

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy
May 24, 1990**

Present: John Clark (chair), John Clausen, Thomas Clayton, Jean Congdon, Roland Guyotte, Karen Karni, Marvin Mattson, J. Kim Munholland, Gary Nelsestuen, Gary Parnes, Aron Pilhofer

Guests: Vice Provost Anne Hopkins, John Howe (chair, Task Force on Liberal Education), Rabun Taylor (Footnote)

1. Report of the Chair

Professor Clark asked if the Committee wished to meet again during 1989-90; it was agreed that it would not.

He thanked Professors Congdon and Nelsestuen for the work they put in to make the Morse-Alumni award ceremony a success.

Professor Clark then reported briefly on the Senate meeting and the SCEP items which had been before the body.

The minutes of the April 26 meeting were approved as written.

2. Discussion with Professor Howe

Professor Clark next welcomed Professor Howe to discuss the Task Force on Liberal Education.

Professor Howe began by saying he--and the several Task Force members who are also members of SCEP--would appreciate receiving advice from the Committee on issues which the Task Force should think carefully about. He had, he said, little to report, because the Task Force is not very far along in its work.

Professor Howe reviewed briefly the charge to the Task Force and the issues with which it was dealing; it has heard from the President, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and the Chair of the Consultative Committee, and all three urged the Task Force to be bold in its work. The reach of the recommendations will be to all undergraduates on the Twin Cities campus. The task is complicated, he said; it is also timely, given that the last examination of liberal education was over 20 years ago and given the President's Initiative on Excellence in Undergraduate Education. There is, however, a real question about whether changes can actually be brought about.

The intent is to produce a draft statement, by the end of Fall Quarter, which can be reviewed by the University community, with a final report by the end of Winter Quarter.

*These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate or Twin Cities Campus Assembly; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate or Assembly, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

Professor Howe was asked what the nature of the report would be; he replied that it has yet to be defined. The Task Force has not yet reached the point of defining what is to be learned or what a degree should require; how or if it will go beyond distribution requirements is being discussed. There are subject areas, skills and competencies, and "personal orientation" issues (ethics and values, cultural pluralism, international considerations), all of which must be addressed.

Committee members discussed briefly the nature of speech courses and credit associated therewith, inter-college arrangements for meeting requirements and student movement among colleges, whether or not students enter with any "liberal education" (and placement), and when a student is "liberally educated" (and assessment thereof). The Task Force has not talked about assessment; it has looked at who the incoming students are and what this particular University has its missions. Attention has also been given to the nature of "breadth" requirements (introductory courses/integration of general education). The Task Force, Dr. Howe reported, was not inclined to support a tightly-drawn "core curriculum" required of all students.

One Committee member observed that CLA at present has a reasonably workable system and also commented that it would be desirable for all graduates to have a certain foundation in various areas of study, such as the arts and sciences and the basic skills--which might require that a little more course work be taken than is now the case, at least in some areas. Another Committee member--who is also on the task force--reported that the general education requirements, in the discussions thus far, are not seen as something one should "get out of the way" in the first two years but rather as an element of education which should permeate the entire undergraduate curriculum. Another task force member noted that there is some sentiment for an "integrative" requirement as part of the senior year, although that is a less well-formed proposal.

One of the student members of the Committee expressed concern about increasing the requirements and agreed that while the CLA system at present works reasonably well there is indeed no "plan" or integrative or mutually-reinforcing element to the education one receives. One specific suggestion made was that courses be listed topically in class schedules rather than by department in order that students could find related subjects. Another entire set of distribution requirements, however, would be objectionable; given the 180 credits required for a degree, there is not, even now, very much time for students to take courses "that are just plain interesting" but which do not fulfill any requirements. There should be as much discretion as possible left to the students; like it or not, it was said, the University cannot force students to do something they are not interested in. With increased specialization in the world, it was added, this becomes even more important.

One inquiry from a Committee member was "how about fewer and better courses more widely available?"

Another comment had to do with the delivery of the education; the Task Force was urged to do something about liberal education rather than simply lecturing about it. One example is student-faculty interaction in the classroom--the engagement of the student in the educational process.

Professor Howe thanked the Committee for its comments.

3. Discussion with Vice Provost Anne Hopkins

Professor Clark welcomed Dr. Hopkins to the meeting and expressed the hope that she could, next year, regularly attend SCEP meetings.

Dr. Hopkins said that because she was so new to the University she did not have a great deal to say but that she did wish to make a few remarks. First, she said, the University of Minnesota is a superb institution. Second, her sense of any administrative job is that it is to help the faculty be more successful at what they do and to play a leadership role when appropriate. It is, as a consequence, important that she get to know the faculty; she expressed the hope that the Committee would feel free to give her guidance. Third, it is her view that teaching and research go together in the life of a faculty member; her experience is that the best researchers and teachers are the same people.

Dr. Hopkins then briefly outlined the elements of her responsibilities, noting that six deans report to her--CLA, CBS, IT, GC, University College, and Architecture and Landscape Architecture. The Vice Provost position permits the Provost to attend to overall academic leadership needs of the institution and to work with the professional schools and the coordinate campuses.

Two major issues the President has talked about recently are the Undergraduate Initiative and diversity. Part of her charge, she noted, is to take a lead role in the Initiative; this means, for the short term, that she has been provided funds for next year to take steps to enhance the quality of the undergraduate program in various ways. It is too early to describe fully what will be done; one thing she has turned her attention to, however, is access to courses. She has proposed to the Council of Undergraduate Deans--and they have concurred with the proposal--to put money into opening general education classes which frequently close early. Initial funding will be somewhat experimental because available data are not designed for the kind of analysis needed. The colleges have been requested to provide information on their own course access problems as well as in other units that affect student program progress in their departments.

A question was posed about offering more classes through CEE to increase accessibility; is there any policy governing this alternative and would doing so hurt CLA? Is it to be encouraged to add sections in CEE when CLA sections are closed? Dr. Hopkins said she did not know enough about the operation of CEE in relation to other academic units to be able to provide an answer but said she intends to explore the question. A few departments, she said, have opted to offer no 1-XXX courses; such a practice blurs the idea of a normal teaching load and can potentially undermine the primary purpose of restricted faculty loads--which is to permit time for research and creative activities.

In terms of course access, Dr. Hopkins said, she will develop baseline data, including CEE offerings. From the perspective of serving the students, she added, it is better to offer classes which are required in student programs rather than to worry about the precise funding implications. The institution, she said, has an obligation to its students to provide, within reason, the instruction required for them to complete their degrees in a timely manner. The budgetary implications of how this is accomplished are important, however, and will be worked out administratively.

Committee members discussed with Dr. Hopkins several issues related to course access. She observed that it is her initial view that the colleges should be responsible for the provision of courses in

the major--central administration should not be providing additional funding for units to take care of their own major students. She wishes initially to direct money to service or general education courses--instances where a college may serve a large number of students not its own. Access to courses students need is primary; access to courses they want to take is a second-level concern. The status of access to courses, she acknowledged, is not clear. The needs of colleges for their own majors, she added, should be addressed in the regular budgetary process.

One Committee member observed that there is no curricular structure above the colleges so that the units can be informed when things happen in another college or so that jurisdictional questions can be settled. Some have suggested that it would be useful for the Provost's office to serve this function, although there has been no receptivity to the suggestion in Academic Affairs; would this be a part of her job? Dr. Hopkins said that it might be, depending on the circumstances; one difficulty is the lack of a campus-wide curricular body. The closest thing to it is the academic policy body--SCEP (which does not deal with specific curricular questions).

Curricular changes carry tremendous cost implications. The administration can, however, identify certain problems; there is, for example, no matrix of curricular requirements in order to deal with course access: How many units require certain things? This is an important tool; deans should know, for instance, what the implications for other units are if their college assemblies adopt curricular changes--or that if a college requires work in another unit, the latter should find out how the required courses will be funded. This, she suggested, may be one reason CLA has as many problems as it has with enrollment; colleges continue to require liberal education courses in CLA but there is no additional money made available to meet the demand. While she does not want to become the central curricular coordinating point, Dr. Hopkins told the Committee, she would certainly respond as specific problems were brought to her attention; another solution is to encourage cooperation among the deans to ensure that problems were dealt with.

One Committee member opined that Dr. Hopkins, in coming to Minnesota, was entering "a culture of complaint"--people are inclined to complain about everything and then only realize how well off they were after they leave. Dr. Hopkins responded that the University is well funded compared to many state universities but that it is not well enough funded for the models to which it should aspire. She also said that the Big Ten comparison was probably not the best peer group.

Another question which she wishes to take up is advising, and in particular the extent to which faculty members advise. She expressed the view that faculty should be the prime individuals responsible for advising even if at times others may be delivering some of the services. Some funds have been provided to enhance advising, on a one-year basis. She wants to ensure that the several hundred thousand dollars is put in the best places to maximize the quality of advising--which is, she asserted, is one of the most powerful weapons the University has to improve the quality of the educational experience. Providing quick and responsive service to students about what they need in their academic programs is important. How this will be best accomplished is not yet clear but it will be something worth talking about at greater length in the Fall. One Committee member suggested putting faculty in their offices a week early and paying them to be in their offices to advise; it was also noted--by a CLA faculty member--that in CLA, dividing the number of new students by the number of faculty available leads one to conclude each faculty member would have to take on about 10 undergraduate advisees--which seemed very reasonable.

Dr. Hopkins observed that there is no one right way, and that different units may provide advising in different ways. Not all faculty, she added, have to advise students. At some institutions in her experience, she recalled, there are virtually no professional advisors; here, she noted, there are a lot of them. All the additional money proposed for advising was requested for professionals; she said she was unwilling to solidify those appointments until she is certain about what the role of faculty will be. One faculty member observed that it seems to be part of the culture that faculty do not advise undergraduates. One student member pointed out that part of the problem is the "Byzantine system, at least in CLA, of getting to the point of graduating and making sure all the requirements are met." Much of the time spent with advisors, he continued, is devoted to making sure that he will graduate when he is scheduled to do so. That, Dr. Hopkins maintained, can be done in a more efficient way than is the case now. Peer advising, it was responded, is one way to accomplish that objective as well as being "very cheap"; Dr. Hopkins agreed it is an effective alternative which might be considered more widely.

Dr. Hopkins appended to the discussion the observation, vis-a-vis the task force on liberal education and curricular change, that curricular complexity is one reason faculty have difficulty serving as effective advisors: there are so many rules, which keep changing, and which make little intellectual sense to faculty members. Whatever is done, she noted, simplicity has a certain elegance, style, and usefulness.

Dr. Hopkins was asked to what extent she would encourage teaching innovation--given that she had funds to do so--and whether or not any activities would extend beyond the Twin Cities campus. She said she was not certain about what she would do but that her responsibilities ran to all units when broad questions of undergraduate education were being dealt with. She told the Committee she wished to hire someone, preferably a faculty member, to be involved with administration of the Initiative and to assist in deciding what her office should become involved with. She commented that she believed undergraduate education should be decentralized; the colleges should control as much as possible, with only central monitoring and support for initiation of new efforts.

The Committee briefly spoke with Dr. Hopkins about questions of centralization versus decentralization. One comment she made was that it was unusual to see colleges award degrees; at most institutions with which she was familiar it is the institution which granted degrees.

Professor Clark thanked Dr. Hopkins for her comments and welcomed her to the University.

4. Discussion of the Morse-Alumni Awards

Professor Clark noted that some objections to the awards had been made; the Committee needed to determine if it had any recommendations to make. He noted that the discussion should continue next Fall because the committee to make the nominations had to be appointed early in order to get about its work.

Committee members examined the guidelines for the award. One question was whether or not they should be weighted equally. Another was about the announcement of the award (which may have been a problem only in CLA). Yet another, perhaps related to the foregoing, was that the number of nominations seemed to be inadequate--fewer than the units could have made (both at the departmental and collegiate levels). Getting the word out will be important.

One Committee member noted that making a nomination is an enormous amount of work; in one case over 300 letters were sent out. The new rules, it was pointed out, are designed to limit the size of the dossiers. Nevertheless, if departments have to put in that much work it will limit the number of nominations they make. If nominating a faculty member is too laborious, the Committee should perhaps attend to that fact, especially since the rewards to the department are so much greater than they were before. Another problem, in the eyes of some, is that giving three of the awards to General College fails to take into account the fact that the University is a special kind of enterprise and that recognition should go to those whose accomplishments are multiple (which include but are not confined to classroom teaching).

The nominating committee, it was pointed out, often must compare apples and oranges; perhaps that should be solved by dividing the awards on the basis of how much teaching a unit engages in. Committee members deliberated over this proposition for awhile, with several urging that accomplishment in research clearly not be one of the acceptable criteria (on the ground that there are ample other awards for research). One pointed out that classroom teaching, by itself, would probably not qualify one for the award.

On the balance among the criteria, it was suggested that the committee have some flexibility in emphasizing them. Some units, for instance, may offer no opportunities for advising--so the nominees would receive a low score on that element. One Committee member suggested a single criterion, contribution to educational development--rather than five points for teaching, five points for educational leadership, and so on. One complaint about the system, however, was that there should be recognition of scholarship and research contribution to teaching.

One of the student members said that it was virtually impossible to differentiate among the nominees based on the dossiers alone. But the award should not become yet another for scholarship or research; this one should be reserved for undergraduate education--and the allocation of the awards should not be among colleges on the basis of enrollment. One can inquire, he said, whether or not the Committee is over-reacting to criticisms of the awards this particular year; is the system really broken? If the only problem is that CLA did not receive an award this year, then "that is too darn bad." Professor Clark said the Committee was not over-reacting but was taking advantage of the criticisms to examine the procedures to determine if changes were appropriate.

The nominating committee, it was suggested, should not be bound by any arithmetic calculations based on rankings on the criteria. It was generally agreed that the committee should be able to weigh the factors differently, if it wished, and that the quantification should merely be advisory. There were also suspicions expressed about the educational leadership category (including publications or presentation of papers or positions in national associations), even though there are within the institution sentiments to the contrary.

It was agreed that the Committee should also advise Academic Affairs and the next chair of SCEP that the process should begin early in order to clarify the understandings reached by the Committee and so that the nomination process can begin in a timely way.

5. Meeting Time Next Year

The coordinate campus representatives expressed a preference for continued Thursday meetings. It was agreed that 1:15 - 3:00 on Thursdays would be the appointed time.

Professor Clark thanked the members of the Committee for their service; they, in turn, wished him the best in Oregon.

The Committee adjourned at 5:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota