

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, April 22, 1998
1:00 – 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall

Present: Laura Coffin Koch (chair), Avram Bar-Cohen, Elayne Donahue, Gayle Graham Yates, Darwin Hendel, Gordon Hirsch, Thomas Johnson, Kathleen Newell, Tina Rovick, Craig Swan, William Van Essendelft

Regrets: Robert Leik, Judith Martin

Absent: Adam Miller, Kevin Nicholson, Palmer Rogers, Jessie Jo Roos

Guests: Carol Cline (Office of Admissions)

[In these minutes: policy implications, especially for transfer students; degrees with honors and with distinction; policy on in-term examinations; prerequisites; staggered class start times]

Professor Koch convened the meeting at 1:00 and touched briefly on a few items. The recent Carnegie Commission report on undergraduate education at research universities will be distributed to the Committee, as will the report from the IMG subcommittee.

1. Discussion of Various Policies

Professor Koch welcomed Carol Cline from the Office of Admissions to the meeting. Ms. Cline's office deals with students who transfer to the University from other institutions, and she had questions about the recent policies provided for information to the Twin Cities Campus Assembly.

Ms. Cline noted several issues:

- The proposed policy provides that if a course is accepted for transfer by one college, it must be accepted by all. Some colleges are more liberal in their transfer policies than others. What about the case where a student proposes to transfer some "technical" credits, which some colleges will accept but others will not? If a student transferred into CBS (which accepts the credits), and later changed to CLA (which does not), what about if the student originally transferred into CLA, and later changed to CBS? The policy needs to be the same, no matter the point of entry to the University, Ms. Cline said.
- No college may limit the use of electives (e.g., music, physical education), but a college may impose additional graduation requirements?

*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.

- What if a transfer student takes courses out of sequence, before the student transfers? A student takes calculus, then algebra: now the University would not accept the algebra. The same general rule holds in foreign languages.

Committee members discussed a variety of issues related to the points Ms. Cline had raised, including the nature of “technical” credits, the practice at other Big Ten universities (which Ms. Cline agreed to explore), the extent to which this was an issue (primarily although not exclusively in CLA, because other colleges tend to have requirements that leave students little room for extra electives), the fact that CLA could impose additional requirements in order to control the use of electives, the nature of college courses (e.g., courses in welding, cosmetology, are not uncommon, and what about LOTUS, how to do spread sheets, career development, personal orientation?), and the need for the Committee to have more information about what programs allow in the way of electives. It was agreed that Professor Koch would also inquire of CLA what its views on these matters were.

With respect to prerequisites taken out of sequence, Committee members noted once again the ambiguity of the term prerequisite: some courses build cumulatively on material presented in the prerequisites, while others may not. Ms. Van Voorhis reported the results of a study her office recently completed, which concluded that students who did NOT take the prerequisites for a course did better than those who did. One debate is whether prerequisites are required or advisory; the consensus practice at the University is that they are advisory. The number of students who take prerequisites after taking the course for which the prerequisite was preparation is not small; often they have taken the advanced course at another school.

The Committee was of the view that the current proposal should be left as is: students may take for credit a course which is a prerequisite to a course they have already taken. There are legitimate educational reasons for doing a student to do so, often the prerequisites are very different courses covering different materials, and it would not be cost-effective for the University to check on whether prerequisites had been taken. One Committee member questioned how frequently University students would do this; it seemed “nutty” and cannot be that widespread (except for the opportunity to improve the GPA).

One dilemma is whether to treat transfer students differently from students at the University; a University student would receive credit for a prerequisite taken later, while a transfer student would not. After brief debate, the Committee accepted a suggestion from Dr. Swan that it delay action on this question and consider the transfer policies as a whole.

Ms. Cline also inquired about the policy on repeating courses. At the University, the last grade received for a course is the one that counts in the GPA; what about for transfer students? At present, individual college policy is followed. There was agreement that University policy should control. In the case of a course taken more than once, at other institutions, it does not affect the GPA because transfer credits are not counted in the University GPA. If a course is taken elsewhere, and then again at the University, the Senate policy controls. Professor Koch also noted that colleges have the authority not to permit courses to be repeated.

2. Degrees with Honors and with Distinction Policy

Professor Koch next reported on questions about the policy on degrees with honors and with distinction. The Committee agreed that the determination of qualification for such degrees should be at

the time the student graduates, not when the student applied for graduation. Ms. Van Voorhis reported that new arrangements will permit a much more timely link between certification of graduation and graduation ceremonies, and that the notation of honors or distinction can be added to the diploma, if the award hinged on grades that were late.

With respect to the question of basing degrees with honors or with distinction only on upper division work, allowing a student who does not do well the first year or two to nonetheless qualify, the Committee concluded that it believed the degrees should reflect consistently high academic performance, and recommends the degrees be based on the overall GPA, not one restricted to the upper division or some other smaller segment of a student's academic performance.

3. Policy prohibiting non-class-time in-term exams

One Committee member said that the proposed policy on in-term exams would hurt students, particularly in small sections where students want a different exam time. The problem is that there are students who are afraid to speak up, against making a change. University College students have expressed concern about faculty wanting to change an exam and "getting down on" students who don't agree.

The Committee concluded it did not wish to change the recommended policy, except to clarify that it did not apply to take-home examinations.

4. Prerequisites

It was agreed, following short discussion, that faculty should have the right to insist that students have taken prerequisites, that advisers should NOT have the right to waive prerequisites for students, but that faculty may, on an individual basis, waive them for students. The language on prerequisites will be redrafted for the May Assembly meeting.

5. Staggered Classes

Professor Koch next reported on the discussion of the proposal for staggered classes that had been presented for information to the Assembly. She had taken two straw votes; there was support for the staggered classes, but about even division on the wisdom of starting Minneapolis classes at 7:45 rather than 8:00. It was agreed that the Assembly would be presented two options, and that the St. Paul campus could have the option of a "zero" hour, beginning at 7:25.

Ms. Van Voorhis noted that there will be a problem with classrooms on the East Bank in 1999, because 43 will be lost, so that she will have to schedule more tightly those classrooms available on the West Bank and in St. Paul. She said she NEEDS to have a decision on the class schedule at the May Assembly meeting.

Professor Koch adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand