

## MINUTES\*

**Faculty Consultative Committee**  
**Thursday, April 1, 1998**  
**1:00 - 4:00**  
**Room 238 Morrill Hall**

- Present: Victor Bloomfield (chair), Mary Dempsey, Gary Gardner, Virginia Gray, M. Janice Hogan, David Hamilton, Russell Hobbie, Laura Coffin Koch, Leonard Kuhi, Michael Korth, Marvin Marshak, Fred Morrison
- Absent: Kent Bales, Carole Bland, Gary Davis, Harvey Peterson, Matthew Tirrell
- Guests: President Mark Yudof
- Others: Martha Kvanbeck (University Senate); Maureen Smith (University Relations)

[In these minutes: Morrill Hall renovation; structure of Finance and Operations; grading; term appointments]

Professor Bloomfield convened the meeting at 1:15 and turned to the President for comments.

### **1. Morrill Hall**

President Yudof thanked Committee members for agreeing to meet on short notice, and said he needed to consult fairly quickly on a major item to the bonding bill. A recently-completed study by Facilities Management had concluded that Morrill Hall needed to be vacated as soon as possible because of asbestos and radon problems; the health of the employees who work in the building could not be put at risk so the offices needed to be moved temporarily.

The estimated cost of making the building habitable, the President reported, is approximately \$30 million. He has been in touch with the Governor and with the majority and minority leadership in both houses of the legislature to learn if it is possible, even in conference committee, to add the \$30 million to the University's capital request. The response was not entirely positive, he said; while the Governor reluctantly agreed, but the legislative leadership suggested there would have to be a tradeoff for other items in the request.

In the meantime, President Yudof said, he had directed that all offices in Morrill Hall be moved temporarily to other facilities. He said he was uncertain what space would be used; under consideration are offices in the Basic Sciences building, the St. Paul Student Center, Management and Economics, and Northrop Auditorium.

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The President inquired of the Committee its views on how to proceed. Several ideas were offered in the ensuing discussion.

- Perhaps the administration should suspend operations for the duration of the construction, estimated to take two years. The University cannot go for more than two weeks without a head football coach without harm to recruiting, it was noted wryly, but it could probably operate for years without an administration.
- In terms of tradeoffs in the capital request, Committee members were of divided views on whether to delay the molecular and cellular biology facility in order to renovate Morrill; some argued that the academic programs were more important, while others suggested that having the administration scattered all over the campus was unwise at a time when support from all quarters was vigorously being sought.
- The University might best be served by relocating the administration to the Morris campus, thus eliminating the need to renovate Morrill Hall. Such a move would reduce the perception that the administration paid more attention to Twin Cities campus issues; there would, however, be a need to maintain a lobbying office in St. Paul.

Professor Bloomfield said the Committee would consider the matter and report its counsel to the President by the end of the day.

## **2. Finance and Operations**

The President next informed the Committee that he had decided not to split Finance and Operations, but instead to appoint Professor Morrison as Senior Vice President. In order to facilitate his ability to perform his new responsibilities, he said, he was also transferring several offices into Finance and Operations, including Planning and Analysis (Dr. Kvavik), Budget and Finance (Mr. Pfutzenreuter), intercollegiate athletics, and Admissions and Records. This, he said, would make the job of Executive Vice President more manageable, and Dr. Bruininks was agreeable to these arrangements.

Professor Morrison thanked the President for his expression of confidence, and said he would take office as soon as possible. His first order of business, he told the Committee, would be to develop a new planning process; his preliminary thought was that each academic department would annually provide rolling five-year plans to his office, and that he and Dr. Bruininks would then consult with the deans about which plans would be funded.

Additionally, Professor Morrison said, with the President's concurrence, he would appoint an "anonymous committee," similar to the body that was once responsible for Regents' Professorship nominations, to advise him on which programs and departments should be eliminated, which should be strengthened, and which should be supported but not improved. He said he would invite membership from FCC, with the understanding that the recommendations of the anonymous committee, as a package, would be approved by the Executive Council and taken directly to the Board of Regents, to minimize the friction created by negative recommendations. No department will voluntarily participate in planning a future that does not include it, Professor Morrison recalled Professor Fogelman once commenting; he said he believed that the anonymous "base closing commission" approach would be the best way to accomplish what the faculty and others had long been calling for, a reduction in breadth and giving effect to the admonition that the University should quit trying to be all things to all people.

The Committee congratulated Professor Morrison on his appointment, but several cautioned that his tentative proposals could engender controversy.

Professor Bloomfield thanked the President for joining the meeting; Dr. Yudof said he would look forward to hearing from the Committee about the capital request.

### **3. Grades**

Professor Koch next reported that the Committee on Educational Policy (SCEP) had recently received data suggesting that nearly 95% of the grades awarded to students in the past two years were either A or B and that almost 75% of students were qualified to graduate "with distinction" or "with honors." It would appear, she said, that grades no longer serve to distinguish among different levels of student performance. SCEP had not had time to think about this phenomenon, much less make any recommendations, but would welcome comments.

One solution that has been proposed, Professor Koch reported, is simply adding a new grade, Y, to the top of the existing scale, with an appropriate descriptor, so the grading scale would become 5 points, rather than 4. The A would thus become equivalent to what used to be a B, a B would become equivalent to what had been a C, and so on. Whenever grades rose to a certain level (the point could be determined by calculating a threshold "institutional GPA"), a new grade would be added to the top of the scale, thus controlling grade inflation.

What becomes of an F, asked Professor Bloomfield? Or would the University become like Lake Wobegon, where all the students are above average, and no Fs would be awarded? Moreover, it was pointed out, a recent study suggested that the intelligence (or IQ) of the population had increased over the last several decades, so that it was not surprising that grades had increased; given those data, it would be surprising if performance--and thus grades--had NOT increased. Several Committee members expressed doubt about this proposition.

Professor Bloomfield said that FCC would look forward with great interest to the recommendations that SCEP might provide.

### **4. Tenure appointments**

Professor Bloomfield turned next to Professor Bales for a report from the task force on term, part-time, and tenure-track faculty appointments.

Professor Bales reported that the task force (which included him and Professor Bland) had reached preliminary conclusions which it wished to preview with FCC. First, the use of term appointments should be increased substantially. This was not what the task force originally thought it would recommend, but the data from departments across the University suggested a decreasing need for the protections of tenure and a greater need for departments to venture in new research and teaching directions on relatively short notice. Department chairs were particularly emphatic on this point, Professor Bales said, while the deans were less enthusiastic. While there would be no change in the status of those who already have tenure, it was expected that in most departments, the percentage of faculty with tenure would be reduced to about 25% over the next few years.

FCC reacted adversely to this proposal. Following a lengthy and rather heated exchange of views, Professor Bloomfield asked for a motion to close the meeting. The motion was adopted

unanimously. At the conclusion of the meeting, it was agreed that Professor Bales would bring a recommendation back at a future meeting.

## **5. Miscellany**

The readers of these minutes should pay keen attention to the alleged date of the meeting (did April 1 fall on Thursday in 1998?) and then decide to what extent they wish to credit what is reported. It can also be confirmed that this set of minutes was not distributed to the normal list of recipients, but instead only to a few colleagues and friends. What if these reports made the newspaper?

Professor Bloomfield adjourned the meeting at 3:45.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota