

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, November 13, 1996
1:00 - 3:00
Room 626 Campus Club

- Present: Laura Koch (chair), Avram Bar-Cohen, Anita Cholewa, Elayne Donahue, Darwin Hendel, Thomas Johnson, Robert Leik, Judith Martin, Kathleen Newell, Tina Rovick, W. Phillips Shively, William Van Essendelft
- Regrets: Gayle Graham Yates
- Absent: Gordon Hirsch
- Guests: Elizabeth Grundner and Sam Lewis (Office of the Registrar); Dean Hal Miller (University College/CEE), Robert Pepin (IT; chair of the University College Assembly), Mary Sue Simmons and Suzanne Bates Smith (Program for Individualized Learning); Matt Curry and Helen Phin (students)

[In these minutes: Classes, schedules, and final exam policy; University College Assembly; the question of making the results of student evaluations of teaching available to students; policy on reorganization of colleges and departments]

1. Policy on Classes, Schedules, and Final Examinations

Professor Koch convened the meeting at 1:00 and began by welcoming the new graduate student member of the Committee, Tina Rovick. She invited Dean Miller to join the discussion, then turned to Ms. Grundner and Mr. Lewis for comments on the draft policy on classes, schedules, and final examinations.

Ms. Grundner distributed copies of a draft set of regulations and practices that they would prefer to see adopted. It is, she noted, a little more stringent than what the Committee had proposed; they are trying to maximize the use of classrooms.

The Committee then reviewed the draft policy once again, as well as the proposal from Mr. Lewis and Ms. Grundner. Several points were made in the ensuing discussion.

- There are now hundreds of waivers from the "standard" class policy, and it can be expected there will continue to be such exceptions. The question of who should review and approve them has not been addressed. The Committee earlier voted not to support a complete ban on waivers.
- There should be a set of implementing regulations that are handled administratively; the regulations

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could be changed as needed without Senate action.

- The question of staggering class start times between the Minneapolis and St. Paul campus needs further exploration. The policy, for the time being, should remain silent on the issue. Professor Koch reported that she had talked with a number of individuals on the St. Paul campus who felt that classes should NOT be staggered; Provost Shively, on the other hand, has heard from quite a few faculty who believe they SHOULD be staggered. Professor Koch said the Committee must examine the issue more closely before making a recommendation to the Twin Cities Campus Assembly; such a recommendation should be made by Winter Quarter.

Even though the issue of staggered classes will not be addressed now, the class schedule can be proposed and class starting and ending times identified.

- University College/CEE (evening) classes will start at 5:20 or later.
- There is a confusion in the policy between those issues that apply exclusively to the Twin Cities and those that apply across the institution.
- There is no policy on distance education, and the Committee will need to consider the issues. It is addressed briefly in the semester conversion standards that speak to credits, contact hours, and student workload, but those policies need elaboration for distance education.
- It is unclear whether the new registration system will be programmed in such a way that it can automatically bar a student from registering from overlapping classes, or classes that are too close together (a provision in the draft policy). Mr. Lewis said he would try to ensure that it would do so, if the Assembly adopts the policy; he noted that to the extent classes stick to the standard class schedule, and if classes are staggered between Minneapolis and St. Paul, such a policy might be unnecessary.
- The Office of the Registrar does not believe it has the authority to enforce these policies unless they have been adopted by the Senate or the Assembly.
- It was agreed, by unanimous vote, that one provision in the draft from Ms. Grundner should be eliminated: one calling for the distribution of classes evenly across the day. Ms. Grundner noted that they have only pressed this issue in general purpose classrooms; departments have been free to schedule classes however they wished in classrooms that they control. Such a provision works a hardship on students who work, students who participate in extra-curricular activities, and departments who offer graduate courses in the afternoon so that TAs can be available for morning undergraduate courses. On the other side, Liberal Education courses were not offered in the afternoon at all.

It was agreed that a draft of the policy would be prepared and circulated by email to Committee members; once general approval is obtained, the policy will be presented as a draft to the Assembly and Senate for information in December.

2. University College Assembly

Professor Koch next welcomed Professor Robert Pepin and Ms. Mary Sue Simmons to the meeting to discuss a change in the relationship between the University Senate and the University College Assembly, the governing body for the historic University College.

Professor Pepin noted that there had not been much interaction between the University College Assembly and the Senate, and that the Assembly had been established by the Senate for an experimental program that had no faculty of its own. The Assembly has provided governance for 60 years for the programs. The two degree-granting programs in the historic University College--the Program for Individualized Learning and the Intercollege Program--still needs a faculty oversight body and the relationship should continue.

The question before the Committee, Professor Pepin said, is whether the link between the University College Assembly and the Senate should continue. He noted a number of issues that affect the decision, such as the adoption of a constitution and bylaws for the new University College that would permit the University College Assembly to continue to function for the two degree programs. He said that the Assembly is satisfied that there will be faculty governance in the future as there has been in the past; whether there should continue to be Senate oversight is up to the Senate. The relationship with the Senate has been one of benign neglect, although presumably the Senate could have acted had it chosen to do so.

Dean Miller distributed a handout outlining the new structure of University College, and reviewed some of the pertinent provisions. There would be degree program committees for each program; it is in this capacity that University College Assembly would continue. He reported that there had been no internal objection to the provisions of the proposed document (including an Academic Council); Dean Miller said they need an academic body such as the Council because they have degree programs. Up to now they have been presented to ad hoc faculty committees; this will ensure a more regular process and should answer some of the questions posed by the Faculty Consultative Committee.

Ms. Simmons expressed appreciation for the attention of the governance system to the question, and said she believed the proposed governance plan would be adequate so that the Assembly could be severed from the Senate.

Asked what would prevent the new University College from starting any degree programs it wished, Provost Shively said that the agreement is that only the present two degree programs in the old University College would be offered, and that general BA or BS degrees all have to be approved by the Board of Regents. What mechanism, inquired one Committee member, is there to prevent ANY college from offering any degree programs it wished? Any mechanism established to control degree offerings should apply to all colleges.

Dean Miller assured the Committee that the proposed governance structure did not compromise the ability of the Committee and the Senate to insist that its policies be adhered to; if anything, he said, this would broaden the scope of Senate authority. SCEP and Senate policies have applied independent of the University College Assembly, and would continue to do so, Professor Pepin observed.

After brief additional discussion, it was moved, seconded, and unanimously voted that a bylaw be drafted severing the connection between the Senate and the University College Assembly.

3. Use of Student Evaluations of Teaching

Professor Koch then recalled that the Committee had heard, at its previous meeting, a proposal to make the statistical results of the student evaluations of instructors available to students. This is an important issue to students, she commented, and they would like to see something fairly soon. Her suggestion, she said, is that the full Committee not spend additional time on this, but that she appoint a subcommittee that would study the issue and report back within approximately two weeks.

The Committee proceeded nonetheless to discuss the issue.

- There are faculty who have worked on this topic. The student proposal looks at one use of evaluation results, and is a way to try to use data in a reasonable way but that is beyond the original intent of the policy requiring its collection. The Committee needs to look at the information gathered and what has happened with the policy; that could inform a decision about the student proposal. There are broader issues, such as the ways in which the policy is used and whether or not the data are good or accurate.
- The Committee also needs to revisit the issue of peer evaluation, which appears not to have been implemented as it should.
- Committee members disagreed about, and debated at some length, the relationship between (1) the question of the adequacy of the instrument, and whether or not the results are used properly, and (2) whether it is necessary to address those issues in order to respond to the students' request. The points made included the following:
 - making public the results exposes faculty to a spotlight that could have serious consequences, and there is a gross asymmetry between what is done with faculty records and with student records
 - the students will not make decisions about promotion or salary increases, they will simply use the same results, for their own purposes, that others will use for different purposes
 - some faculty in the Carlson School do feel they are coerced into signing the release that permits the results to be made public
 - do consumers not have the right to know what people think about the courses they are paying money to take? If the questions asked are good, the students are owed the results; why should they be tricked into taking a bad class because they do not have appropriate information?
 - once the results are public, not only those making personnel decisions will have them; contrarily, they are now used in all promotion and tenure cases, and they are used a great deal in merit salary decisions, so making them public should not mean they will be put to

additional use in personnel decisions

- releasing the data will mean comparing junior faculty with senior faculty who have years of experience teaching; students will naturally gravitate to the faculty with better ratings, with gross and inappropriate imbalances in course enrollments; this changes the use of the results from what assistant professors were told the data would be used for
- one possibility might be to norm all the data
- another possibility might be development of different questions for use by students; data from the required questions now used do not respond to the uses which it has been proposed students might put them (e.g., teaching style, amount of writing, etc.); to the contrary, students are interested in the results from all of them (except the one about physical facilities)
- one hopes that the decision-makers of the University are not using the data inappropriately, because doing so could mean erroneously jumping to the conclusion someone does not deserve tenure, and if tenure decisions and salary raises are based solely on these data, then someone should look at tenure; these data are vague enough that they should not be the basis of major personnel decisions; deans and department heads, however, do reach conclusions on the basis of the data
- at the extremes, the data will work fine
- if only one person teaches a course, and a required course, what will the students do? boycott the course if they don't like the results?
- in CLA, about 50% of the student credit hours are taught by TAs; it is not appropriate to have the evaluations of TAs be public information
- Committee members are all imagining the worst case; if one thinks about students at this campus, and their inability to get information about ANY courses, there is a clear need to work with students to provide them information, and it is appropriate to provide information on how students feel about a course; one can be confident students will use the data with integrity
- students are not the concern; students, faculty, and administrators all want good data upon which to base decisions, and all must understand whether or not student evaluation data are good; one does not want students to get invalid data

there is research enough so one can be reassured that student evaluation data are consistent and valid; what needs validation is the system in place at the University. The questions used now do not respond to the issues Mr. Curry and Ms. Phin have earlier raised about teaching styles, work in the course, etc.; some of this information would come from the syllabus, not teaching evaluations

- the results should be used to improve teaching, not just for tenure and salary decisions; the literature on use of the results for this purpose is ambiguous
- one worry is that publication of the official results used in personnel decisions will change the purpose of the evaluations and how students will use them, and may change the way they answer the questions
- the arguments about large classes and the inability to get information is more appropriate for the Twin Cities; have the proponents of the proposal consulted University-wide? At least some students on other campuses do not think having these results would be of value--coordinate campus representatives are on MSA, and support the proposal
- has anyone spoken with other schools that make public the results? at one other Big Ten school, the students used a different set of questions

Mr. Curry made a plea with the Committee, reviewing a number of points.

Professor Koch said she would appoint a subcommittee, composed of equal numbers of students and faculty.

4. Policy on Reorganization

Professor Martin next distributed excerpts from Senate policies and statements that dealt with institutional reorganization at various levels. Committee members reviewed them and offered several observations. It was the general view that intra-college changes were the purview of the colleges, not the Senate.

It was agreed that Professor Martin, with staff help, would draft a proposed policy for Committee members to chew on.

On this general subject, one Committee member inquired if the Committee might be informed about what is occurring with respect to reorganization of the biological sciences. Professor Koch agreed to invite the biological sciences deans as well as some faculty.

5. Other Issues

It was agreed that there were other topics requiring attention soon: the CASE teaching award, IMG, and with respect to the latter, whether the critical measures are now dead. If the measures are dead, the faculty should be told. Some faculty are spending time in department meetings trying to figure out how to reconcile IMG and the critical measures--and cannot identify how to do so.

Professor Koch adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand