

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy
January 9, 1992**

Present: Stanford Lehmberg (chair), Victor Bloomfield, Thomas Clayton, James Cotter, Michael Handberg, Kenneth Heller, Karen Karni, Clark Starr, Susan Wick

Guests: John Anderson, Amos Deinard, Linda Ellinger (Office of Student Affairs), Theodore LaBuza (chair, Assembly Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics), J. Kim Munholland (past chair, SCEP)

1. Scheduling of Athletic Events

Professor Lehmberg convened the meeting at 1:20 and told Committee members he had forwarded the copy of the Assembly Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics (ACIA) policy on scheduling athletic events during Study Day and Finals Week because he thought it might be appropriate for SCEP to adopt such language as formal policy. He invited Professor LaBuza to discuss the policy as well as to raise other issues associated with it.

Professor LaBuza informed the Committee that there is concern about having a fair and even-handed scheduling policy across the University. The professional meetings in his field, for example, are typically held in June; depending on the dates, they can fall during the University's finals week. A number of graduate students in his department attend the meetings and present papers, and some are supported on research funds. The food science clubs also compete at these meetings, use the University's name, and are supported by department or external funding. How, some have asked, are these different from athletic teams? And what if a student attends the meeting without sanction from SCEP and gets a zero for a final?

Professor Lehmberg pointed out that SCEP had recently adopted and sent to SCC a policy on missed exams, which would require that students be given the opportunity for a make-up if they missed the exam as a result of participation in a University-sanctioned event. SCEP does not want to be in the business, he said, of approving every scheduling problem that arises.

Several points were made by Committee members in response to Professor LaBuza's inquiries. First, the scholarly activity of a national meeting, such as he described, takes the students away from class/exams far less than do athletic teams, which compete throughout the quarter; the problem with athletics is not just exams, it is the total time over the year. Further, the University has some control over the scheduling of athletic events while it has no authority over the scheduling of national professional meetings. Participation in professional meetings, it was also pointed out, are themselves scholarly or academic activities--whereas athletic competition, by definition, is not, and it is inaccurate to compare the two.

*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.

Discussion turned briefly to the time commitments required of athletes. NCAA rules, it was noted by one Committee member, are supposed to prohibit requiring more than 20 hours per week of an athlete's time (excluding travel and competition). In fact, however, athletes put in much more than 20 hours. How this problem can be dealt with is not clear, especially since some of the additional time spent is due to students organizing activities on their own.

Professor LaBuza agreed, and noted that the University cannot lock its buildings to prevent students from practicing. The President's Commission of the NCAA is examining this question. The length of the season has been reduced, but what has happened is that coaches have crammed the same number of events into a shorter time period. The number of EVENTS has not been reduced, and in the revenue-producing sports the pressure is against reducing the number because to do so would reduce income.

Committee members briefly reviewed the parts of the ACIA policy which addressed events scheduled during Study Day and Finals Week and agreed that they should be recast and adopted as SCEP policy and forwarded to the Senate for information (which policy would, with caveats, automatically permit an exemption from the ban on competition during Study Day and Finals Week if the events were in the normal progression to a championship sponsored by the NCAA or an appropriate national sport governing body). It was also agreed that in the case of invitational events, such as the approval recently granted to the women's volleyball team, the policy would have SCEP continue to exercise judgment on a case-by-case basis.

2. Appointment of the Morse-Alumni Award Committee

Professor Lehmborg reported to the Committee that for a variety of reasons he was unable to present a slate of candidates to serve as the Morse-Alumni Awards committee. The issue will be brought to the next SCEP meeting for action.

3. Advising

Professor Lehmborg then turned the discussion to advising and noted that the Committee would be joined by Professors Anderson and Deinard, the latter of whom is concerned about the low quality of letters of recommendation to the Medical School received by students from the University. The discussion of advising today will be general, and the subject will again be taken up with Vice Provost Hopkins at the next meeting.

One Committee member referred to the proposed policy statement on the faculty role in advising and inquired why it was not simply "motherhood and apple pie." Professor Lehmborg said he thought it was something with which most faculty would agree but that it has been learned that in some units, for instance, the curriculum is determined by professional advisors, so there seems to be a need for such a statement. It appears, he added, that SCEP seems to need to adopt legislation about things that most would think are commonly understood. These may be aberrations rather than a University-wide practice, one Committee member observed; another commented that what is needed is for the deans to take authoritative action to ensure that the faculty are fulfilling their responsibilities. Whatever lapses may exist may also reflect a shortage of faculty time.

The advising report distributed to the Committee (from a group chaired by Professor Anderson) appears to call for "nuts and bolts" kinds of advising to be provided by professional staff and more substantive advising to be provided by the faculty. One Committee member commented that a report such as this one should have cost estimates attached to it; in an age of shrinking resources, and recommendations that cost money, priorities should be established. Vice Provost Hopkins should be so informed, Professor Lehmborg observed.

Apropos the lack of faculty time, one Committee member commented, those who are older faculty members will recall that they WERE advised by faculty when they were in school. It isn't the case that student/faculty ratios have changed all that much; what has happened is that demands on faculty time have increased in other ways (such as committee meetings, it was interjected). Also a factor, it was said, is the contraction of the staff available to assist faculty in their jobs; if the University is to provide better advising, perhaps it should put more money into staff support so that faculty time is freed up.

One Committee member suggested that TAs make good advisors; another responded that they cannot provide good letters of recommendation or advise on graduate study. There are some things on which faculty themselves must spend time with undergraduates. On the other hand, some students appear never to learn that to take more than one class from a faculty member, and to go to office hours, would help them get to know the faculty. That may in part be due to the fact that this is a commuter campus--there is no grapevine that informs students on how to survive and succeed in this respect. It is, moreover, not necessarily wise to leave advising on degree requirements to the faculty--they don't know them and it isn't their job to know them; this is an area where professional advisors can do a better job.

A computer system that students and faculty could use that tells students how close they are to their degree and what courses they need would be extremely useful, said one Committee member, but it is doubtful the University is even close to developing one.

Each college, it was pointed out, has its own set of problems. In the case of Biological Sciences, for example, the student-faculty contact is pretty good, and the advisors are excellent, but CBS is not a freshman-admitting college, so many juniors and seniors don't get the right advice on science courses. CLA advisors, it was noted by another, are typically very good but they are overextended.

One Committee member inquired about the extent to which advising is incorporated in promotion and tenure and salary decisions; another responded that there have been no meaningful salary increases so there are no incentives to do anything; the incentive is to survive. That is not true, responded another Committee member; some faculty do receive raises because of their teaching and advising--although not as much as those of their colleagues who also do research. Advising is not usually separated out as a separate factor in the decisions. The problem is that teaching is primarily a local activity while research is national; improvements in methods do not get communicated nationally.

At this point Professor Lehmborg welcomed Professors Anderson and Deinard to the meeting. Professor Anderson reviewed the genesis of the advising report: The committee was asked to do two things, he related. It was to evaluate what new things might be done in academic advising and, in response to a question from SCEP, it was to develop a statement on the faculty role in advising. In the course of their work, he told the Committee, they learned that solutions did not simply appear; the University is too complex and situations differ from one unit to another. They came to realize that there

is no perfect solution and decided they could only look at the different ways academic advising is provided rather than recommend that all parts of the University should do it one particular way.

As a result, their first recommendation is that each college looks at its advising to see how it could be improved; the primary means to accomplish this will be for the deans to appoint groups to focus on improving the advising process. After reviewing reports from the past 6 - 8 years, Professor Anderson said, the committee was impressed with the progress that has been made, but things still need to be done.

In terms of the policy statement on the faculty role in advising, it is general, he acknowledged, but the University is diverse and it is difficult to identify a specific faculty role. Professor Anderson agreed that it may have seemed unnecessary to draft the statement, but their charge from SCEP requested it. It was noted that the previous chair of SCEP felt strongly about the faculty role in advising and wanted it reaffirmed; at Stanford, for example, the faculty are in their offices for several hours per day a week before classes begin and students seek them out for advising. At Minnesota, however, the faculty are not willing to do this, the University will not pay for it, and a recommendation to that end does not appear in the report. Others noted that the faculty are on the payroll on September 16 but most use the time for other things--and that students would not come in even if the faculty were available.

Although it was recognized that part of the burden for obtaining faculty advice must rest with the students, it was also agreed that many have had a bad experience or find it difficult or painful to walk in and start a conversation with a faculty member on how they should spend their lives. Some departments have tried requiring students to obtain faculty advice but the results have not been positive, especially with new students. It is possible that the new freshman seminars proposed by the Task Force on Liberal Education will help in this regard. One Committee member argued that simply because only half the students participated in a required advising program is not a reason to consider it a failure; students have different styles and needs. If only 20% make effective use of faculty advising, the effort should be considered a success; many students want the anonymity or have no need for faculty advice. Success should not be judged merely by numbers. Students, by and large, will not come in to see faculty unless they MUST in order to deal with nuts and bolts matters; few will be willing to discuss their careers. And if a computer can deal effectively with nuts and bolts matters, it will DECREASE student-faculty interaction.

Professor Anderson commented that this discussion points up one of the reasons the committee declined to advocate particular solutions for advising problems. Some departments have hundreds of majors; others have only a couple of dozen; even if the faculty in the former departments were enlarged, the advising load would not be equalized. And the committee did not feel it could require that every faculty member be available for advising and that every student should have a faculty advisor.

One Committee member said that three questions needed to be posed: What kind of advisors are needed and what kind of advice needs to be given? What is each advisor supposed to do? Where should each kind of advisor be found or be placed? Answers to these questions, it was said, would help solve some of the problems. Professor Anderson concurred and pointed out that what some units see as appropriate advising others would not, which is why a single definition for the University would be inappropriate. It was rejoined that this means the large departments have too many students and are not providing a good education.

The emphasis on communication with students is to be commended, said one Committee member. Each unit should be told to tell students what they need to do and where and how to do it.

Professor Lehmborg next asked Professor Deinard to explain the problems he has encountered while serving on the Medical School admissions committee. Dr. Deinard said his concern was a practical matter: Students at the University are at a disadvantage in applying to their own Medical School. The Medical School requires five letters of recommendation, one of which must be from a faculty member; the letters from University faculty typically say nothing. The smaller colleges in Minnesota usually do a report, evaluate the student, and compare him or her to their group--an in-depth opinion. Would it be unreasonable, he inquired, to tell students that they will need a letter of recommendation and the burden is on them to see a faculty advisor so that they can obtain it--and that they will not get a letter if they do not do so. Faculty would be available but will not chase students. Students would come to see the faculty if they knew they had to in order to obtain a letter of recommendation. Professor Deinard concluded that it is the responsibility of the faculty member to then write a letter if the student needed it.

Committee members discussed with Dr. Deinard the problems that arise when there are no "intense" courses for majors in a department with senior faculty and what the alternatives might be.

One Committee member pointed out that the kinds of letters and evaluations received from small colleges are easier for them to provide because they are dealing with small groups. Those institutions are also more selective in admitting students; the conversation at this meeting ignores the differences between disciplines as well as the fact that the University accepts anyone in the upper half of their high school class while the smaller schools have brighter and more privileged students. Self-selection on the part of the University students in getting to know faculty and obtaining letters is not all bad. Other Committee members took issue with the claim that students are better at the small colleges, but it was also then pointed out that a department with 38 faculty and 700 majors cannot provide the kind of evaluation that smaller colleges can.

One Committee member suggested that a pre-med club would help with the problem of the Medical School; it makes sense that an undergraduate club be organized by Medical School faculty so that the MDs would work with those who want to become professionals in their field. One of the problems at the University is that the Medical School faculty are not involved in undergraduate education. Dr. Deinard agreed that many schools have pre-med clubs but he said he could never recall seeing a letter from a pre-med club advisor. It is also true, he agreed, that not all students know early on that they want to become doctors.

The solution, Dr. Deinard, is more than just taking classes from a faculty member; the Medical School wants to know about their commitment, their motivation, their persistence, and so on. Committee members discussed several additional issues associated with the problem. Dr. Deinard emphasized that this is not a complaint from the Medical School; it is something that has been noticed by those faculty who sit on the admissions committee. Maybe what is needed, observed one Committee member, is more not more resources for advising but more funding for undergraduate research programs so the Medical School faculty could hire them; Dr. Deinard agreed that the faculty would be more interested in working with undergraduates if that were to occur.

One member of the Committee noted that there are 250 undergraduates in the Medical School--in

OT, PT, Medical Technology, and Mortuary Science. It was also argued that one of the recommendations in the report, calling for more professional advisors so that faculty could be freed to develop more informal advising relationships with students, reflects an inaccurate cause-effect relationship. The faculty role should include advising, and if faculty were to perform the task effectively there would be no need for professional advisors. Professor Anderson said it was the perception of the committee that some aspects of advising are routine and the faculty are not interested in them; that course X is needed in order to take course Y is information that can be handled by a professional advisor. It was also noted that if that recommendation were to be accepted, the faculty would be pushed even farther aside in the advising process; no one would come in to see them unless there are nuts and bolts questions which need to be dealt with. Further, it was commented by another, if the faculty need not give advice, they have no need to know the curriculum--but, rejoined one Committee member, it is dubious whether or not the faculty know or can advise on curriculum, and even if they could, the student who has not declared a major remains a problem. Professional advisors can provide better guidance for such students.

Committee members discussed a number of possibilities for dealing with students who have not declared a major, including providing them with a list of faculty in a variety of fields who have indicated their willingness to be available to discuss their own discipline. One Committee member argued that a professional advisor cannot help ANYONE find a major because they do not know the fields as do those who are practicing them. Professional counselors can certainly be of help; faculty are not qualified to deal with students' problems, nor are professional advisors. All of this discussion about academic advising, it was concluded, means the University is not doing something right but that the activity cannot be delegated to one class of people and shoved off into the corner.

Asked his view of the statement on the faculty role in advising, Professor Munholland said he was satisfied in part because it calls for engaging the faculty in advising. It isn't possible to change attitudes but advising can be given structure and delivered through the departments. In the case of students who do not have a major, their interest is not in finding a major immediately but rather to learn what goes on at the University and find out what the place is about. Once a student is in a major, he observed, the advising tends to be pretty good. The amount of money that goes into professional advising is bothersome, he opined; even if the number of advisors in CLA is tripled, the professional advisors will still have over 200 students each. The nuts and bolts issues, he agreed, could be dealt with by a computer disk; this solution, while somewhat impersonal, would be inexpensive, and much could be handled mechanically. Faculty time could be freed for the office hour--one of the great unused resources of the University, he observed. Faculty should announce in their classes that if a student wants to go to Medical School or Law School they will need a letter and they should come and see them during office hours. Students will come, and the problem will not be solved by putting more money into professional advising. Asked about the colloquia recommended by the Task Force on Liberal Education, Professor Munholland noted that these were among the more controversial of the recommendations, but the idea behind them was that students would talk about what they are up to and where they want to go--with the obvious understanding that they could change their minds--but they would at least think about the issues.

Professor Anderson commented that he believed faculty/student interaction is desirable and that while a number of faculty agree, others begrudge the time. If the 650:1 ratio for CLA advisors is to be dealt with, there will need to be a lot of CLA faculty involvement. And that time, he noted, will not be spread out over the quarter; it will come in concentrated doses, which will create logistical problems if nothing else.

One minor recommendation of the committee, Professor Anderson explained, but one which is indicative of the flavor of the University, is that material supplied to students--e.g., class schedules and college bulletins--should be more positive in promoting the use of advisors and how to get in touch with them. There is much about final exam schedules and registration dates and fees but little about advising.

Students, moreover, are often apologetic about coming to see faculty members, as if they are wasting faculty time, observed one faculty member of the Committee, when in fact they are PAID to advise students. The Committee cannot forget the hesitancy of students in approaching faculty. The written admonition in class schedules and bulletins, added another, would not be enough; few read them. Requiring a faculty signature would get the students to see the faculty, and even in departments with a 20:1 ratio of students to faculty, a couple of hours per day for one week before classes would be enough.

One Committee member expressed doubt that much would happen if the departments are all left to their own devices to improve advising. Another concurred and said that Vice Provost Hopkins wants a statement from SCEP; it will then be her job to put pressure on the deans. It is not the job of the Committee to keep on generating reports. Professor Lehmberg said he believed she was prepared to do so but wanted to discuss the issues with SCEP before acting.

There is a trade-off involved in all of this, concluded one member of the Committee. One could make the system more student-friendly on nuts and bolts issues by developing an interactive computer system--students would like it and it would always be right if programmed correctly and kept up to date. It would, however, reduce the need for students to interact early with faculty, which will only be increased by requiring that the faculty deal with nuts and bolts issues that the computer cannot help with. There are costs in both systems, in faculty time or in development or purchase of a computing system. It might be possible to combine these approaches, suggested another; students could be required to obtain a faculty signature, and selected faculty could be asked to be available and rewarded for being available for students 20 hours before classes start each quarter.

It might be useful to have a small committee look into the practicality and desirability of such an arrangement, one Committee member suggested. Departments should certainly be solicited for their views, it was agreed, but they would have to understand that if such a system were to be established, they would be out of the process if they didn't participate.

Professor Lehmberg suggested that this and a number of other issues should be raised with Vice Provost Hopkins at the next meeting and he thanked Professors Anderson, Deinard, and Munholland for joining the Committee.

The Committee adjourned at 3:20.

-- Gary Engstrand