

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, April 2, 1997
1:00 - 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall

Present: Laura Koch (chair), Avram Bar-Cohen, Anita Cholewa, Elayne Donahue, Darwin Hendel, Gordon Hirsch, Thomas Johnson, Robert Leik, Kathleen Newell, W. Phillips Shively, William Van Essendelft, Gayle Graham Yates

Regrets: Judith Martin, Tina Rovick

Absent: none

Guests: Peter Zetterberg (Office of Planning and Analysis)

[In these minutes: Summer session calendar; grading policy changes; exemptions from semester standards; final exam periods and study days; Morse-Alumni advisory committee; reorganization policy; use of student evaluations of teaching]

1. Summer Session Calendar

Professor Koch convened the meeting at 1:10 and began by re-introducing the issue of the summer session calendar, raised at the last meeting by Dr. Zetterberg.

One Committee member inquired if faculty would be willing to teach for 8 weeks in the summer; Dr. Zetterberg said he had only heard from faculty who believed that 5 weeks was too little time in which to teach what is normally taught in a 14- or 15-week semester. There need to be a variety of options available, but the main summer term should be one-half the length of the semester.

The Committee unanimously approved a proposal to change the Semester Conversion Standards to create a standard 8-week summer session and to permit courses to be offered for either longer or shorter periods. Also approved was a revised summer calendar for the year 2000 to reflect these changes.

2. Grading Policy

The "D-" Professor Koch then turned to the grading policy, and began by recommending that the D- be eliminated. The Duluth campus does not have the D-, and has made several other changes in its grading policy which would make the two policies more closely aligned, so it seems appropriate for the Senate to consider this one change in return. It is also appropriate because earlier in the debate about the grading policy, several faculty members inquired about the usefulness of a D- grade. Eliminating the D- grade would mean that the letter grades for students would be the same, with the same meaning, on all

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campuses of the University.

The Committee voted unanimously to approve a recommendation to the Senate that the D- be deleted.

THE "T" Another problem is that transfer courses are not listed on the transcript any longer, so the "T" symbol is not needed, according to the Registrar's office. Only the number of transfer credits appears on the University transcript; the actual courses transferred are available on the student's APAS record.

One Committee member inquired when and where the decision was made not to list specific courses on the transcript; this is an educational policy question that was never brought to the Committee. Another Committee member inquired about the difference between the APAS record and the transcript. At present, the transcript only records work done at the University; is there a reason it cannot provide other grades and courses earned? It is nice to see the whole record on one piece of paper, it was said, especially since it is the University that is granting the degree. There are a lot of uses made of transfer course information, and even if the transfer course information is on the APAS record, there are a number of programs that do not use the APAS system yet.

It was agreed that the Committee would not at this time vote on removing the "T" symbol, and would ask that the issue of listing transfer courses on the transcript be brought to it for discussion and review.

MEANING OF THE "D" After long discussion, it was unanimously agreed that there was a misplaced modifier in the definition of the "D" grade; the Committee voted to recommend a change to the Senate. The definition of the "D" grade, in the policy now approved by the Senate, reads as follows: "Represents achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails fully to meet the course requirements." This can be interpreted to mean that the student did not meet course requirements IN ANY FASHION. The Committee approved moving the word "fully" so that the definition would read: "Represents achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements."

USE OF THE "F" IN CALCULATING THE GRADEPOINT AVERAGE The Committee unanimously agreed that the language dealing with the "F" and the "N" grades should be clarified so that it is clear the F counts in the grade point average and that the N does not, and so that "0 credits earned" with an F grade count in the grade point but not, in any fashion, toward a degree.

Professor Koch reported that the President had said, in an informal discussion, that he would like to see this be University policy, so it has been reformatted to include both the Twin Cities/Crookston/Morris provisions as well as the Duluth provisions. There are differences in four areas (time to make up an Incomplete, use of the Withdrawal, the grade earned in repeated courses, and how the policy itself is changed). Asked if she thought there could be agreement on these four items, Professor Koch said she thought not; there has been a great deal of negotiation over the grading policy, and it is not possible in any event to have a uniform SENATE policy, because the Duluth faculty are not governed by the Senate. She agreed that either the Senate or the Duluth campus could change their policy provisions, rendering them no longer uniform, but expressed the hope that there would be consultation prior to any changes.

3. Semester Conversion Standard Exemptions

Following a question raised in the Senate meeting, Professor Koch proposed an amendment to the Semester Conversion Standards concerning where the authority to make exemptions should rest. Rather than a blanket grant of authority to the President, the Committee unanimously agreed that such exemptions should be reviewed first by this Committee, and that it would make a recommendation to the President.

The issue of the term of an exemption (e.g., one year, forever) has not been addressed in the standards language.

4. Policy on Classes, Schedules, and Final Examinations

Following up on discussion at an earlier meeting, it was unanimously agreed that units which receive an exemption from the calendar should also receive an exemption from the requirement of a 5- or 6-day finals week. The Crookston and Morris campuses, it had been reported, do not need that much time; the Law School needs two weeks for accreditation purposes. The Committee also agreed without further discussion that each campus should decide whether or not it wished to have a study day before final examinations.

5. Morse-Alumni Advisory Committee

Professor Koch reported that 14 individuals had been nominated to serve on the Morse-Alumni Advisory Committee (the establishment of which is called for in the Morse-Alumni Award policy approved by the Senate). It was unanimously agreed that all 14 names should be submitted to the President; he would be expected to appoint 10, and to use the other 4 as alternates in case any of his first choices decline.

6. Reorganization Policy

The Committee then turned to the draft policy on reorganization and discussed several elements of it. A major issue was the extent to which the Senate, and this Committee, should be involved in reorganization of academic units and programs. It was agreed that the policy was not ripe for distribution to the Senate.

7. Use of Student Evaluations of Teaching

Professor Koch now reported on hearings she had attended at the state legislature, noting that three students had testified against legislative action to declare as public data student evaluations of faculty. The proposal was referred to a subcommittee, to be taken up next year if the University Senate process was not in place, but there are other means by which the legislature could yet consider the bill this session. It is clear that students are of two minds on the legislative proposal, and the work of the subcommittee on this issue is important. If the University does nothing this year, the issue will come up again at the legislature next year.

In response to a question, Professor Koch said it would be helpful if the subcommittee were

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"thoughtful but hasty." The goal of some students is that the evaluations of every faculty member teaching every course be public data.

She then adjourned the meeting at 3:10.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota