

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, October 13, 1999
1:00 – 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall

Present: Judith Martin (chair), Wilbert Ahern, Steve Fitzgerald, Gordon Hirsch, Emily Hoover, Christine Maziar (represented by Ed Schiappa), Marsha Odom, Richard Skaggs, Rita Snyder, Thomas Soulen, Steven Sperber, Craig Swan (represented by Linda Ellinger), Lisa Wersal

Regrets: Karen Seashore Louis, Kathleen Newell, Riv-Ellen Prell, Tina Rovick

Absent: Darwin Hendel, Suzanne Bates Smith, Bradley Wuotila

Guests: John Kellogg (Institutional Research and Reporting)

[In these minutes: overlapping classes; grading data, use of classrooms, class sizes; calendar questions]

1. Overlapping Classes

Professor Martin convened the meeting at 1:00 and began by inquiring what position the Committee wished to take on the question of overlapping classes. Current Senate policy provides that students may not register for courses that end/start within 30 minutes of each other when one is in Minneapolis and one is in St. Paul, and may not register for courses which end/start closer than the normal passing time on the campus (e.g., 15 minutes on the Twin Cities campus). The registration program in PeopleSoft, however, cannot bar students from registering for any courses except those that actually overlap.

Mr. Fitzgerald explained that there are two times that courses can be back-to-back, that that is on Tuesdays and Thursdays when 75-minute courses and 50-minute courses intersect. It is difficult to tell the magnitude of the problem; perhaps 100-150 students are affected. That problem can be fixed for next fall (but not for this spring), by moving the start time for 75-minute classes back 15 minutes. Mr. Fitzgerald said he did not believe such a change would create other problems, or the staggered starting time for Minneapolis and St. Paul classes, but agreed that the Committee would see the proposed schedule of classes.

Another problem is that sometimes there is only five minutes passing time between classes, which makes students late to class. What is creating that problem? Depending on the location of the classrooms, expecting students to go from one class to another in five minutes could affect quite a number.

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As for changing PeopleSoft, that would be very expensive. One question is whether future versions of PeopleSoft can be altered so that it can automatically prohibit such registrations. There are urgent problems in the PeopleSoft "fix it" queue now, Mr. Fitzgerald reported; if the Committee pressed for inclusion of this item, it would be put on the list, but probably not with a high priority. Professor Martin suggested that the Committee review the changes in the schedule that Mr. Fitzgerald proposed, and decide if it is comfortable at that point with the solution.

Several Committee members took sharp exception to the assertion that only 100-150 students are affected by the back-to-back classes; several faculty members on the Committee related stories of problems, and suggested that the number is far larger. The data are not correct, said one Committee member. A related problem, said another, is that if classes are scheduled too close together, or back-to-back, one class is leaving while another is entering, and a significant amount of instructional time is lost in the transition. The system allows classes to begin and end at the same time, which creates problems.

Any change in the schedule for next fall must be made by mid-November, so the Committee will review the information as soon as it is prepared.

2. Grading and Other Data

Professor Martin next welcomed John Kellogg from Institutional Research and Reporting.

GRADES By Senate policy, the Committee is to present to the Senate each fall aggregate data on grades awarded, and must decide how to present them. The Committee will consider the data, which it will receive from Institutional Research and Reporting as soon as they are available.

CLASSROOM USE It was agreed that Mr. Kellogg and Mr. Fitzgerald would work together to identify, by college and department, those courses that are offered at non-standard times, thus causing an inefficient use of classrooms. The data are to be separated by graduate and undergraduate courses. The data should also include information about the credits for the courses; in some cases, a 4-credit course may meet over two class periods on two days; it is not clear that the Committee wants to insist that a 4-credit course meet four hours on four separate days.

And once the "culprits" are identified? Then perhaps a kindly letter from the Provost to the chairs would be in order.

ENROLLMENT FOR MORE THAN 20 CREDITS The Committee last year expressed concern that with tuition reduced by 50% for credits over a certain level (different for undergraduates and graduate students), students might "load up" during one term and then take Incompletes to be finished the following term. It had asked for data on the number of students who enrolled for more than 20 credits.

Mr. Kellogg presented the data; on all campuses, the number of students who enrolled for 20 or more credits dropped notably. The Committee expressed pleasure, and asked that the same data be provided for Spring Semester.

CLASS SIZES Mr. Kellogg related that he was unsure what data he should assemble in order for the Committee to look at any difference in class sizes as a result of the change from quarters to semesters. With that change came also changes in course numbering. It was agreed that Mr. Kellogg would work with Dr. Ellinger to sample a number of classes and provide the data to the Committee.

The experience of faculty, even absent data, is that they are drowning in students. With a reduction in the number of courses, it is inevitable that class sizes would increase; this is an important datum for the Committee to track. Another factor may be the increased enrollment; there are 400 more students on the Twin Cities campus this fall. A lot of students met the admissions standards, and more applicants accepted than were expected.

Another issue that should be of concern to the Committee is course access; is it possible to obtain information on the number of closed sections for this fall, compared to earlier years? If four-year graduation rates are a priority, access should be a major issue. There are serious access problems, it was said, and anecdotal evidence is that classes are stretched to capacity. The major problems occur in the 9:00 - 1:00 slot; there are smaller classes available later in the day. But in some cases, as when labs are staffed by graduate students, simply expanding the number of offerings later in the day may not be a solution, because graduate students themselves are expected to be in classes and seminars and labs at that point, and thus unavailable to teach.

Another datum the Committee requested is attrition rates, by comparison with earlier terms.

The Committee also asked that the Graduate School investigate the possibility of making dissertation fellowship decisions earlier, to allow better planning for graduate students and instruction.

Mr. Kellogg told the Committee that he was working to meet a number of state and federal reporting requirements, but that he would provide the requested data as soon as possible. Professor Martin thanked him for his help.

3. Calendar Questions

The Committee next looked at a series of questions that had been raised about academic calendars on the four campuses beginning with the 2001-02 academic years. Professor Martin noted that a small group had been working with the calendars, and that the Executive Vice President had asked all campuses to develop calendars for four years into the future. The calendars need to be taken to the Senate.

Professors Ahern and Odom said there had not been wide discussion of the calendars on their campuses, and that they would take up the matter upon their return.

1. Does SCEP wish to recommend to the Senate that summer session starting dates no longer be linked explicitly to the end of the K-12 academic year? It was noted that not all K-12 districts end at the same time. One Committee member recalled that the Committee had appeared earlier to be of the view that if the College of Education and Human Development had the option to schedule their summer courses at a time when teachers could take them, there was no reason to have such language in Senate policy.

The Committee discussed whether there should be a "standard" summer session, and if so, what the rationale would be for moving it. "Standard" means used by a significant fraction of courses, and might be different on each campus. Students may depend on when the courses are offered. The mechanism by which the starting date for summer session was determined, and the Committee concluded it should continue to be linked to the end of the intersession.

2. Should spring semester, the intersession, and summer session be run together, to permit a longer summer break and to permit use of the intersession either in conjunction with spring semester courses or in conjunction with summer session courses? The Committee concluded tentatively that whether or not there should be breaks between any of the three sessions should be left up to each campus.

It was noted, however, that student financial aid rules require that the intersession be treated as part of spring semester, so intersession should not be counted as part of summer session. The Committee discussed this linkage and whether students could obtain aid for the intersession. It was pointed out that counting intersession as part of spring semester is to the advantage of students, if they are careful in their academic planning.

Questions about the extent to which the intersession would be used also arose; the view of those who had experience at other institutions with a May intersession reported that it was very successful. It was agreed that someone should write an article for KIOSK about how other institutions make use of the intersession; Professor Martin agreed to contact Maureen Smith about an article.

There is some traffic between campuses for summer session, so heterogeneity in starting dates could be a problem for those students. The fact that students can transfer between campuses at the break between fall and spring semester, however, has helped a great deal.

3. Does it matter if spring breaks are not the same on all four campuses? The Committee concluded that it did not.

4. When should the Twin Cities spring break be scheduled? Dr. Swan invited the members of the Council of Undergraduate Deans to express views on this question; those who had responded by the time of the meeting all favored scheduling the break so that there are eight weeks of instruction, spring break, and then seven weeks of instruction. This will allow for half-semester courses, and exam time for those half-semester courses scheduled during the first half of spring semester. The Committee tentatively concluded that this made sense and should be the policy for the Twin Cities campus.

5. Are the calendar exceptions for Law, Medicine, Dentistry, and Vet Medicine granted in perpetuity, or must they be renewed each year? Professor Martin noted that the schools have been granted exemptions from the regular University for calendar for the two years since Senate policy has been in place; should they continue to have an exemption? The general view of the Committee was that the four units should be allowed to do what they need to do--with the stipulation, added one Committee member, that they can do so as long as their classrooms are available to other units.

It was agreed that a question should be raised with the Law School about why it must start spring semester two weeks earlier than the rest of the Twin Cities campus, and whether or not it intended its spring break to be at a time different from the rest of the campus.

Professor Martin adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand