

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, May 21, 1997
1:00 - 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall

Present: Laura Koch (chair), Elayne Donahue, Gordon Hirsch, Thomas Johnson, Judith Martin, Kathleen Newell, William Van Essendelft

Regrets: Anita Cholewa, Darwin Hendel, W. Phillips Shively, Gayle Graham Yates

Absent: Avram Bar-Cohen, Robert Leik, Tina Rovick

Guests: none

[In these minutes: Kellogg Commission report, improvements to undergraduate education, and the need for information; reorganization policy; honors policy; grade inflation]

Professor Koch convened the meeting at 1:00 and began by reporting on the FCC discussion with President-elect Yudof, which had been joined by SCEP members Professors Bar-Cohen and Martin. Professor Martin said that educational policy issues have "sunk off the screen" for central administration for parts of the year, because of the press of other issues; President-elect Yudof, however, seemed VERY interested in them. He was impressed with the number of issues before SCEP, Professor Koch said, but Dr. Yudof also said he did not have answers for them all.

Later in the meeting, Professor Koch also noted that the many SCEP proposals that had been approved by the Senate had not yet been cleared by the President's office. Action on those items is necessary, particularly so colleges can reform their rules to conform to the Senate actions.

1. Kellogg Commission Report

Professor Koch then recalled that the Committee had decided to review the "Action Commitments" of the Kellogg Commission report, and as a means to doing so requested information from Senior Vice President Marshak and Provost Shively about the status of the University's efforts and activities with respect to the items in the "Action Commitments." Both Drs. Marshak and Shively responded to her letters requesting information, she reported (and provided copies of the responses to the Committee), but what she received was not especially illuminating for the purposes of the Committee.

Committee members noted that what was provided had no information on outcomes or impact; such information was needed, as was an exploration of how the activities related to the critical measures as well as the "Action Commitments." "What student gains were there?" asked one Committee member. Committee members considered several items of the Undergraduate Initiative and the associated

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expenditures; it was agreed that more description of what each project entailed would be needed, as well as outcomes. Committee members discussed advising, the intensive writing requirement, "expanding worlds," and priorities among the items.

The question, said one Committee member, is whether sufficient attention is being paid to ANY of the issues so that they can be moved forward and make a difference. The Committee is receiving policy statements and data, but no analysis of impact. It may be too soon to measure impact for some, but the Committee must ask the questions. It is acceptable to say that 25 more sections of a language have been added, to respond to student demand, but that does not mean there has been an enhancement of education--nor does offering courses on the web mean education has been enhanced, although one fears that additional sections and web offerings are likely to be the answers when the Committee asks about improvements to undergraduate education. When discussing improvement, it is easy for the administration to leap to information technology.

On the other hand, quality improvements can be hard to measure, said another Committee member. Quantitative data, however, are not the end of the process, responded another. Some believe, for example, that with advances in technology, the number of people employed can be reduced; with respect to advising, anyone who says that does not understand advising. It must be understood, said one Committee member, that if the number of advisors is not reduced with the introduction of APAS and related technology, then the quality of advising can be increased--but that must be a conscious decision to invest more in advising. There are, noted one Committee member, a number of administrators who believe the University already puts too much money into advising and hand-holding. If students want to use information technology to make decisions, they should be given the opportunity to do so, but registration for courses does not equal advising. The emphasis on technology has been phrased more as an emphasis on efficiency than on learning. The message of the Harvard president has been misunderstood, it was said; technology can enhance education, but some believe it can replace people.

University College is looking seriously at distance education; one concern, however, is that it is MORE expensive than traditional classroom education. It will be interesting to see if that remains the case in the future. It should be used only when the classroom CANNOT be used; the idea of making distance education available in the dorms is not appropriate, and ignores the socialization aspects of a college education. Other Committee members agreed that distance education should be used for students who cannot come to campus, and that it cannot or should not try to replace students coming to campus. Distance education and classroom education serve different groups. Distance education is also very labor intensive; faculty must still grade papers and respond to email--there may be more one-to-one contact in distance education than with traditional classroom instruction.

Professor Koch agreed to seek more detailed information, both by asking the senior officers as well as consulting with Dr. Hendel about who might have the most pertinent and useful information.

2. Reorganization Policy

The Committee turned its attention to the redrafted reorganization policy; Professor Martin outlined the changes that had been made, in response to questions raised the last time the draft was discussed.

Discussion turned to the issue of minors, and in particular the new minor in Military Science through University College that has been approved by the Board of Regents. It was reported that Military Science had requested of central administration approval for a minor; the request had been referred to University College. UC looked at college requirements for minors, which are minimal, and agreed to offer it. Faculty groups oversee each degree program offered by UC; those groups are composed of about 75% faculty from University departments, with the remaining members from the community and University College staff.

The concern about the Military Science minor, Professor Koch reported, is that it is offered through a program about which the University Senate expressed concern because it does not treat all individuals equally. Any quarrel, it was said, was with the administration, which refused to respond to the Senate action.

It was agreed that since minors are approved by the Board of Regents, their creation should be subject to the policy on reorganization and should be reviewed by a faculty group.

There was brief discussion of the Minnesota transfer curriculum, and how students might be enrolled at the University but obtain credits at other institutions. The Committee concluded that a student enrolled in a University program would be obligated to abide by the course requirements of that program, and not obtain credits elsewhere. But there are inconsistencies in how the transfer curriculum rules are applied that need attention.

The Committee voted unanimously to endorse the draft policy and to forward it to the Committee on Finance and Planning for action.

3. Honors Policy

Professor Hirsch reported that the draft policy had twice been distributed to the individuals responsible for honors programs in the colleges; several responded with praise for the draft.

With no further discussion, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the policy for placement on the Senate docket in the fall.

4. Other Business

- Professor Koch reported on the Senate meeting, at which the report of the subcommittee on teaching evaluations was presented. She expressed surprise at the reaction of some Senate members to what SCEP believed to be a non-threatening proposal. Notwithstanding the debate, the Senate did approve moving forward on the proposal.
- The subcommittee on grade inflation has been awaiting information from the Office of the Registrar; Professor Martin expressed concern that with the change in regime, provision of the information might be further delayed. Professor Koch said she would contact Associate Vice President Kvavik to ensure that the request was not lost.

A few committee members expressed doubt that grade inflation was a problem about which the

Committee could do anything, and whether or not there was in fact grade inflation. It was also noted that distance education will bring a related set of problems: how can it be guaranteed that the student taking the course is the one doing the work?

- Professor Koch asked Committee members to prepare for the next meeting by talking with colleagues about what they see as important issues that SCEP should take up next year, and to think about the items of unfinished business that needed attention. There remain policies that need to be revised and consolidated, and there are new policy issues that arise as a result of the implementation of the Student 2000 system.

Professor Koch adjourned the meeting at 2:30.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota