felt strongly that the break should be confined to 19 days in order that classes would end earlier in the spring.

It appears that the variation may be cyclical, and the Committee agreed that it wished to be provided additional information before making a recommendation. It was noted that the Crookston campus must be sensitive to when MnSCU institutions start, because UMC students receive instruction from MnSCU schools and UMC offers instruction for MnSCU.

4. Due Date for Grades, Fall Semester 1999

Professor Martin turned to Ms. Van Voorhis to explain her proposed due date for Fall Semester, 1999, grades.

Ms. Van Voorhis noted that Senate policy calls for grades to be turned in 72 hours after the last final. The last final will be December 23, with December 24, 27, and 31 as holidays. She is recommending that an exception to the policy (allowed in the policy itself) be made, and that the due date for grades be January 5, 2000. That is the last possible date that she can recommend, because financial aid decisions must be made and colleges need time to make academic progress decisions.

The Committee talked about the matter a short while. Why not set January 3, since December 27-29 are regular work days at the University? Because most faculty are not around, it was said. Some may expect the date to be later, more like January 12, because there was mention in the Senate of a 2-week period after the holidays. Ms. Van Voorhis was unwilling to agree, now, that the third workday after the New Year's holiday should be the due date, because she regards this as an experiment; if it does not work, the due date will have to be set during the week between Christmas and New Year's. (She noted that at one Big Ten institution, faculty paychecks were withheld until grades were turned in. They only had to do it once.)

The proposal from Ms. Van Voorhis did not require action by the Committee (by the terms of the Senate policy), but there was agreement around the table that her proposal to set a January 5 due date was acceptable.

5. Academic Progress Policy

Professor Martin turned now to the draft policy on academic progress, copies of which had been circulated to members of the Campus Assembly and to the deans. She noted that there had been a steady stream of objections as well as endorsements; those who opposed it believed that as written it was too punitive to students who are not full-time. She inquired if the Committee wished to pursue such a policy, and if so, to do so in way that would be more benign in promoting timely completion of degrees. Is the Committee comfortable making a statement that encourages timely progress?

A number of points were raised in the ensuing discussion.

-- There should be incentives, but they should not be punitive, and part-time students should not be ruled out of the University. Proposals to give priority or restrict financial aid (over which the University has discretion) to students who make timely progress to a degree may be punitive, but other incentives should be adopted.

-- For the purposes of federal financial aid, every institution is required to have an academic progress policy; at most of them, the minimum credit load is 12 credits per term, and the GPA must be 2.00. In both cases, an institution could set the standard higher. On the Twin Cities campus, policy requires that students graduate in 6 years, after which time they lose eligibility for financial aid. The number of credits a student must be enrolled for, to receive financial aid, should remain at 12. If it is set at 15 credits, a student who takes 18 credits one semester and 12 credits the next would lose financial aid; it is not uncommon for credit loads to vary by term. (State aid rules require 15 credits, and this is an issue upon which Dr. Zetterberg said he would like to argue with the state.)

-- The availability of courses must be considered; students may not be able to graduate in a timely fashion if they are unable to take the courses they need. The biggest problem with respect to credit hours is that students may not see how they can fit 5 courses into their schedules; the second biggest problem will be that classes may not be offered when students need to take them; the University must be responsive to this problem, something the students can do nothing about. There are also classroom limits. At the same time, students should not be encouraged to lengthen their enrollment time simply because they do not want to get up before 10:00.

-- One way to think about this is how to provide additional incentives to students while not taking from the pool of benefits now provided to all, including part-time students.

-- There is a problem with mixed messages. Governor Ventura has commented, apropos paying for college, that there is no law that says people have to graduate in four years. President Yudof said students may need to meet the Governor part way, and take longer to graduate. The Committee wants to encourage timely graduation and wants students to be on track. It would be appropriate for the Committee to talk about the educational advantages of graduating in 4-5 years, AND to point out that some students cannot do so. (The President

has been clear about the advantage of graduating in 4 years, said one Committee member.) It was pointed out that one need not worry about students taking longer; the 4-year graduation rate from the Twin Cities campus is 18.3%, and even lower depending on how one counts certain kinds of credits. No matter how measured, the University's graduation rate in 4 years is extremely low in comparison with its peers. In addition, Dr. Zetterberg said that the number of students completing 180 credits in four years is actually much higher than 18.3%, but that the average number of credits completed by a student earning a baccalaureate degree on the Twin Cities campus is 210. This is another important reason why so few students graduate in four years. It obviously takes more than four years to complete 210 credits. The five-year graduation rate is about 40%, also extremely low in comparison to the University's peers.

-- It would be better to have a simple policy whereby SCEP encourages the administration to take steps to encourage timely graduation. Some such steps have already been taken, and should be noted in any policy. But a policy should not punish students for problems that are not theirs. It is important to have a policy that encourages timely completion; another element is what the University does to set expectations. The challenge to the University is that the majority of new first-year students want and expect to graduate in four years, but only 18% do so. The expectation of graduation in 4 years must be reinforced.

-- The policy would not apply to University College students. At present, that means students not admitted to a degree program, in one of the partnership degree programs, or someone in the ICP or PIL programs (the old University College).

-- Merit-based financial aid should not be taken away from students who do not take 15 credits per semester. If there is an expectation of advisors that students who receive the money will attend full-time, then advisors as professionals should have the authority to make exceptions. Moreover, if a student drops below full-time, withdrawing financial aid and other incentives makes it MORE difficult to get back on track.

-- What affects the graduation rate is not only the setting (in the Twin Cities) but also the characteristics of students. In studies of characteristics of entering students, the University graduates about 18% fewer students than would be predicted on the basis of those characteristics, so there is something about the environment that makes it difficult for students to finish soon. It is not, therefore, a problem of admissions criteria being too low.

-- One possibility the Committee or administration could pursue is to ask groups of students what incentives would be effective in pushing them to graduate in a shorter period of time. Compilation of a list of the items that help students do so should also be considered.

-- Another step could include creating a stronger sense of class identification (i.e., Class of 2002) and do more about reunions. This was emphasized heavily at the convocation this fall, in order to try to get students to think in 4-year terms.

-- Advising is critical. In some cases, students are advised to take fewer credits so they will do better academically, and thus be more competitive when applying for advanced or graduate programs. One response might be to send the message to admissions committees that the ability to carry a full load should be one of the criteria considered. In some cases, that is already done. Students should be advised that they will not be competitive if they do not carry a full load.

It was agreed that Professor Martin would redraft the policy, a simple one that would leave the implementation to the administration. It was suggested that the draft include reasons why students should want to graduate in a timely way.

6. Tuition Policy

Professor Martin next asked Dr. Zetterberg to review with the Committee his latest proposal for tuition rates for the Twin Cities campus. Dr. Zetterberg handed out a sheet outlining the proposal, and noted that Morris, Duluth, and Crookston would retain their own tuition plans.

In sum, of the options available, the one he recommends is that tuition rates be set at \$154.50 per credit for enrollment in up to 12 credits, and that tuition for the 13th and all additional credits be set at \$77.25, or half the rate for the first 12 credits. This plan would be in lieu of a tuition band (e.g., charging the same amount for enrolling for 13-16 credits). Another option that had been considered was charging the same tuition for 14 credits and above.

Each of the options has a projected cost of about \$5 million, or 5% of tuition revenue, in terms of lost revenue that is currently collected from students taking more than 12 credits. The rates are set to recover that money, so aggregate tuition revenues remain constant (except for increasing revenue when the Regents have approved rate increases).

A number of points were raised in the discussion.

-- There is a different psychological impact between the tuition band and the tuition discount at 13+ credits; the 50% discount will likely have a bigger impact as a student gets closer to 12 credits; the band would push students more toward taking 15 or 16 credits. The benefit of the band, however, is not realized unless a student takes 15 or 16 credits.

-- Would there be a virtue in imposing the full rate on credits after the 18th? There may be a self-destructive impulse in some students, so a cap at 18 might be helpful. Some students may want to enroll for 28 credits in a term and take an Incomplete in 14 of them. There is, however, a policy that students may not enroll for more than 20 credits without permission. Dr. Zetterberg agreed that such a cap could be imposed, although that would make the message slightly more complicated.

The plan also equalizes undergraduate tuition rates, Dr. Zetterberg reported; this is the third and final year of moving to equalizing upper and lower division rates. This will mean that

students will benefit financially, in that they will no longer face a 20% tuition hike when they make the change from lower to upper division. Being a full-time student on the Twin Cities campus will cost less next year than this year, if this tuition plan is adopted, and that is an important message to be sent.

-- The plan does not take into account possible changes in student behavior. If students increase their credit loads, there is a risk the University will have to provide more instruction but lack the funding to do so. His primary objective, however, is to avoid a DROP in the student credit load, Dr. Zetterberg told the Committee. The University, in his view, would be glad to have to handle the problem of students increasing their credit load; so would CLA, he added.

-- If a students drop 3 credits per term in average load, will that fall on the colleges? The tuition band protected the colleges to some extent. This offers a little protection, Dr. Zetterberg said. Students who drop from 15 to 12 credits will pay for the privilege. But charging higher rates at lower levels of enrollment could not begin to make up for a decline at the top, should loads decrease.

-- It should be certain that this will not impose an inappropriate burden on students who are taking lower credit loads. The proposal has a minimum impact on students taking 1-3 credits, Dr. Zetterberg pointed out; the cost for taking one credit drops considerably when the base tuition charge (a flat fee in addition to per-credit tuition charges) is dropped. The impact will be felt by students who enroll for 6-12 credits--the students for whom the University WANTS to provide an incentive to increase their credit load.

There is no magic bullet, Dr. Zetterberg said; advising and course access are important, and the tuition structure will not matter if the courses are not available. This plan will be presented to the Board of Regents in February, and he would like to be able to say that the plan is endorsed by a number of groups, including this Committee.

Without formal vote, but with clear agreement, the Committee lent its support to the tuition plan outlined by Dr. Zetterberg.

6. Graduate Assistant Fringe Benefits

Professor Martin called next on Dean Maziar, who distributed copies of a memo she had sent to deans, directors, and department heads informing them that tuition fringe benefit rates for graduate assistants would be significantly reduced in 1999-2000 (from \$6.59 per hour to \$5.13). This was accomplished because the University has been over-collecting, and federal law requires that the overage be returned within two years. She said she suspects that the University may also be over-collecting during the current year, so there will likely be a surplus at the end of this year as well. This provides an opportunity for the funds to be returned to departments and to principal investigators.

In addition, the floors for stipends has been increased, so students will see a benefit. The cap on the upper end of the stipend scale has been lifted as well, because the cap had affected the ability of some departments to recruit graduate students.

The announcement is made now so that programs know about it and can plan accordingly in their budgets and in graduate student recruitment.

In response to a question, Dr. Maziar said that there would be no “snap back” in the future, when the surpluses from over-collecting have been used up; she has spoken with Dr. Bruininks about building in a central subsidy to be sure that that does not occur, and that the continual fluctuation in rates is avoided in the future.

A number of Committee members expressed strong support for this action, calling it very good news.

Dr. Swan commended Professor Martin for getting through a long and difficult agenda on time. On that note, Professor Martin adjourned the meeting at 3:10 (almost on time).

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota