

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy
October 29, 1992**

Present: James Tracy (chair), Victor Bloomfield, Susan Donaldson, Michael Handberg, Kenneth Heller, Robert Johnson, Andrea Mack, Clark Starr

1. Miscellaneous Business

Professor Tracy convened the meeting at 1:20 and began by reminding the Committee that the membership of the Morse-Alumni Awards Committee had to be determined. The Committee reviewed the names of a number of individuals who might be asked to serve, and directed Professor Tracy to contact those it selected.

The Committee then turned to the appointment of a task force on honors programs, something that had been promised to the Senate in 1990 but not done. Professor Tracy reviewed the history behind the proposal and said that Professor Bognanno, Chair of the Consultative Committee, asked SCEP to take the lead in identifying individuals to serve (even though the Consultative Committee, per the report to the Senate, will make the actual appointments). It was agreed that Professor Tracy would contact a number of individuals, including directors of college honors programs, to identify faculty members who might be willing and able to serve. The task force will have five faculty members, one student, and a recent honors graduate.

Because Vice President Hopkins has schedule conflicts, the discussion of the protocols for student evaluations of teaching with Dr. Dallis Perry will be postponed to November 24. If the subcommittee of Megan Gunnar and Susan Wick is ready, the November 12 meeting will be devoted to a discussion of protocols for peer evaluation of teaching and contributions to undergraduate education.

2. Semesters

Professor Tracy next told the Committee that Professor Bognanno has been receiving inquiries about the possibility of a change to the semester system; there have been rumors that the President or Provost is prepared to make the change. Professor Bognanno has asked that SCEP consider what the implications of such a change would be for the consultative process.

The stance of those involved in the governance system over the past year has been that the administration should simply make a decision. All of the polls of the faculty show them to be divided almost equally between favoring and opposing a change, and Senate committees that have considered the question recently have been of the view that there is no more information to be gathered or arguments to be made. The governance system has, in essence, told the administration to decide.

Questions SCEP might consider, if a decision is made to move to semesters, have to do with

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timing, how the change would be made, integration with other activities, affect on students midway through their degree, time for faculty to revise their courses, and so on. One Committee member maintained that SCEP should not be concerned about the consultative process that led to the current situation--that is the responsibility of the Consultative Committee--but should, in accord with the request from Professor Bognanno, consider the EDUCATIONAL implications of a change. Several Committee members concurred with this sentiment.

There appeared to be broad consensus on the Committee that WHATEVER the decision, it should be made quickly. There are a number of activities now underway that would be profoundly affected by a change to semesters (e.g., the work of the Council on Liberal Education and a number of colleges that are reconsidering their curricula). Committee members dwelt briefly on the possible costs of such a change (largely one-time, although using funds for the change at a time of constrained resources could raise questions), possible savings (probably minimal if any), and the extent to which the administration was proposing the change on financial rather than educational grounds (not very much, although that may not be the perception).

One Committee member argued that there are educational policy implications for the change. Nationally, the decision has largely been made: the quarter system is a failed experiment. It is strange that the University remains on quarters when most institutions have moved back to semesters. Another commented that except for the reduction in the number of courses a student can take, the only real argument against the change is the problem of "turning the tanker." There is, responded another, no good evidence--in outcome measures--to suggest that semesters are better than quarters. One can strongly defend the proposition, rather, that different courses and subjects are best taught in varying lengths, anywhere from two weeks to a full year; what is needed is greater flexibility (something, another Committee member pointed out, the current system provides as much as a semester system would).

Professors Tracy and Bognanno will be meeting with the President next week; Professor Tracy agreed to communicate the sentiment of the Committee that any decision should be made as soon as possible.

3. Credit Hours and Contact Hours

Professor Tracy then noted that the question of the Senate policy on credits and contact hours could still require attention from SCEP, although he wondered if it might be best to wait until the semester question is resolved before addressing it further. Others on the Committee, however, said the question was the same irrespective of the calendar and could profitably be taken up.

There are two principles one could advocate, said one Committee member. First, that contact hours should equal credit hours. Second, that credit hours were a measure of the effort required by students in a course. In some courses, the two principles may lead to the same result; in many others, they would not. The credit should be a "uniform currency" for students and the outside world to measure work required.

Dr. Hopkins last year came to SCEP to talk about enforcing the policy and asked the Committee to tell her to do so. The Committee hesitated; it agrees there should be uniformity, but at present the colleges do what they wish. The Committee, however, is dubious about the existing Senate policy.

It was agreed that the Committee, rather than asking the administration to ignore a Senate policy it--the Committee--did not like, would submit a revised policy to the Senate. It was agreed that the proposal drafted last year by Professor Heller would be taken up in the near future.

4. Computing

Professor Heller agreed to be the contact person for SCEP as the Office of the Registrar moves to computerized registration.

The Committee adjourned at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota