

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy
January 10, 1991**

Present: Thomas Clayton (chair), Martin Conroy, Edward Foster, Michael Handberg, Karen Karni, Marvin Mattson, J. Kim Munholland, Clark Starr

1. Report of the Chair

Professor Clayton began by informing the Committee of the membership of the Morse-Alumni Award nominating committee. He expressed confidence in the ability of the committee to conduct its business wisely.

He then reviewed briefly the meeting of the previous week with Senior Vice President Kuhi to discuss the reallocation plans.

The Committee will also need to select a representative to a new "**Transfer and Articulation Committee**," which will deal with coordination between the various institutions of higher education in the State in order to make it easier for students to transfer to the University as juniors and seniors. Dr. Foster explained that the chief academic officers of the four public systems, meeting as a "no name committee" devoted to results rather than reports, are forming two committees to deal with transfer issues. One is a "nuts and bolts" committee, composed of people who deal with transfers and courses and so on; the other is a policy committee. Each system is to nominate three people; the University has decided to nominate one faculty member, preferably from SCEP, and two faculty/administrators who are involved with undergraduate education. This "Transfer and Articulation Committee" which will meet about three times per year (but more frequently at first). There will also be one central administrative staff member for the committee; he will be that person, Dr. Foster reported. [After Professor Clayton found a SCEP member willing to serve, he was advised that the "no name committee" had decided not to form such a committee but to do the work itself.]

The academic officers would like to have developed a system whereby anyone who obtains an Associate in Arts degree could move from one system to another and have satisfied all general education requirements. The Community College System and the State University System are already close to this point. It may not be possible to ever reach that point with the University, but there is interest in going as far as possible in that direction.

The point is to make it as easy as possible for a community college student to decide to attend the University for upper division work without requiring that the student make that decision when he or she enters college as a freshman. Over the last several years there has been a change in where community college students go for upper division work. It used to be that about 20% of those students transferred to the University; it is now 11%. The University has encouraged more students to do their lower division work at community colleges, but the practice has been going in the opposite direction. The "Transfer and Articulation" committee will look at what has been happening and what can be done to ensure that

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transfer is as easy as possible.

In response to a question, Dr. Foster expressed doubt that transfers from the technical colleges would be taken up directly. The issue will doubtless arise, however. He also noted that there will be separate faculty committees established to deal with specific questions associated with particular disciplines.

The Committee discussed the names of several of its members who might appropriately be asked to serve. It was agreed that Professor Clayton would contact the possible nominees to ascertain their willingness to serve.

2. Continued Discussion of Teaching Evaluation

Professor Clayton next reported that Professor Bruce Overmier has informed him that the Psychology Department has devised a way to get at the major dimensions of evaluation of teaching with five to seven questions. Inasmuch as this is what the Committee was seeking to develop, he has asked that the work they have done be provided to him. He also distributed several pieces of information concerning teaching evaluation.

What kinds of recommendations, he inquired, does the Committee wish to make? An evaluation instrument is one possibility; there may be others. Some policy statement, and an instrument permitting comparisons, would seem desirable. [The Committee set aside this matter to take up eligibility for awards and then returned to it after the discussion noted under item 3 of these minutes.]

Dr. Foster inquired if the Committee had on its agenda anything beyond the development of a set of core questions--such as collection procedures for the forms and whether or not all (or more) courses should be evaluated. Professor Clayton affirmed that the Committee would take these questions up but suggested that the drafting of core questions should come first.

The Committee reviewed the two evaluation scales which had been distributed and discussed the questions they contained. One Committee member argued that one of the questions must be "how much did you like the instructor" because it provides a way, even if subjective, of assessing the patterns of responses. The notion of "approachability," however, is attitudinal, a value judgment, and may not include appropriate information; sometimes the meanest and most difficult instructor may be the one from whom a student learns the most. Most disciplines, it was suggested, would want a set of five to seven questions which provide a reasonably objective judgment, by students, of what the instructor's work is worth. The point of these questions would be to provide evaluation data, not to improve the instructor; one can assume that additional information could be obtained for that purpose and that different departments would ask additional but different questions of their own.

The core questions, however, would be used primarily for assessing the situation across the University. The results should probably be available within the University as a whole, certainly within the college.

One Committee member maintained, however, that one primary purpose of the questions would be to decide rewards. Those who are "bloody-minded" but nonetheless good teachers could be penalized;

this could create inequities. The questions, therefore, must be good ones.

The link between the course and the instructor was discussed. There appeared to be no consensus on whether the course, the instructor, or both should be evaluated and whether or not the two could or should be separated. It was pointed out that the same course will also vary over time. The point of the Committee's present efforts, it was suggested, is instructor evaluation.

If the questions are to be used across the University, it should not be assumed that all courses use a lecture format, Dr. Foster pointed out. It was agreed that questions not valid for all or most courses should not be included--or that additional questions would need to be framed for special cases. It was also pointed out that there are differences even between lecture courses, such as a class of 200 versus a seminar of 6 or an introductory course versus an upper division course in the faculty member's specialty.

At Morris, the Committee was told, there are two separate evaluations: One of the faculty member (used in the tenure and promotion process) and one of the course (used in the curriculum review process). SCEP should address instructor evaluation, it was said, but the course evaluation for curriculum review purposes should also be taken up. Another Committee member agreed strongly that these purposes should be separated.

The comment was made that perhaps students should be asked to evaluate a course later rather than immediately after they have completed it. One Committee member told the Committee that research results suggest it is a myth that students change their minds about a course; the reliable evidence is that if a student didn't like a course, he or she won't think any more highly of it ten years after the fact.

The discussion turned to some of the specific questions on the surveys distributed at the meeting. One fundamental issue which must be decided, it was noted, is whether or not the Committee believes there is a set of core questions which can be asked about every faculty member at a university; if not, it was pointed out, the discussion is pointless. There was agreement that the instruments should be restricted to undergraduate education.

Dr. Foster told the Committee that he has been told there is a good body of research on the attributes of effective teaching; whether or not to ask undergraduates if a faculty member has those attributes is a question. If the Committee finds that this research is reliable, one way to approach this topic would be to try to discover ways to learn if instructors display those attributes.

A point made several times took note of the correlation between the grade awarded to a student and his or her evaluation of the course and the related issue of whether or not a student was adequately prepared for the particular course.

There appeared to be general agreement that students are able to provide, and usually do provide, reasonably accurate assessments of both the course and the instructor's ability. There will, of course, be a range of opinions about any course or instructor.

Professor Clayton suggested that if time permits this subject should be taken up again at the next meeting--or the one thereafter if the reallocation plans consume the entire next meeting. He urged, however, that the Committee decide it would come to some resolution before the end of the year so that a

recommendation could be made. He asked Committee members to send him suggested questions.

3. Eligibility for Awards

Professor Clayton turned to eligibility of individuals for awards; he handed out materials to Committee members. Two issues were on the table: First, eligibility for more than one Bush or Morse-Alumni Award; second, Morse-Alumni funding for individuals who retire, resign, or go on leave during the period of the three years for which the winner is funded. (When the Morse-Alumni award only covered one year this was not a problem.)

On the question of eligibility for an award a second time, one argument in favor of it is that people in disciplines which are not well supported are less able to take a sabbatical (because of a low salary). Sabbatical supplements available to such individuals are few; once a Bush has been obtained, any future leave is extremely unlikely.

Insofar as the Morse-Alumni award is concerned, with the switch to a three-year grant there has been an implicit change from reward to incentive; failure to permit second-time eligibility means that merit can only be considered once. At ten individuals per year, after three years 30 people are no longer eligible; there certainly must be cases where such individuals should again be permitted to be nominees. (Practically speaking, it is unlikely that there would be a stampede to grant the awards to those who have already won it once.) Moreover, those who won the award in its early years probably received \$500; if they were to be eligible again, they would be awarded \$7500 personally and another \$7500 for their use.

Committee members discussed Morse-Alumni eligibility. Two Committee members expressed opposition to permitting renewed eligibility: because previous winners would not receive full consideration and because of cynicism about the award and multiple applications. It was also said that there are a lot of good teachers and the awards, even at 10 per year, will not recognize all of them. On the other hand, it was argued, there are those who teach well for 30 years, and who could be recognized again, and there are those who rise meteorically, receive the award, and "sink into sloth" thereafter. It was maintained by another Committee member that if a faculty member is to be eligible a second time, there should be a period of time which must elapse before the individual is again eligible. And if there are insufficient awards for good teaching, one solution is to create more awards; it may be that the decision to make the award so generous was the wrong strategy. The amount involved, however, does make it much more meaningful and more likely to engender the effort required to assemble dossiers for candidates.

Another Committee member argued that SCEP should push for greater recognition of good teaching in all units; that all units should develop awards which parallel those given in CLA, Crookston, and a few others. There appeared to be agreement that the Committee should consider a statement along these lines.

It was unanimously agreed to table consideration of renewed eligibility for the Morse-Alumni Award.

The Bush awards are a different issue, it was agreed. It was unanimously agreed that SCEP recommend a change in Bush Fellowship policy to the effect that individuals be eligible for a Fellowship

again after a six-year interval. It was understood that the six-year specification would be redundant if the Bush is still a Bush Sabbatical Fellowship designed to supplement regular half-salary sabbatical leave funds.

It was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously to recommend that faculty be eligible for a Bush award a second time. Professor Clayton agreed to check on whether or not the policy on Bush awards remains tied to sabbatical leaves. The Committee agreed that if the awards are no longer tied to sabbaticals, a faculty member should not be eligible more often than once in six years.

The Committee adjourned at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

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