

**EDUCATIONAL POLICY COMMITTEE (SCEP)  
MINUTES  
DECEMBER 3, 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.]*

[In these minutes: Discussion of the rollout of the new Graduate SERU; Discussion of current trends in financial aid, indebtedness, and fiscal literacy; Discussion and Approval of amendment to the Administrative Policy: Leave of Absence and Readmission for Undergraduates; Information on the Not Reported (NR) grade]

**PRESENT:** Sue Wick (chair), Nicola Alexander, Gifty Amarteifio, Michael Anderson, Erich Beckert, Elaine Darst, Gayle Golden, Karla Hemesath, Lauren Lindquist, Keith Mayes, Robert McMaster, Thomas Michaels, Hamza Musse, Savio Poovathingal, Rachna Shah, Tisha Turk.

**REGRETS:** Noah Hall, Ken Leopold, Alon McCormick, Henning Schroeder.

**GUESTS:** Melissa Anderson, Suzanne Bardouche, Tina Falkner, Ron Huesman, Dan Jones-White, Leslie Schiff, Stacey Tidball.

**1. DISCUSSION OF THE ROLLOUT OF THE NEW GRADUATE SERU**

Ron Huesman and Dan Jones-White, from Institutional Research and Reporting (IRR), and Associate Dean Melissa Anderson, from the Graduate School, joined the meeting to discuss the Grad SERU.

Associate Dean Anderson noted that this survey is based on the undergraduate model but will be able to provide data to the University for graduate students. She and Ron Huesman then reviewed the background of the survey.

Dan Jones-White then said that the Graduate SERU was developed at the University over the last two years and then rolled out for a comment period. Given the unsatisfactory comments that were released, 12 interviews were scheduled with stakeholders starting last January. Their comments were then incorporated into the next draft which lead to the 135 core questions trimmed to 91.

A pilot test was done this summer before the survey was launched here and at Virginia in November. The University's response rate is about 20 percent that varies by college and type of student responding; doctoral students have a higher response rate than Masters students. The survey will close at the end of the calendar year, but there will be two more reminders this month.

The mean response time is 25 minutes. There was some student concern about the response time but it was shared with students before they began the survey. Currently all items are in the core. In the future, some of the questions could be moved into modules, so that all students have a shorter survey.

Professional school students have not been included at this time as the questions were designed for Masters and doctoral students. A separate survey will be designed for them at another time.

All information from the survey will be presented back to stakeholders in spring and summer so that they can assess the strengths of the measures and see what modifications can be made. A

report can then be made back to SCEP in fall 2015. The survey is planned for delivery each spring to coincide with the undergraduate version.

Associate Dean Anderson said that the data in this survey will allow the University to do institutional benchmarking against other institutions. There is also a national push for professional development of graduate students.

Q: Who sent the request this year?

A: It was sent by the Office of Measurement Services but the cover email was signed by Dean Schroeder and Andrew McNally, President of the Council of Graduate Students (COGS).

Q: What was the dissatisfaction with the original survey design?

A: The initial feedback was that there were too many questions and it took substantial effort to leave comments. The follow-up conversations were much more focused and allowed for better modification of the modules to select individuals with everyone receiving the core question set.

Q: How does the 20 percent response rate compare to the undergraduate response rate?

A: It is 10 percent lower, but the first undergraduate SERU response rate was only 26 percent. The results this year were acceptable due to not much advertising. COGS also sent its own survey this year, so there was fatigue among graduate students.

Q: Can one see results by program?

A: Not now but that is the plan.

Q: Will COGS continue to do its own survey or rely on the SERU data?

A: COGS agreed to stop doing its own survey after this year in exchange for serving on the Grad SERU steering committee.

Members made the following comments:

- This will be a great tool to gauge students success and catch some before they leave a program
- Data shows graduate student goals and outcomes, including training for life instead of just in one field
- Responses will show if a program is working and if students are receiving what they need

## **2. DISCUSSION OF CURRENT TRENDS IN FINANCIAL AID, INDEBTEDNESS, AND FISCAL LITERACY**

Vice Provost Robert McMaster walked the committee through a presentation on the current trends in financial aid, indebtedness, and fiscal literacy. He noted that while most data represents Twin Cities' students, the system campus offices do report to him. He then highlighted the following information:

- No two students have the same financial issues
- Board of Regents policy addresses merit and need-based aid but now aid for the middle class is emerging
- There is a financial aid group that discusses policy and practice and develops guiding principles
- Distribution for graduate students is different from undergraduates

- For undergraduates, there is a central distribution system that incorporates federal funding including PELL, state grants, the University Promise Scholarship, and college and department funds
- University determines the cost of attendance (COA) and reports that figure
- Three biggest programs for funding are PELL, state grants, and University Promise Scholarship
- 22 percent of freshmen PELL students have \$0 expected family contribution (EFC)
- There is almost \$500 million in aid per year distributed system-wise
- The percentage of students graduating with no debt is rising, but if a student takes more than four years to graduate, there is a greater likelihood that they will have debt
- A survey on student financial behavior was sent last month

Q: Is there a way to increase funding for students who enroll in summer courses?

A: The federal and state programs both have complexities that make summer funding difficult. Most programs were built on the concept of attending fall and spring, and no classes in the summer. Currently a student who uses both programs in fall and spring would have no funds available to take summer classes.

Q: Is there a creative way to expand the population of student who cannot take on loans?

A: The University Promise Scholarship was intended to help these students. There are now three to four new scholarship programs that are targeting the middle class. In a new capital campaign, funds for need and merit-based aid would be requested.

Q: Does the University have any feedback from students who do not attend due to the cost?

A: The only feedback is anecdotal as the University does not request feedback from those who decline the University offer.

Q: For students who graduate with no debt, does the University know who is paying the cost or how?

A: Most are students from high-income households, veterans, and international students who are not allowed to take on debt

Q: Is the EFC a reasonable figure?

A: No. In most cases it is not close to what a family could afford to pay.

Q: How are state grant funds distributed?

A: It is scaled based on the number of credits a student is taking.

Q: Will responses to the student financial behavior survey impact University expectations?

A: There is very limited information on this topic so it is possible that it could influence a policy change.

Members made the following comments:

- Some minority students choose other institutions which are able to provide more grant or scholarship funds, thereby reducing the need for loans
- The University cannot compete with small, private institutions

- The University will work with the financial aid office if a student has a need-based request
- Student can move in and out of PELL-eligibility over their college career

### **3. DISCUSSION AND APPROVAL OF AMENDMENT TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY: LEAVE OF ABSENCE AND READMISSION FOR UNDERGRADUATES**

Tina Falkner presented the amendments being proposed for the Administrative Policy on Leave of Absence and Readmission for Undergraduates. She noted that the main changes involve the title and the process for being readmitted. The readmission process is confusing for students so this policy is trying to clarify the steps. The policy also intends to help students understand what happens if they just do not enroll for a semester.

Q: How does readmission differ from reactivate?

A: If a student is granted a leave of absence, then they just need to fill out a form to be reactivated. However if a student just stops attending, then they need to be readmitted to a program.

Q: How does a student who does not graduate and has 'Is' come back?

A: They need to complete a readmission form which is then evaluated by the program.

Q: How many times can a student request a leave of absence?

A: It is typically done only once.

Members made the following comments:

- Students are less likely to be readmitted once they have been gone for a period of time
- Students should be counseled to finish their degree
- Students cannot take a leave of absence to avoid a suspension

With no further comments the amendments were approved.

### **4. INFORMATION ON THE NOT REPORTED (NR) GRADE**

Tina Falkner stated that two hours after the deadline for reporting grades, any unreported grades will show as blank on the grade roster. This is an attempt to change grade behavior and have instructor report this information on time.

Q: Can instructors upload class data with a grade missing for a student?

A: Yes.

### **5. OTHER BUSINESS**

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

Becky Hippert  
University Senate