

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, March 12, 1997
1:00 - 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall

Present: Laura Koch (chair), Avram Bar-Cohen, Anita Cholewa, Elayne Donahue, Darwin Hendel, Gordon Hirsch, Thomas Johnson, Robert Leik, Judith Martin, Kathleen Newell, Tina Rovick, W. Phillips Shively, William Van Essendelft, Gayle Graham Yates

Regrets: None

Absent: None

Guests: Sam Lewis (University Registrar), Peter Zetterberg (Office of Planning and Analysis)

[In these minutes: Student 2000 project; changes to summer session under semesters; use of student evaluations of teaching; Twin Cities course and curriculum committee; approval of Morse-Alumni award winners]

1. The Student 2000 Project

Professor Koch convened the meeting at 1:00 and welcomed Sam Lewis and Peter Zetterberg to discuss the "Student 2000" project (the new student data computing system) and its implications for the Committee.

Dr. Zetterberg explained that the Student 2000 project involves the replacement of seven or eight major computer systems that track students, courses, financial aid, transcripts, and so on. The process of changing these systems cannot be halted, because of the year 2000 problem and because the University would be unable to offer courses. The project will cost \$7 - 8 million, and the decision has been made to use PeopleSoft as the vendor (they are also vendors for Wisconsin, Northwestern, and Michigan).

The project is at the point of implementation, and this has raised questions about the way the University does business. No institutions do it the same way, so the programs must be tailored, but it appears the University does it about the most complicated way possible. This raises the question of whether to change some academic policies and practices. Dr. Zetterberg assured the Committee that those implementing the system will not make the decisions, but that they will implement decisions made by the faculty and administration. The system should not, however, be more complicated than necessary.

Some of the policies that should be reviewed need to be brought to SCEP, Dr. Zetterberg said, and they will be brought with sufficient lead time for review to occur.

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The motivation to review the policies, Mr. Lewis added, is to make the system work better for students and to reduce the hassles they face.

The Committee briefly reviewed the possible policies that could be taken up (e.g., consistency in deans' lists, on-line course syllabi, internal and external transfer course issues, bracketing courses). Mr. Lewis expressed the hope that it would not be necessary to program 25 different procedures with respect to transfer grades, for example; that would make the system very complex and expensive. These are not "do or die" issues, Dr. Zetterberg said; his objective is to propose policies to SCEP and take care of as many items as possible all at once.

One Committee member inquired how a limit on the number of courses that a college will accept from another unit will interact with IMG. Dr. Zetterberg said IMG does not require abandoning common sense, nor does it limit the ability of those in authority to say "no." IMG is not "every tub on its own bottom." Units can play games with any system, including requiring more courses within a college right now, in order to increase revenue.

With respect to areas where there may be no policy, but policy is needed, Dr. Zetterberg said some such areas have already been identified. In some cases, existing practice has no authority in policy. These all need to be identified.

2. Summer Sessions and Semesters

Before proceeding to the discussion of the Student 2000 project just noted, Dr. Zetterberg said he wished to raise a question about summer sessions under semesters. The Change to Semesters Coordinating group has recently talked about summer session and wishes to recommend a schedule comparable to that offered by Wisconsin: an 8-week general session (approximately one-half a semester), which could in turn be divided into two 4-week terms. The 3-week May intersession would still be offered, and these 11 weeks could be used in a way that would permit classes of various lengths.

The public message would be that summer session is 8 weeks, but there would be great flexibility in the length of courses offered. The director of Summer Session is very comfortable with this proposal, Dr. Zetterberg reported.

Faculty have expressed concern that reducing a 14- or 15-week semester course to 5 weeks would require triple-time teaching. The proposal for an 8-week session would make semester summer sessions comparable to the current summer session relationship to quarters. It would also be chronologically possible to offer a full semester course, if anyone wished to teach for 15 weeks after the end of Spring Semester.

Professor Koch thanked Dr. Zetterberg and Mr. Lewis for joining the meeting.

3. Student Evaluations of Teaching

Professor Koch next reviewed the status of the use of student evaluations of teaching. She noted that a recent DAILY opinion piece had several factual errors (e.g., that SCEP refuses to see the merits of a plan to make student evaluation results available to students) and did not note the work of the

subcommittee. She also reported on what has been occurring at the legislature, and expressed concern that actions at the legislature by students, in parallel to the work of SCEP, are preventing the internal process from working as it should.

It was reported that some students had abstained on the resolution from MSA concerning teaching evaluations, and that the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly opposed legislative action.

Dr. Hendel reported on the work of the subcommittee. They have had several meetings, and there is agreement that there is an important and legitimate need for more information upon which students can base course choices, and to ensure that high quality teaching must be taken seriously by those who can make it happen. They are now identifying options, and have obtained information from what peer institutions do. The subcommittee is making progress and will finish its work by early in Spring Quarter.

Committee members discussed the uses of summary statistics, and the possible misuse to which they might be put.

4. Twin Cities Undergraduate Course and Curriculum Committee (TCUCCC)

Professor Koch reported that the motion to create the TCUCCC had again failed in the Assembly because of an insufficient number of voters present, even though the proposal had, once again, been supported by a large majority of those present. At this point the proposal either needs to be dropped or a subcommittee of SCEP should be appointed; she has opted for the second alternative.

Two Committee members inquired what problems needed fixing by the establishment of the subcommittee; others responded by pointing out examples, including lack of oversight of undergraduate programs, many of which go across colleges, the impact of IMG, and the multitude of courses in fields such as statistics, psychology, and economics that are taught in many places. One Committee member argued that unless one can document problems, there should be no new mechanism created to review programs and courses. It was said that the composition of committees varies, creating problems, and that this is the business of the provosts, who should draw on faculty expertise as needed.

It was also suggested that the subcommittee be given more power than the proposal before the Assembly.

Another Committee member said there is no process in place to evaluate how change made in one part of the University affects the institution more broadly; there is a need, either within the provosts' offices or through this Committee, to review such changes. The losers are students. It was suggested that the TCUCCC could act as a jury in cases when departments or colleges are in dispute. Others suggested the subcommittee should only react, and not take positive steps to review programs.

Professor Koch reported that Provost Shively wants such a committee appointed and will support it financially as proposed to the Assembly. She is talking with the other two provosts about it. If it is only to be reactive, then the wording creating it needs to be changed, and it would not be a curriculum committee.

The Committee took no action on the proposal at this time.

5. Morse-Alumni Award Winners

Professor Koch now welcomed Professor Marti Hope Gonzales to the meeting, to present the recommendations of the Morse-Alumni nominating committee to SCEP for action.

Following a presentation by Professor Gonzales, the Committee unanimously approved the nominations. Professor Gonzales said it was gratifying to see the commitment to and innovation in undergraduate education demonstrated by the nominees.

Professor Koch said she would contact the nominees to inform them of the award. The Committee expressed its thanks to Professor Gonzales and the members of the nominating committee.

5. Policy on Reorganization

The Committee made brief suggestions on the wording of the policy on reorganization. Professor Koch then adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota