

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Thursday, April 21, 1994
1:30 - 3:15
Room 626 Campus Club

- Present: Megan Gunnar (chair pro tem), Thomas Clayton, Sara Hornstra, Robert Johnson, Manuel Kaplan, Michael Pawlicki, Brian Shekleton, William Van Essendelft
- Regrets: Kenneth Heller (chair), Anita Cholewa, James Cotter, Carla Phillips, Gayle Graham Yates
- Absent: Craig Bursch, Sue Donaldson, Darwin Hendel, Darren Walhof
- Guests: Charles Clanton (Chair, College of Agriculture Curriculum Committee), Samuel Lewis (University Registrar), Dennis Saviano (Associate Dean, College of Human Ecology), Bert Swanson (College of Agriculture)
- Others: none

[In these minutes: Effective and efficient class scheduling]

Professor Gunnar convened the meeting at 1:30 and explained that Professor Heller had asked her to serve as chair because he was out of town. She then welcomed to the meeting two new student members of the Committee, Ms. Hornstra and Mr. Shekleton. She also welcomed the guests from the St. Paul colleges, who had raised the issue of class scheduling in a joint letter addressed to Professor Heller and to Mr. Lewis, University Registrar, and asked them to brief the Committee on the issues.

Professor Swanson explained that a curriculum subcommittee of the College of Agriculture had concluded that the class schedule was a high priority and that a central issue was that classes were not starting at the scheduled times. This phenomenon has negative effects on both students and advising as well as on the scheduling of rooms. In a small survey they did, 30% of St. Paul classes and 60% of Minneapolis classes did not start or stop at the scheduled times; this practice not only wastes rooms, more importantly, it makes it difficult for students to appropriately schedule their courses so that they can get through the University in a timely fashion. Related issues are that courses are not scheduled in the right sequence, or frequently enough, but students would be helped a great deal if this scheduling problem were dealt with.

CEE, the Committee was told, has a POLICY that the published times when a course is to meet may not be changed except by the unanimous consent of all the students enrolled. That may be the case for the rest of the University--whether or not it is was not clear--but if it is, the policy is not being followed. One question the issue raises is whether or not SCEP should consider proposing such a policy to the Senate.

*These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate or Twin Cities Campus Assembly; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes reflect the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate or Assembly, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

There are two general standard modules for course times, Mr. Lewis reported: the 50-minute hour for courses that meet M-W-F or Monday through Friday and the 75-minute module for Tuesday-Thursday classes. A survey his office did for Vice President Hopkins of all undergraduate courses on the Twin Cities campus reveals, however, that there is an enormous amount of variation from those standards. In some units, the curriculum is planned around different schedules to fit their own needs. In one such unit, for example, this affects the students not in the college but who may be required to take courses in it. In some cases, he said, the result may not reduce the efficiency of classroom use, but it may disrupt students' academic progress.

In terms of the use of classrooms, Mr. Lewis told the Committee, a classroom is considered fully used if it is occupied 30 hours per week. Most classrooms on the Minneapolis campus are fully used; those in St. Paul are used slightly less. Why that is the case, he said, is not clear, because there are more "odd" hour classes in Minneapolis than in St. Paul. In St. Paul, it was said, there are two departments in particular that want longer hours.

Another issue is the bus ride between the campuses: while the schedule may make it seem possible for students to take courses on both campuses, in fact the practices often prevent it.

Professor Gunnar then turned to the four recommendations concerning hourly scheduling contained in the letter.

- Have an official starting time of 0725 on the St. Paul campus (ALL St. Paul colleges), which would allow longer class periods or an additional class period before noon. There could be slight problems with getting access to AV equipment before offices open, but that could be accommodated, with practice.

The possibility of using the noon hour was also discussed, but Mr. Lewis said that it is already among the most heavily scheduled class hours of the day. (In Minneapolis, excluding CEE, the 9:00 - 1:00 period has 60 - 65% of the classes; the noon hour could hardly be set aside for longer sessions.) There would be no problem with 0725, however, he said; that could start next Winter Quarter (the Fall Quarter schedule is already set). It would also permit four class periods before noon, a possibility that was lost several years ago.

- If a course requires more than the 50-minute class period, the number of hours and credits should be adjusted--but within the framework of the standard class hour modules.

This would require review of how the 75-minute and 50-minute class hours mesh as well as the use of each module on different days of the week (e.g., T-Th sessions for 3-credit classes, M-W-F for four credit classes, etc.). The problems that may arise with labs, it was pointed out, existed before the adoption of the 50-minute class hour.

The point is to use the class schedule and to make classes fit together for students; if that's not to occur, why have scheduled times? The problem is that faculty members are permitted to pick their own times; if there were a master umbrella for scheduling, that

would spread classes out, that would be a big help. Central control, it was suggested, might need to come from the Senate; the Registrar's Office, Mr. Lewis commented, would welcome such help. The point, said another, is to help students. With schedules as they are, it is IMPOSSIBLE for some students to finish in four years, no matter how much they might want to.

Committee members discussed a number of issues associated with the daily and hourly scheduling of courses. Mr. Lewis cautioned, in response to queries, that his office does NOT have a computer program to model various schedules; rooms are scheduled by hand on cards.

This issue, it was pointed out, does not take into account other problems, such as lack of equipment in the classroom or the need for student interaction before they reach upper level courses in their major.

Some departments will resist a change, it was said, while others will not. Most would fall in line with a Senate policy. The prime determinant of class times is the faculty; few, it was said, would be questioned if they chose to change the time. Others suggested that would not be true in some departments.

The amount of planning a department does in terms of course offerings varies a great deal, it was pointed out. Some are quite careful about offering required classes at times that meet student needs; others are not. The problem, moreover, is different for departments that serve the entire University than it is for small and somewhat self-contained units.

Part of the problem is that both students and faculty want a compact day, so want courses in as few hours as possible. For departments that try to schedule five sections of a course, including one at 3:00, they often end up canceling the one at 3:00 for lack of enrollment.

It was agreed that a small group of the Committee should meet with Vice President Hopkins to learn what information she may already have gathered on these issues. Professor Gunnar and Mr. Van Essendelft agreed to do so. Once additional information has been gathered, the guests will be invited back, along with representatives from the Minneapolis campus colleges.

Professor Gunnar then reviewed a set of recommendations in the letter related to class closings/prerequisites/series, to impact of course changes on other units, and to sequencing of courses. Committee members discussed the issue of prerequisites (the computer does not check whether or not a student has taken the posted prerequisite; faculty often find many students have not, which means they must re-teach much of the materials, thus irritating those students who HAVE taken the prerequisite). Classes that close before the end of registration are, in some cases, a chronic problem that can delay a student's progress by a full year. Vice President Hopkins has provided money to help deal with early class closing, it was noted.

The Committee agreed that cross-collegiate communication about changes in class schedules for affected units made sense. Something like this, it was noted, will not be encouraged with Responsibility Centered Management. The distribution of such information would be most easily accomplished with

central scheduling and a computer program that could develop the optimal schedules. Committee members discussed how information could best be disseminated among units.

It was agreed that the Committee should obtain whatever information is available about prerequisite courses and about courses that close. It was also agreed that the Committee would inform Vice President Hopkins of its interest in these issues and ask her to come to the meeting on May 26 to discuss them. Professor Gunnar asked the student members of the Committee to speak with other students about their experiences with class schedules.

One possibility for a policy, it was suggested, that department class schedules with irregular hours would not be approved. To accommodate those who believe they need odd periods of time, it was suggested, those sessions might be permitted only after 2:00.

Professor Gunnar thanked the guests for bringing their concerns to the Committee; the guests expressed appreciation for attending to those concerns so promptly. She then adjourned the meeting at 2:45.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota