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EDUCATIONAL POLICY COMMITTEE (SCEP) MINUTES

MAY 7, 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, Gifty Amarteifio, Michael Anderson, Lee-Ann Breuch, Elaine Darst, Gayle Golden, Karla Hemesath, Ken Leopold, Robert McMaster, Nic McPhee, Kristen Nelson, Moshe Volovik, Sue Wick.

ABSENT: Timothy Gearns, Janine Grebin.

REGRETS: Erich Beckert, Charlene Ellingson, Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, Keith Mayes, Thomas Michaels.

GUESTS: Suzanne Bardouche, Leslie Schiff, Stacey Tidball, Sue Van Voorhis.

1. PROGRESS TO DATE ON STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

Vice Provost McMaster said that his office has been working on a strategic plan throughout the year in coordination with the plan for the University. He distributed a handout of this plan and reviewed the mission and vision for his office. Many of these factors relate to the Twin Cities being a research one institution that also had a land-grant mission to apply knowledge to local problems. This is a key distinction between this campus and Washington University.

He then moved to the next part of the handout, which discusses the teaching and learning curriculum. Associate Dean Leslie Schiff is dealing with problems in this area, including:
- Flexible and rigid majors and how they affect the student experience
- Finding the appropriate liberal education requirements; too many options overwhelm students
- Prerequisites as impediments to graduation
- Placement testing
- Increasing capacity in basic Chemistry
- Mission differentiation between BA and BS degrees
- Control of course management by the Campus Curriculum Committee
- Challenge curriculum was created a few years ago but never offered courses; Grand Challenges in Strategic Plan relate to this previous program

Robert McMaster said that another area of focus is supporting academic success. A comprehensive advisor survey was completed that will inform the right and wrong ways that advising is being done. The goal will be to improve advising and merge advising for academics and career.

Q: A previous report noted that an advantage of a research one institution is that every student can graduate with a special experience. Is that distinction noted in this plan?

A: That report provided a basis for this plan. This strategic plan highlights high impact activities for all students, such as UROP, service learning, and study abroad.

Q: How are students provided with the information they need to apply to the correct college or campus?

A: Most undecided students, about 1700, apply to CLA. Most other colleges have focused majors and are easy for applying students to understand. The University understands that there is a burden to switch colleges due to a second tier admission process once admitted to another college. Inter-campus transfers are also not easily done.

Members made the following comments:
- Research component in grand challenges is exciting
- Challenge curriculum requires service learning component

2. POSTING SYLLABI AND COURSE GUIDE SUCCESSOR

Moshe Volovik, student member, said that students do not know much about a course prior to registering. Students would like to be provided access to previous syllabi to review course content and assignments but faculty have pushed backed stating that this is their intellectual property. He would like to know if syllabi information could be added to the One-Stop site.

Sue Van Voorhis, from the Office of the Registrar, provided some background on course information. The course guide was rewritten eight years ago. At that time deans asked if usage would increase by spending money for this improvement; participation did not increase. Two years ago the Disability Services Office made a push to increase information from faculty and there was no increase. $250,000 is currently spent each year on the course guide for information on less than 50 percent of the courses. This process is not sustainable and will be going away as part of the Enterprise Upgrade.

After the upgrade, course information will be available on a PeopleSoft link through the class schedule. The link will take students to an instructor's site where they can post information and previous syllabi. This information was illustrated in a handout.

Q: Why is faculty buy-in low?

A: Many faculty do not finalize their syllabus until a course begins and they do not want to provide access to previous syllabi so that they are not held to those course conditions.

Q: Where is the ideal place for students find this information?

A: It is ideal to post information where students are registering.

Members made the following comments:
- Most faculty do not know that students want to see previous syllabi or think how this information could be used
- Faculty need a reminder at the correct time to post information
- Unless someone in the department posts this information for everyone, it will be hit or miss
- Some departments create uniform course profiles to make syllabi creation easier
- It is a big effort to post this information and keep it current
- It is always a challenge to get all faculty to participate in any program
- Syllabi were posted in one college and it was not sustainable on a semester or yearly basis

- The next version of PeopleSoft has an easy mechanism to provide more course information
- Some graduate students are opposed to posting syllabi as there is a question of who owns the material once it is posted
- Messages to faculty regarding the upgrade should encourage posting of previous syllabi through the links provided in the course template

3. VOLUNTEERS FOR SUMMER CALENDAR SUBCOMMITTEE

Sue Wick, Alon McCormick, Ken Leopold, Michael Anderson, Moshe Volovik, and Gifty Amarteifio volunteered to work on the calendar subcommittee this summer along with Tina Falkner and Stacey Tidball from Academic Support Resources.

4. INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE GRADUATE EDUCATION COUNCIL AND SCEP

Sally Gregory Kohlstedt noted that the Graduate Education Council (GEC) was formed as a separate constituency by the Graduate School to discuss graduate education policies. Its mission has some overlap with SCEP. As the body that is closest to graduate education, it discusses issues first and then has a collaborative mission with SCEP.

Q: How is it determined how a policy change is processed?

A: The Graduate School keeps a list of graduate education policy issues. They are first discussed with the GEC and then a recommendation is made to SCEP for implementation.

5. BOYNTON DISCUSSION OF EXCUSED ABSENCES FROM MAKEUP WORK POLICY

Ferd Schlapper, Director of Boynton Health Services, joined the meeting to discuss excused absences being provided by Boynton under the Makeup Work Policy. One mission of the University is to prepare global citizens by setting community standards. He believes that the University's stance on excused absences in this policy is in contrast to this mission. The policy allows an instructor to require verification for absences which is not a productive solution to preventing abuses.

Currently Boynton is being contacted by many students requesting verification for self-care in appropriate situations and Boynton is taking the student's word for it when the faculty does not want to. Last year Boynton was asked to provide verification 4500 times. This is a misuse of Boynton resources and is not teaching students to address the issue with their instructors.

He cited a policy from his previous institution, Boise State, as well as examples from other institutions which are not providing illness verification for students to show to instructors.

Q: If a student has a legitimate absence which the faculty opposes, what can be done to assuage these concerns?

A: There are implications for missing extensive course time, but communication should take place early if a student has a significant health issue.

Members made the following comments:
- Current policy does not prevent students from providing false information
- Instructors should understand if a student misses one class; if an illness extends beyond one class person, then a student should see a doctor and get documentation
- Students need to communicate proactively with instructors

- Verification should be required if the absence is extended
- Many students seek health care from outside Boynton
- Instructors may be less lenient with a student depending on what that student is missing on a particular day
- There is no system for tracking long-term absences and if it's related to health information, it is private data
- Students should be viewed as employees since their behavior needs to be set now before entering the workforce
- Faculty want guidelines on providing reasonable accommodations to be equitable among students
- It is hard to make a policy that fits all situations
- Is illness verification a policy issue or a best practice situation?
- Attendance expectations vary by course
- Students should take responsibility for their absence and inform instructors in advanced

6. OTHER BUSINESS

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

Becky Hippert
University Senate