

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy  
February 27, 1992**

Present: Stanford Lehmberg (chair), Victor Bloomfield, Thomas Clayton, James Cotter, Michael Handberg, Karen Karni, Matt Meyer, Clark Starr, Susan Wick

Guests: Geoff Gorvin (Footnote), Vice Provost Anne Hopkins, Karen Seashore Louis

**1. Evaluation of Teaching**

Professor Lehmberg convened the meeting at 1:15 and welcomed Vice Provost Hopkins and Professor Louis. He began the discussion of teaching evaluation by inquiring of Dr. Hopkins if there was anything she could do administratively in the area without action by SCEP; she thought not. He then asked what SCEP might do that would be helpful; she suggested that it adopt, first, a set of principles, and then, later, particulars which would implement them.

Committee members turned their attention to the subcommittee report which had been reviewed the last time the Committee had discussed teaching evaluation. Professor Wick repeated one of the central points in the subcommittee report, that there are two reasons for evaluating teaching. In one case, the results are used in the process of making promotion, tenure, and merit decisions. In the other case, they are used by the instructor for the improvement of teaching. Dr. Hopkins expressed the view that both kinds of evaluation should be conducted; she suggested that formative evaluation for improvement of teaching be private and strongly encouraged while summative evaluation for promotion, tenure, and merit should be required.

Several issues were explored in the ensuing discussion.

- Student evaluations are only one way of evaluating teaching, and not necessarily the best way. There is a need for variety in form of evaluation; additional evaluation, however, could require additional resources, which would be controversial in time of financial constraint. Also problematic would be increased demand on faculty time.
- Dr. Hopkins maintained that the Provost's office should not reallocate funds to set up an office to support teaching evaluation; it should not re-create the Educational Development Programs office.
- A program for improving teaching, analogous to the program for new department heads run by Dr. Carrier's office, might be attractive. It would be voluntary, would create an environment where improvement of teaching would be seen as worthwhile, and would provide a more professional approach to improvement.

---

\*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.

- If evaluations are to be used in personnel decisions, the University MUST have a mechanism to provide support to those who fall short. It is a grave administrative mistake to have a system which tells people they are failing but which provides no assistance for improvement. The Academic Affairs office should take responsibility for ensuring that such assistance is available; it is insufficient to declare it the responsibility of the colleges. (Dr. Hopkins noted that the question is moot as long as there is no evaluation system in place.)
- There was dispute about whether or not student evaluations of teaching correlate with the grades they expect to receive. Dr. Hopkins, Professor Louis, and others asserted that there is no evidence to suggest there is any such correlation; other Committee members expressed doubt at these assertions. Evidence was requested. Professor Louis also commented that student evaluations are unrelated to grades so long as students perceive that the instructor was FAIR. Dr. Hopkins suggested that a study could be done, but one can always then criticize the study and it might not persuade anyone.
- There IS a high correlation between student evaluations and ratings by individuals trained in evaluation, Professor Louis reported. She also agreed that holistic evaluations are more accurate than specific questions of merit.
- It must constantly be remembered that scores of 4.3 and 4.8 on a 6-point scale are not important differences; those differences are affected by luck and style. The real point of evaluation is to identify the superb teachers (so they can be rewarded) and the really poor teachers (so they can be helped or, if not, denied tenure). For the 70 - 80% of faculty in the middle, the evaluations will not make much difference. Professor Louis agreed, noting that finer distinctions can be made only over a LONG period of time with many observers--a system no one is proposing and no one can afford.
- If it is true that only three general categories of performance are identified, it was suggested that peer and other kinds of evaluation need only be invoked when there is a problem; otherwise, use of a 5-item questionnaire with students in every course would provide the information the University needs.
- Evaluation for improvement (rather than personnel decisions) might best be administered mid-way through a course, so that changes can be made before a course is too far along. A more summative evaluation could come at the end; administration of evaluation tools at different times would also help clarify the distinction between the two different purposes of evaluation.

Professor Lehmborg drew from the Committee members assent that they had agreed to the following propositions:

1. Teaching evaluation serves two separate purposes, for improvement and for promotion and tenure decisions and for use in making salary decisions.
2. It is not desirable or necessary that SCEP propose a mandatory policy for teaching

evaluation geared to improvement of instruction. Such evaluation, however, should be strongly encouraged and supported by the colleges.

3. There should be a University-wide instrument for collecting student evaluations of teaching for use in promotion, tenure, and salary decisions, and use of the instrument should be mandatory. Any such instrument, which would be developed under SCEP's auspices, must include provision for written student comments.
4. Teaching evaluation for purposes of tenure and promotion must include peer review of some kind, to be determined by the colleges. Such peer review would not be required for annual merit salary increases.

It was agreed that SCEP would seek to develop a policy, based on these points and the Committee discussion, for presentation to a meeting of the Senate during Spring Quarter. This policy would be considered "round one"; round two would consist of implementing details, most likely to be developed and presented during the next academic year. Professor Wick agreed to draft the policy statement.

## **2. Report of the Chair**

Professor Lehmborg next reported on a number of items:

- The Senate policy prohibiting events during Study Day and Finals Week needs some minor clarifying language; it was agreed on voice vote that the changes should be presented to the Consultative Committee.
- He approved a post-season tournament for the women's ice hockey club, using the standards set out by the Committee in the language governing post-season competitive events for intercollegiate athletics. The Committee assented to his decision.
- He urged Committee members to think about colleagues who might serve on SCEP as they respond to the request from the Committee on Committees for nominations.
- He reviewed a letter from Professor Scott, suggesting that SCEP should be involved in transfer issues as well as the Task Force on Student Employment being appointed by Vice President Hughes; Dr. Hopkins interjected that she was responsible for transfer issues and would work with the Committee on them.
- If SCEP is to make any statement on the "Waldorf" plan to change the amount of state subsidy for instructional costs, it will have to act quickly. Dr. Hopkins told the Committee that Senior Vice President Infante has testified against the change.
- Professor Skaggs, chair of the Council on Liberal Education, has inquired about a possible overlap between the charge to SCEP and to the Council; it was agreed that Professor Lehmborg would write to Professor Scott and indicate that the overlap seems not to present any problem, in SCEP's view, and that SCEP recognizes that the Council reports to the Assembly. SCEP, however, would like to receive the minutes of the Council and be kept

informed of its activities.

### **3. Revision of the Policy on Make-up of Missed Examinations**

Professor Lehmborg reported that the Senate had returned to SCEP the proposed policy requiring that students who miss examinations for legitimate reasons be given an opportunity for a make-up. The principal objection appears to be that the policy makes no provision for those who miss exams (primarily Saturday finals) for religious reasons.

Professor Lehmborg circulated a redraft of the policy for Committee consideration. With one change, the draft was approved; it was agreed that inquiry would be made about whether or not there are other University policies or applicable statutory or constitutional provisions which would govern the issue of religious practices.

### **4. Discussion of Policy on Ratio of Credits to Contact Hours**

Dr. Hopkins reported to the Committee that she wished to have a conversation with it about the Senate policy requiring a 1:1 correspondence between credits for a course and weekly contact hours. Exceptions are to be granted by college curriculum committees, she noted, and they report to the deans; the administration asks the deans to keep track of what the committees are doing.

The question is "what are appropriate exceptions?" If she is to ask a dean to justify the exceptions, it is not clear what she is seeking. Some believe the exceptions now being granted are justified, said one Committee member; Dr. Hopkins pointed out that no one has said what constitutes acceptable justifications. Another Committee member pointed out that 70% of the courses in CLA are exceptions to the policy; what kind of policy is it where 70% of the occurrences are exceptions?

It was agreed that this issue would be taken up at a meeting to be held on March 31. Dr. Hopkins said that Academic Affairs would hold off on compliance until the Committee has discussed the subject, even though the policy called for compliance by the end of the 1991-92 academic year.

Professor Lehmborg recalled that there was a report some years ago calling for a move to a 4-credit norm, because students complained about the 3-credit norm requiring them to take five classes per quarter. Moving to a 4-credit module would permit them to do better in fewer courses. In some instances, where the department had funds, a course added a discussion section with a TA to the three lectures; others added reading and writing. Many changes were made at the time were justified; now, with the norm of four credits, the understanding about the extra work to be required may be absent.

The Committee adjourned at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand