

MINUTES*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, January 20, 1999
1:00 – 3:00
Room 229 Nolte Center

- Present: Judith Martin (chair), Darwin Hendel, Gordon Hirsch, Laura Coffin Koch, Darcia Narvaez, Kathleen Newell, Martin O'Hely, Palmer Rogers, Richard Skaggs, Suzanne Bates Smith, Thomas Soulen, Steven Sperber, Craig Swan
- Regrets: Robert Johnson, Christine Maziar, Jeff Ratliff-Crain, Tina Rovick
- Absent: Shumaila Anwer, Laura Beauchane, Angela Bos
- Guests: Professor Tom Clayton

[In these minutes: distance education and technology-enhanced education; reorganization policy; Morris calendar change; policy on academic progress for undergraduates; exemptions from non-resident tuition rates]

Professor Martin convened the meeting at 1:00 and reported that she had the previous day attended the debut of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers, and that it had been a terrific celebration. Professor Koch asked to be on the record extending thanks to Professor Martin and to Dr. Swan for all their work on the Academy, and expressed the hope that the University would make good use of the Academy. Professor Martin reported that SCEP had specifically been recognized at the celebration.

1. Distance Education/Technology-Enhanced Education (DE/TEL)

Professor Martin welcomed Professor Tom Clayton to the meeting. She reminded the Committee that she had received a request that SCEP send a representative to a central administrative committee devoting attention to distance education and technology-enhanced education (DE/TEL). SCEP had been short of members at the time the request was made, so she asked former SCEP chair Clayton to represent the Committee, and he had agreed to do so.

Professor Clayton began by noting miscellaneous items drawn from the day's news summary provided by the CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION:

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- LEADERS OF BUSINESS and academe both value higher education, *but differ on how it should be managed,* says a study released today by a group that looks at issues affecting post-secondary education.
- THE GRADUATE MANAGEMENT ADMISSION COUNCIL hopes that using a computerized essay-grader will save time and money and get scores back to test-takers quicker. But critics still have reservations about relying on machines to grade essays.
- THE CALIFORNIA DIGITAL LIBRARY opens today on the World-Wide Web. The library--the 10th in the University of California's nine-campus system--is designed to be the on-line gateway to the university's card catalogue, and much more.

Professor Clayton then made a number of remarks to the Committee about his efforts on its behalf. "In my limited personal experience, technology can make a definite contribution to teaching as well as research, through e-mail and the ClassWeb (which I mean to look into further into when I have time), to mention only two. So I for one am ready to welcome more such resources, the more happily if they don't involve so many strings and strands as to entrap me in the web or its kindred forevermore, and don't consume too much additional time: e-mail is NOT a time-conserver.

I must say that after attending several meetings of the TEL/DE Committee and associated special events, and reading and skimming a considerable volume of related paper, however, I began to have the uneasy feeling that TEL/DE is so pervasive that it is to the University something like what the Internet Explorer browser is to Microsoft Windows. Anyone even slightly in touch with software and the web will know what that means: IE is so deeply imbedded in Windows that it cannot be removed or disarmed without adversely affecting the functioning of Windows itself. A major difference between IE and TEL/DE is that you CAN get rid of Explorer, if it proves to be counterproductive, with a handy-dandy bit of shareware that cuts the umbilicus clean and clear, without bits left over or bloodshed. And I know from experience that it works, fast.

"The special events I attended were two. The first was the Flashlight Project Workshop on Evaluating Technology's Role in Education scheduled for three hours, which I stayed for nearly all of without being much edified, because it was more process than product. Those in attendance were intermittently subjected to small-group discussion of pertinent issues with others at their table, and results from each table were then shared with the rest in the room. The flowcharts and questions in the handouts were not irrelevant to evaluation, but there were no concrete examples of what might be found or had been found in some earlier application of 'Flashlight Evaluation Services and Products,' which accordingly seemed to be running at pretty low wattage (or maybe it was blacklight).

The other event was "New Media Technologies Across the Curriculum," which was open to the public without registration. "It was scheduled for 90 minutes in the CMU Theater, and had an interactive component: persons in the audience could ask questions of those on screen. This was part of a videoconference series developed by The New Media

Centers, a non-profit consortium; further information on it is available from the website, www.csulb.edu/newmedia/vidcon98.html. I attended this, as did 10-15 others, none of whom I recognized. By the time I left, an hour in, most of the others had already gone. It was a fairly dismal exercise, with examples of Distance Education courses developed by one or two small colleges I had never heard of, which seem to be in the vanguard of DE. In fact, I heard little or nothing in any place or at any time during Fall Quarter about efforts being made by major colleges and universities, which made me think we must be in the vanguard or we just don't know enough about what has been and is being done elsewhere. [This took no account of such things as UCLA's web DE courses, which I had in fact looked into myself, but it didn't come instantly to mind because the STRENUOUS efforts seem not to be coming from such quarters, which seem to be responding to needs rather than trying to make a splash or seize early market share.]

A very large administrative effort and a lot of money have already been invested in TEL/DE, including the Minnesota Virtual University (MVU), with plenty more to come. This explains both why a person at the top is needed to oversee the collective efforts (Ann Duin of Rhetoric-St. Paul has been appointed) and why it is difficult if not impossible for an ordinary person--like a faculty member--without dedicated time at his or her disposal to grasp what all is going on and at what cost. The result is real concern on the part of those of us who are generally aware of efforts and costs but lack the detailed overview, particulars, and figures to be able to determine whether the efforts are desirable, already or likely to be productive, cost effective, and faculty- as well as student-friendly in not becoming an additional major burden without compensation.

SCEP members would presumably welcome any innovations in teaching-learning technology that would benefit all parties concerned, but would very much like to know about (1) the need or demand for TEL/DE services especially from UMN; (2) the opportunities for UMN initiatives to anticipate needs and meet them to its advantage in educational productivity, reputation, financial return, or more than one of these; (3) the cost-effectiveness of and/or the return on the efforts already invested; (4) the academic validity of the "products" being developed at the University, including MVU's; and (5) the extent to which TEL/DE administrators at the University are aware of and making efforts to cooperate--or compete--with those at other universities doing more or less the same things.

In practical terms, SCEP might like to know, for example,

- How TEL/DE instructional programs devised here are and have been evaluated, with what results; and, an overlapping related question,
- Who has already done what, at what cost to the U and in faculty time, and with what success (or failure)?
- What additional uncompensated faculty time is required to design and teach such courses? Anecdotal evidence suggests that "it takes more than twice as much time as teaching a regular course, and there is never sufficient technical support [in MNSCU]." What attempts have been made to measure the increased demands on faculty time from

the learning required for TEL/DE, and for the increased transaction costs involved in running a DE course, or in conducting a regular class that provides student email access to the instructor?

- Where is the money coming from--all Bush and external benefactions, or also internal funds that could be viewed as diverted from other valid uses to TEL/DE without the latter's being able to show good reasons? On what level are we competing with ourselves (a la University College) or with MNSCU, not to mention the rest of the world? Are we reshuffling internal state tuition dollars, or actually expecting to attract them from elsewhere? And if the latter, in what areas exactly?

Professor Clayton concluded that it appears the University is rushing pell-mell into the future, and will see where it is when it arrives.

Committee members exchanged ideas with Professor Clayton. One comment was that NO ONE is against the use of technology. The questions Professor Clayton raise, however, are a concern: the enormous increase in faculty effort required to deliver a technology-enhanced course, and even more for a distance-education course, and with the latter the problems of dealing with students who are not learning in a classroom setting.

There is much collective wisdom and experience on the part of faculty who have been involved in these activities, commented another, but there is no systematic process by which to learn from those experiences. The challenge is to develop such a process. Another challenge is how the University can make resources available to faculty in a transparent fashion. There should be a system for faculty interested in drawing on resources for DE/TEL, but right now they are not easy to find.

One possible drawback to DE is socialization, the interaction of students with faculty and other students. The absence of that element could be detrimental to an education. A chat room is not a classroom, added one.

Asked how DE and TEL were linked, Professor Clayton said he believed DE is a subset of TEL, and some see it as a NECESSARY component. One thing he learned is that the people most active in offering DE courses are doing so from places he had never heard of, and there is little evidence, so far as he knows from admittedly limited experience, that first-rate universities are jumping in. The largest course lists are from the smallest places. In some cases, such as UCLA, the courses seem fine, and are "technologized" versions for independent study--conventional courses on the web. There is little interaction with an instructor, as is typically true of independent study.

One Committee member said the label technology-enhanced education has more meaning inside the University, while distance education means more to those outside it. It is important for the University and state to learn what the needs of Minnesota are and if the University has a role in addressing them. The DE institutions that have received attention--Western Governor's University, the California Virtual University--are in areas facing big population growth and where the existing institutions do not have the capacity to serve that

increasing population. It would also be helpful, Professor Clayton added, for the University to work closely with MnSCU to avoid duplication.

It was noted that the WGU is degree-granting, and counts work experience learning. The CVU, in contrast, provides access to existing degree programs at California institutions, and the degrees come from the campus. It is the latter that is the model for the Minnesota Virtual University, and some faculty group--perhaps this Committee--should have progress reports on MnVU. There were ambitious plans that were to be coming to fruition soon. Several MnVU institutions were to be test sites, with their catalogues to be on-line. One would be able to look up existing courses, not courses developed for DE. At some point the catalogues for all post-secondary institutions will be on-line, as well as the educational activities of some companies. There are, however, very different visions of what MnVU will be.

The strategic question on DE is at what level, and how much, does the University want to get involved? With every program? With some courses and degree programs? This is not a decision that should be made by default.

Other reasons the University might get involved in DE include offering its programs in parts of the state where people cannot get to the Twin Cities campus but which may be the only place a particular program is offered.

Professor Martin suggested that Professor Clayton work with Professor Koch's subcommittee on distance and electronic education and asked that the questions he raises be part of the subcommittee's recommendations, to be presented to SCEP in the near future.

2. Reorganization Policy

Professor Martin next drew the attention of Committee members to an item that has reappeared several times on the agenda over the last several years, the draft policy calling for greater governance system consultation about, and access to information concerning, changes in department structures, degree programs, and administrative structures at the University. She noted that the policy is largely intended to be a redraft of existing policies, with some changes, and that it had been sent to the deans for comment. Only a few responded, most positively. The one question raised has been answered by an editorial change in the policy.

Committee members offered a number of views on the draft.

-- There is a fine line between requesting an opportunity for consultation and establishing procedures that make change difficult. That is a balancing act; this version of the policy is more acceptable than earlier versions.

The Committee wants to be involved in major transformations, not internal college changes.

-- The Senate should not be bypassed, and disposition of any recommendations from SCEP pursuant to the provisions of the policy should be left to the discretion of the Senate. At the

same time, it was said, the Committee should be careful about the level of detail it expects the Senate to be involved in, and that if there were a MAJOR issue, the Senate would MAKE it its business.

-- The policy does not bar Senate or faculty initiatives, although most proposals for department or degree changes will likely emanate from a department or college for a specific reason.

-- The provisions of the policy should apply to graduate and professional programs as well as undergraduate programs.

-- The intent of much of the policy is to establish a reporting mechanism so that the Committee is informed of changes in the academic programs of the University. The concern of the Committee is the impact of a change on the delivery of education to students; if a change will have little impact, the interest of the Committee is minimal.

-- There is an issue of how things are named that is related to this policy. It is not, however, covered by it.

-- The point of a policy should be to ensure that adequate consultation occurs about such changes, but NOT that the consultation should take place in this Committee.

Professor Martin suggested that the changes made at the meeting be incorporated in the policy, and that it be forward to the Senate Consultative Committee for placement on the Senate docket. The Committee agreed.

3. Morris Calendar Change

Professor Martin next reported that the Morris campus has requested permission to start its intersession a week earlier. Morris starts a week earlier in the fall, but Spring Semester starts at the same time as the Twin Cities. The reason for the change is that there are no job opportunities in Morris for students, and it does not make sense for them to delay the start of the intersession for a week after the end of Spring Semester classes.

The Committee deliberated briefly. One reason the break was inserted into the calendar was in the belief that neither students nor faculty would want to go directly from the end of Spring Semester finals into intersession classes. Would this same consideration not apply in the case of Morris? One Committee member inquired if there is any principle involved with respect to a uniform calendar; at present, it appears not, because there are more exceptions than there is uniformity. Another Committee member said the expressed rationale was not persuasive, but that if students wanted to start earlier, that would be a different matter.

The Committee agreed to defer acting on the request until more information could be gathered. [NOTE: At its meeting on January 27, the Committee again took up this question, and approved the request on a one-year basis, pending further discussion of the more general issue of a "uniform" University calendar.]

4. Academic Progress Policy for Undergraduates

Professor Martin distributed a revised version of the academic progress policy; she attempted, she said, to write it in a way that stressed the University's support for timely completion of degrees without penalizing those who could not move more quickly through their programs.

The Committee spent some time editing the language, and then unanimously approved the revised version for forwarding to the Senate Consultative Committee for placement on the Senate docket.

5. Exemptions from Non-Resident Tuition

Vice Provost Swan led a discussion of the possibility of waiving non-resident tuition charges in some instances, including where and how such waivers might be used. The issue will be brought back to the Committee later, when there is a more complete proposal prepared.

Professor Martin thanked Dr. Swan and adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota