

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy
April 23, 1992**

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

Guests: J. J. Thompson (Daily)

1. Report of the Chair

Professor Lehmberg convened the meeting at 1:15 and began by reporting on several items:

- In the last set of SCEP minutes, it should be noted that Professor Louis said it is NOT necessary to evaluate every course, when evaluating teaching, to have useful and valid results.
- He has received a letter from Associate Dean Russell Hobbie, of IT, inquiring about the possibility of reconsidering +/- grading. He told Dean Hobbie that it is too late for SCEP to take up the question this year but perhaps it could do so next year; he also told Dean Hobbie that the School of Management has been granted permission to conduct an experiment and that perhaps IT or Physics could also do so.
- He had a long conversation with Dr. Boston, who was distressed at the letter he had received from SCEP about athletic events conducted during the period prohibited by Senate policy. Professor Lehmberg said that he assured Dr. Boston the Committee still held him in high regard and assumed that he would get matters straightened out within the men's athletic department.
- There is a movement afoot to reconsider the semester issue; it has been raised at the Provost's Council. A memorandum prepared by former Senior Vice President Kuhl has been circulated, which favors the change but which lays out the problems that ensue in making it. This question has been very briefly discussed at the Faculty Consultative Committee, Professor Lehmberg reported, and the consensus appears to be that they are not opposed to moving to semesters but they are DEFINITELY opposed to talking about it any more. Contrary to the usual position of FCC, seeking consultation on all important issues, they jokingly suggested it would be better for the administration to declare that all arguments have been heard and just take unilateral action.

While SCEP has not been asked to take up the issue, presumably it could do so next year if requested by central administration.

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- The Committee acquiesced to the schedule of meetings prepared for 1992-93.
- The Committee unanimously approved the nomination of an individual to serve on the faculty of Military Science.
- He has received a note from a faculty member, Professor Lehmborg reported, inquiring about how to deal with the 60" class hour in CEE as compared to the 50" class hour in day school and carry the same number of credits. The Committee, after brief discussion, concluded that this was an issue where flexibility seemed desirable--that individual faculty members deem what is to be suitable in terms of time in class.

2. Evaluation of Teaching

The discussion next turned to the redrafted teaching evaluation policy, of which Professor Wick distributed copies. Committee members turned their attention to the survey questions that had been prepared by Professor Clayton and identified those which appeared to be essential to a very short form. In the course of the discussion, a number of points were touched on.

- The documents, both policy and questionnaire, are excellent--but they seem too long for the Senate docket. The longer a report one presents to the Senate, the less likely it is that it will pass. It will, however, be essential to provide the Senate with the actual questionnaire the Committee proposes be used, or Senators will likely--and with some legitimacy--balk at adopting the policy.
- Any student survey should key not on how much a student LIKED a subject but rather what was the VALUE of the course; not whether or not they LIKED an instructor, but how they assess the TEACHING ABILITY.
- One Committee member distributed materials recapping the research literature on important characteristics of effective teaching as rated by students, faculty, and administrators; those characteristics include concern for students, knowledge of the subject matter, encouragement of discussion, ability to explain clearly, enthusiasm for subject, and preparation. The evaluation questions, it was said, need to get at those factors.
- The research also demonstrates that the two most important factors, when educational outcomes are measured, are student-student interaction and student-faculty interaction; other factors tend to be less important.
- In considering the "Environmental Factors that Negatively Affect General Education Outcomes," the Committee was struck by how accurately the list of negative factors described the situation of University of Minnesota Twin Cities undergraduates: living at home and commuting, watching television, large institutional size, lack of community among students, participation in intercollegiate athletics, frequent use of TAs, a student peer group that values materialism and status, and full time employment or off-campus employment.

Students, it was said by one faculty member, are viscerally angry and paranoid about teaching at the University; the faculty need to do something about it. Evaluation is one way to help get at some of the problems, although clearly the faculty do not have control over many of the negative factors associated with general education outcomes. Students know they are not getting a good education, although they are not certain why.

- The Committee can recommend a format for gathering demographic data, but departments should be free to collect this information however they wish. It is doubtful, except in rare instances, that the demographic correlates of the survey responses will ever be used in promotion and tenure or salary decision (e.g., students who are juniors or seniors rank faculty more/less highly than freshmen and sophomores).
- Except for the extremes (to indicate positive and negative), no words should be attached to the numeric scales; they tend to confuse those using the scale. The scales will consist of a seven-point range, which, the Committee agreed, allows more distinctions than a five-point scale and permits more ready identification of the very best and very worst.
- Committee members debated heatedly over whether or not the question "how did you like the instructor as a person?" should be included. This bit of information is essential in considering evaluation results, it was argued. Another Committee member, however, said that if one is liked and is evaluated well, the results are ambiguous; likewise, if one is disliked and evaluated poorly, again the results are ambiguous. It is only if the liking and the evaluation results are discordant that one learns something. It was ultimately concluded that this information would indirectly be garnered through the other questions the Committee agreed on.
- There should be more detail on what peer review will consist of and how it will be conducted, argued one Committee member; simply calling for it, but not stipulating any standards or quality, will result in nothing happening. The problem, it was suggested by another, is less in the policy than in the enforcement; the current policies require peer evaluation but the colleges don't enforce the policies.
- In inquiring about how much was learned in a course, the emphasis in the question should be on the course, not the instructor, because the best teaching is transparent--the students learn on their own, which is the goal of instruction. The question should NOT be how much they learned FROM THE INSTRUCTOR but how much they learned IN THE COURSE.
- Whatever policy is adopted should put the onus on the DEPARTMENT to collect peer review information for individuals being considered for promotion or tenure; the individual faculty member should not be solely responsible for accumulating the information. On the other hand, peer review information should not be required every year; rather, documentation should be amassed along the way and perhaps used every few years (similar to the way in which one builds a record and reports it in apply for grant funds).

After nearly two hours of deliberation, the Committee agreed on the language of the report and the questions to be included in a survey to be used institution-wide.

The Committee voted unanimously in favor of the report.

The Committee adjourned at 2:50.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota