

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Thursday, October 25, 1990**

Present: Thomas Clayton (chair), Edward Foster, Roland Guyotte (by telephone hook-up), Michael Handberg, Ken Heller, Karen Karni, Marvin Mattson, Clark Starr, Jennifer Wesson

Guests: Geoff Gorvin (Footnote), John Howe (Task Force on Liberal Education), Ken Janzen (Regents' Office), Aron Pilhofer (Daily)

1. Report of the Chair

Professor Clayton began by reporting that the proposed policy on scheduling events during Study Day and Finals Week has been placed on the docket of the Senate for action at its November 1 meeting; some clarifying remarks will need to be made by Professor Munholland, who will present it on the Senate floor.

At the November 20 meeting the Committee will hear from Vice Provost Anne Hopkins about implementation of the Preparation Standards.

2. Program Reviews

The question of program reviews was next on the agenda. Professor Clayton distributed a one-page memo which appointed an ad hoc subcommittee to develop guideline questions which might be used in reviews which attend to undergraduate programs; the reviews apparently attend to undergraduate programs in an uneven fashion. Also circulated were extracts from several program reviews for Committee members to examine.

It was suggested that the "Proposed Quality Indicators" for undergraduate education and the survey data compiled by Darwin Hendel on good teaching practices would be of interest to the subcommittee. Copies of program review documents should also be made available.

Professor Clayton thanked those who agreed to serve on the subcommittee and promised that the issues would be brought back shortly.

3. Morse-Alumni Award Criteria

Professor Karni distributed several items, including a draft of new criteria to be used in considering nominees for the Morse-Alumni award. The problem in the recent past, she explained, has been that there were four criteria used to rate the nominees (teaching, advising, program development, and educational leadership) and each category received a weight of 25%, with each nominee ranked on a 5-point scale for each criterion; the numbers were summed and divided to reach a final number. The result was that candidates were sometimes only hundredths of a point apart--differences which are meaningless, Professor Karni pointed out, and which reflect the problem of assigning numbers to subjective

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impressions.

The draft, she continued, calls for teaching to be given 50% of the weight in evaluating candidates--because the Morse award is essentially excellence in teaching. She also proposed the addition of a new category, research and creative activities; this new category, plus the remaining three from the previous method of evaluation, should then be assigned the remaining 50% of the weight. Most important, however, is that the total individual be evaluated, within the guideline of 50% for teaching and 50% for other activities, rather than using a system which tries to assign specific values for a list of criteria.

Finally, she said, she had removed from the criteria that language which appeared to give "program directors" an unwarranted advantage--it permits them to obtain an award for doing their job.

Committee members discussed the proposal for some while; some of the salient points in the discussion were these.

- Research and creative activity should not be included because the award is for undergraduate education, not professorship. Involvement in research by undergraduates, however, should receive recognition, for that is teaching. Further, if the University does not give recognition and provide incentives for undergraduate involvement in research then it is difficult to distinguish the University from other institutions around the state; giving undergraduates a sense of engagement in research is very important (although the extent to which undergraduates can be effectively involved in research perhaps varies by discipline).

The fact that a faculty member is a productive researcher should not, per se, lead to the conclusion that he or she is a good educator; the connection between the research productivity and excellence in undergraduate education must be demonstrated in the particular instance.

The virtually exclusive interaction of undergraduates with faculty is through teaching; what can be communicated in the classroom is most important and should not be diluted by too many other considerations. It is that ability to communicate in the classroom that is of the greatest benefit to the vast majority of undergraduates. Others on the Committee took issue with this proposition; even though expensive, involvement of undergraduates in research is important.

Different kinds of teaching assignments can also affect the opportunity of faculty members to involve undergraduates in research; those who have not had the opportunity should not be penalized.

- Is the award for a well-rounded educator or for someone who is truly outstanding in one area, one who has done something way above the norm but who has not done everything? Some argued for the latter, saying that using all these different criteria can lead to recognition of mediocrity rather than "peaks."

Recognition of the truly superb in one activity, it was agreed, would not rule out recognition of those who achieved sustained excellence in several areas--the award should

be structured so that either kind of contribution to undergraduate education could be recognized. The selection committee would have to make choices.

If consideration of "peak" performance is to be given emphasis, at least for some candidates, then the nomination form materials should include instruction on documentation of those "peaks" as well as of sustained excellence. (In the past, it was suggested, such "peaks" were recognized; standards may have drifted in the intervening years.)

- There are really only two criteria, it was suggested: One is teaching (which should explicitly include supervision of undergraduate research) and advising (supervising individual activities by students, interacting with them one-on-one). The other criterion is program development--activities "at a distance" by people who do not necessarily personally deliver undergraduate education but who somehow change the atmosphere so that others can provide excellence in education. People might be outstanding in one of these two areas and lacking in abilities in the other; often, in fact, those who are good in one are not good in the other.

There seemed to be general Committee agreement on this bifurcation of the criteria, although the weighting between the two elements might not be exactly 50/50 if research and advising are included in the definition of teaching.

- It should be made explicit that to warrant consideration for the award an individual must do something substantially above and beyond their job description.
- The categories of Educational Leadership and Program Development are confusing and amorphous; the previous selection committees have had trouble deciding if an activity belonged in one or the other category (or either).
- Flexibility in the process is what is needed, which would permit the selection committee to recognize excellence in a variety of ways. The committee must have the freedom to discuss the nominees at length and arrive at conclusions about what is to be rewarded.

There appeared to be agreement that preparation of the dossiers was a major issue to which the Committee needed to attend when it deals with the procedures and criteria for the award in future years.

Professor Clayton said he would attempt to rewrite the criteria, in line with the spirit of Committee discussion, which Academic Affairs could use for the 1991 nomination instructions.

4. Discussion with John Howe, Chair, Task Force on Liberal Education

Professor Clayton welcomed Professor Howe to the meeting to bring the Committee up to date on the proceedings of the Task Force on Liberal Education.

Professor Howe distributed a written progress report and explained to the Committee the background of the Task Force and the schedule under which it is working. There will be a draft report prepared for wide distribution by the beginning of Winter Quarter; there will then be widespread

discussion of the specific recommendations.

He then asked that the Committee inform him of any initiatives being undertaken by other groups at the University about which it might hear.

The survey results, Professor Howe reported, will be taken up at the next meeting of the Task Force; the information is not yet available. The rate of return has been about what was expected (roughly 800). The results will, in any event, be taken very seriously.

A question was posed about whether or not there are any "benchmarks" being used as the Task Force makes judgments about improving writing skills and "numeracy" and whether or not it would approach these issues boldly. Professor Howe replied that "outcomes assessment" in English language and mathematical competency is a subject around which the Task Force has thus far only skirted. As for boldness, he said, some on the Task Force perceive its work as more bold than do others. The Task Force, he reminded the Committee, has been asked to develop recommendations which reach across all the colleges and which will be saleable. The recommendations will certainly receive careful consideration, and some will doubtless not like them, but both of those outcomes are to be expected. There will be meaningful recommendations to be discussed; what will come of them, and whether or not there will be sufficient resources or faculty attention to them, are not clear. On the latter point, given the other issues which faculty and administrators have on their minds, what becomes of the Task Force agenda remains to be seen. The Task Force, he said, is trying to be "realistically bold."

One Committee member noted that the questions of liberal education go back to ancient Greece and that other institutions, in large numbers, have taken them up. Has the Task Force inquired of other schools what works and what does not--in order to avoid re-inventing the wheel? Professor Howe responded that the Task Force, early on, sought information from a number of other institutions on what they have done; it also read widely in the scholarly literature on liberal education. In particular the Task Force has looked to institutions similar to the University; in many instances, however, the changes made are so recent that it is difficult to assess their efficacy.

Some, Professor Howe observed, make a cogent argument that there is no one way to skin the cat, no right or wrong on any of the issues; this he finds persuasive. It is also argued that there is value in revisiting the subject almost no matter what the outcomes because it focuses attention on these matters and educates a lot of people on the issues; he finds this somewhat less persuasive a position.

The question the Task Force is confronting is what the best way to go about accomplishing the goals at this particular institution at this time in its history. Such a review has not occurred for over 20 years so the work of the Task Force is timely.

In response to a comment about the lack of quantitative evaluations available now to indicate where the educational process is failing Professor Howe said that the Task Force did not begin with the assumption that everything is being done wrong. There are recurring and nearly universal statements in the liberal arts education literature which argue that some parts work better than others; the "data" are almost always "for example."

Student-satisfaction data also exist, for example, which suggest that the lower division experience is less satisfying than is the upper division--which is hardly surprising. The Task Force finds the gap to

be wider than it should; part of its work is considering the breadth requirements and ways to give "more students more of a clue more quickly" about the values of a liberal education and what University academic values are all about. Doing that might very well create a multiplier effect; students who show up in classes might be better oriented and understand better why they are asked to have breadth in their education.

Concern was expressed about the "Agenda for Action" in CLA, especially the budgetary and curricular implications, and how such efforts might intersect with the work of the Task Force. CLA actions, it was said, could put a limit on what the Task Force might recommend. Professor Howe agreed that it was difficult to put the two efforts next to one another and see very much connection. While not necessarily incompatible, they do seem to be going in different directions. How important the agenda of the Task Force is, in the larger context of the University, will have to be determined. The job of the Task Force is to make the strongest and clearest case it can for the values and substance of liberal education. Other fora will decide how important that case is in comparison to other agendas. And although the Task Force is bearing in mind the stringent fiscal climate of the University, its recommendations will inevitably lay claim to resources.

One Committee member inquired if the fiscal constraints of the students were being considered. The number of hours they must work in order to support themselves means they have not the time to read and think; this is a situation which has worsened in recent years. The tuition structure of the University requires this work; students cannot be asked to work to earn money and also spend time thinking and reading about serious issues. If the Task Force is going to truly be realistic, it must recognize that student time available outside of class has shrunk to nearly zero. Time required outside of class for undergraduate education, it was said, is now a "myth of the professor."

Professor Howe demurred; the question must be asked, he said, what we expect University work to be. It is true that time to degree stretches out when students must work, and while the University must be sensitive to those constraints, nonetheless student work hours cannot determine what the academic agenda will be and what it means to earn a degree. The Task Force has discussed whether or not the general education requirements should be more demanding in terms of credits or if the existing demands should be kept and made better. Finally, however, the faculty must say "this is what it takes to graduate from the University" and then ways must be found to help students find the resources to meet those expectations.

In that event, it was said, students must be warned what it takes to go to the University. Will this then bar a large number from going to school here? Should parents and the legislature be told that unless one comes from an affluent family he or she cannot attend the University?

Another Committee member, noting the increasing number of returning students, inquired whether or not the liberal arts requirements will be different for an older student than for the 18-22-year-old student? Professor Howe said his own view is that they would be no different. The ways in which different kinds of students address and realize them may vary. There is no apparent reason, however, that because one person is 35 and another 21 the values and meaning of a liberal education differ. A 35-year-old will certainly bring different things to the formal educational process than will a 22-year-old, and those differences may call for different paths or different courses of study, but the guiding principles should remain the same.

Whatever comes from the Task Force, Professor Howe added, will raise a number of

implementation questions. The Task Force is trying to think of those questions as it goes along, but there will almost certainly need to be an implementation phase as these questions are worked out. One major such issue will be transfer students, for instance.

On the specific question of the older students, Professor Howe added, it is his experience that "they know what they want, by God, that's what they want, don't tell me about other stuff, it's too late, I don't have the time." Those people, he said, need to be sat down--just as does an 18-year-old who barely knows why he or she is here--and told that the time and money being spent on liberal education will make a difference for a long period of time in their lives. The purposefulness of those students can be valued but they must learn that that is not all that a University is about or what an undergraduate degree is about. This may take some persuading but it is necessary.

Professor Howe was asked if the Task Force would re-do what the University already has in place (perhaps reorganizing the group distribution requirements) or will things be added and subtracted. Professor Howe said the recommendations would not simply be add-ons; the Task Force is reconsidering what exists and the results will require a reallocation both of faculty resources and student attention.

Associate Vice President Foster was asked for his perspective on the CLA "Agenda for Action" and its relationship to the work of the Task Force. He explained that CLA has been informed that if it is to be the recipient of increased funding it must demonstrate that it has its house in order and is using its own funds as efficiently as possible. There is wide recognition that the college is seriously underfunded, which is the reason it is targeted for increased funding; there is also, however, a widespread perception that it is seriously mismanaged (that is, not that the dean is at fault but that it is so sprawling that it is inefficient). The "Agenda for Action" is one side of what will be a two-sided process; the other will be what will be added. It is not possible to determine if the college will be improved just by looking at the "Agenda for Action." Professor Howe concurred that the CLA action is necessary; what is of concern is that CLA faculty time will be so absorbed that it will be unable to attend to the agenda of the Task Force.

Committee members expressed thanks to Professor Howe for leading the work of the Task Force.

5. Agenda for the Next Meeting

Professor Clayton suggested that the Committee might complete its revision of the Morse-Alumni awards for future years.

The Committee also extended its thanks to Professor Karni for her work on the revision of the criteria for the award.

The Committee adjourned at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand