

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, February 28, 1996
1:00 - 3:00
Room 626 Campus Club

Present: Laura Koch (chair), Avram Bar-Cohen, Anita Cholewa, Elayne Donahue, Gayle Graham Yates, Megan Gunnar, Jeffrey Larsen, Robert Leik, Glenn Merkel, Ryan Nilsen, W. Phillips Shively, William Van Essendelft

Regrets: Robert Johnson, Thomas Johnson (weather prohibited both), Judith Martin, Mark Schuller

Absent: Paul Cleary, Darwin Hendel, Helen Phin

Guests: none

[In these minutes: Semester Conversion Standards (several times); Twin Cities Undergraduate Course and Curriculum Committee; Semester Conversion Transition Standards; Semester Conversion in the Graduate School; Grading Policy;

1. Semester Conversion Standards

Professor Koch convened the meeting at 1:00 and began with comments on the Semester Conversion Standards.

- The President's Office should be authorized to grant exemptions from the standards, and report the exemptions to the Senate.
- The Council on Liberal Education is thinking about liberal education requirements in terms of courses, while the Semester Conversion Standards speak of credits. At this point, since there is nothing known about what courses will exist, it is perhaps best to leave in the reference to credits, but with the understanding it will later have to be amended.

Representatives of the College of Liberal Arts sent her a memo, Professor Koch reported, and have asked for a meeting with SCEP about semesters. She said she had told them she would meet with them, rather than commit SCEP to a meeting, inasmuch as the Committee had a great deal to do and insufficient meeting time.

Committee members deliberated the wisdom of meeting with the CLA representatives; most appeared to believe that it would help to educate people, and perhaps gain support for the Standards, if SCEP were to have a meeting with representatives of the colleges. The college representatives may also present information that would lead to changes in the Standards, and a joint meeting might well

*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.

demonstrate to the colleges the discordant views being expressed across the University. It was agreed that there would be a meeting on March 13, with representatives of college faculty and administration from all colleges and campuses invited.

2. Twin Cities Undergraduate Course and Curriculum Committee

Professor Koch drew the attention of Committee members to a letter from Dean Bruininks to Senior Vice President Infante expressing opposition to the creation of a Twin Cities Undergraduate Course and Curriculum Committee (TCUCCC). As Committee members reviewed Dean Bruininks' objections, it appeared that what SCEP has proposed is not greatly at variance with his views. The role of the TCUCCC would be one of reviewing the overall curriculum of the campus, dealing with cross-collegiate and cross-provostal course duplication, ensuring adherence to Senate and Assembly policy, and the like; it would NOT function as a body to review the substance of course proposals.

It was suggested that Professor Koch respond to Dean Bruininks letter and explain that what he objects to is not what the Committee is proposing.

The Committee voted, with Professor Gunnar dissenting, to place the proposal for the TCUCCC on the docket of the April 18 Assembly meeting.

3. Responses to the Semester Conversion Standards

Professor Koch reported that she had been inundated with messages about the semester calendar; in many cases, the information upon which the senders relied came from one set of meeting minutes, or from an editorial in the DAILY, rather than from an understanding of the debate and discussion that has gone on over the last five months. It is unrealistic to expect faculty to read pages of minutes, it was said; an executive summary would be helpful.

Professor Koch said she had made the mistaken assumption that faculty senators represented their colleagues, and talked with them about the topics before the Senate. That is clearly not the case, she concluded.

4. Transition Standards

Professor Koch distributed copies of a revised policy concerning students enrolled at the University during the transition from quarters to semesters, and reported on changes made since the last meeting. She reported that she talked to the Change to Semesters Implementation Task Force about the importance of protecting money for advising, and the need for SCEP to keep an eye on what is being done with respect to advising. At one university, advising funding was cut before the transition, and as a result, students did not have a clue about how to deal with the conversion.

How would it be best to get the message out, asked one Committee member? One possibility would be a Senate resolution asking that funding for advising be protected. But how, with funding pared down so much, can the provost ask the deans to protect some activity? In the extreme, it was said, the argument is that there is no money to make the change, so it should not be made. More moderately, it could be said there is insufficient money to implement the change in an intelligent way, so the change

should be postponed.

Professor Koch agreed to draft a resolution. It was suggested that information about the expected magnitude of the problem be developed.

Dean Leik reported on an approach being taken by the Graduate School. They propose to develop computer information, provided by directors of graduate studies, so that any advisor could call it up and identify what a student has taken, what a student has left to take, how it could be handled under semesters, the time required, and so on. It cannot be made operational until the programs are ready, but the concept is one that could be used at the undergraduate level as well. A lot of work in total, it does not require a great deal from each program, and it could be assembled fast. This would not replace advisors, but it would permit students to try different things, identify problems, and then talk to an advisor.

People have to be able to see an advisor, said one Committee member; the University is continually being beat up because students cannot see anyone to get help with their programs. Nor will this be cost-free, added another Committee member.

The draft policy declared that "each degree-seeking student enrolled at the University . . . shall neither be disadvantaged nor advantaged" by the change to semesters. One Committee member suggested the language should be softened, so it was not so legalistic. If the purpose is to assure students, then it should only say students will not be disadvantaged and that faculty will try to make them equal in the transition.

In the documents from other institutions, Professor Koch explained, one has the sense they were not read only by students. One can fear that if both sides of the equation are not included, the language could be misinterpreted, and lead to courses being waived and that kind of thing, which will not ensure that students obtain a degree of quality. Without it, said another, people might be inclined to let students off because dealing with the problem is inconvenient.

Professor Koch said she would bring the proposal to the Senate Consultative Committee for discussion on April 29 and then return with any suggestions it might have.

4. Change to Semesters and the Graduate School

Professor Koch turned next to Associate Dean Leik to provide information on Graduate School activities with respect to semesters. Dr. Leik distributed a memo and a diagram outlining what the Graduate School is doing. He said that the Policy and Review Councils must approve all the changes, including all new courses. After they have approved the proposals for change in principle, the proposals will be taken to the Graduate School Executive Committee.

Dr. Leik reviewed the credits that would be required for Masters and Ph.D. degrees under semesters and quarters, and said the general attempt is to have semester requirements equal two-thirds of the quarter requirements, although the exact ratio cannot be observed because some of the existing credit requirements are not divisible by three. He noted some of the issues raised by the P&R Councils.

Eventually, all graduate courses will have to be re-approved for semesters. This means a new A99

form will be required for every course, and the A96 will be dropped; any course that does not have the new A99 form will automatically be discontinued, so that every existing course will not have to be reviewed. This is one way they are trying to minimize the amount of paper shuffling that will be required.

Time limits for degrees will be unaffected by the change to semesters.

These are not particularly controversial proposals, Dr. Leik concluded.

What is the role of SCEP in graduate education, asked one Committee member? That is an interesting question, Dr. Leik responded; technically, these are all Graduate School rules. In the case of 5-XXX courses that graduate programs rely on, but which are open to undergraduates and will be reviewed by the colleges, there is the possibility of conflict. That also raises the question of timing, because some of the courses are critical for other programs, and the latter will have to wait until they know about the courses in other departments.

It would be helpful if a form could be sent to departments asking for basic information about courses other programs rely on; those forms could be completed early so that programs could rely on them. It was agreed that SCEP should NOT be involved in this process.

There appear not to be policy changes in the proposals from Dr. Leik, Professor Koch said, and the Committee has no policy with respect to graduate degrees in any event. If the Graduate School has ideas about policy that SCEP should consider, she said, she would appreciate it if they would identify them.

One is the question of timing, Dr. Leik said. If one considers the bulletin deadline of fall, 1998, and looks at the schedule backwards, there is not a lot of time. One of his colleagues in the Graduate School is trying to identify a schedule so that the P&R Councils can go through their approvals in a timely way. This will be a problem. Apart from the timing, he pointed out, there will have to be negotiations and adjustments across fields, and it is not clear what all the steps will be.

Dr. Leik agreed that the provisions governing credits transferred from CEE would be moot if there is a unified registration system. The limits on transferring credits from other institutions would remain in force, however.

Another concern is student time spent in the programs, Dr. Leik said. Programs should be asked to think about this. As individual courses are dealt with, the total time required of students should be kept in mind, so that it is consistent with what is now required. Programs should see what happens with students who have 1-2-3 years into their education; there is trouble coming if departments think only about individual courses and not about overall program timing.

Professor Koch thanked Dr. Leik for providing the Committee with the information.

5. Grading Policy

Professor Koch turned next to the grading policy again, and reported on two messages she had received from Matthew Curry of MSA: students support a uniform grading policy but they do not

support the plus/minus grading (although they are split on the latter). Students, she reported, are also unhappy with the provision on repeating a course.

Committee members discussed alternatives to the draft language on repeating a course (necessitated by the fact that the Senate, by straw vote, indicated it was opposed to the existing language). The options appeared to be that students could receive their first grade, their last grade, their last grade but no better than a C, the grades could be averaged, or the policy could be left up to the colleges.

The Committee concluded it did not wish to leave the policy up to the colleges, because five students in the same class could all have different policies. The argument against allowing the second grade to count was economic, said one Committee member, but it appears that very few students actually repeat a course, so relative wealth is not a factor.

The Committee agreed unanimously to revise the policy so that the last grade in the course would be the one that counted in the grade point average.

Professor Koch then reported that there was an objection on the Senate floor to the provision requiring an instructor to turn in a grade (to make up an Incomplete) within four weeks of receiving the work. What, it was said, if someone is on sabbatical? What about the summer? In addition, who will scold the faculty member if the grade is not turned in--who will enforce it?

The latter responsibility is administrative, said one Committee member; if it is a Senate rule, the administration must implement it.

One problem is students who know what to do versus those who have not a clue how to respond if they do not get their grade. A lot of students may receive a C rather than an A because of a technical error, and not know what to do.

Objection was also raised to the requirement that there be a written agreement between instructor and student about how an I will be made up. Several Committee members spoke against removing this requirement, noting that it is a protection for the faculty member as much as for the student; it is a contract that the student can rely on and can be held to. One Committee member, noting the tendency of some faculty to give an I when in doubt about what happened to a student, said this policy will clarify what they must do.

The Committee voted to change the language about the deadline for reporting a grade.

Another question that has arisen, Professor Koch said, is whether the C or the C- should be equal to the S grade. Students on the Consultative Committee have asked why, when the C- is acceptable for credit on the A-F system, is it not be acceptable for credit on the S-N system?

The Committee, after brief deliberation, concluded it did not wish to change the provision and noted that the Senate could change the language on the floor, if it wished.

6. Tuition Remission for Graduate Students

Committee members discussed briefly the proposed change in Graduate School tuition and tuition benefits for GAs, but reached no conclusion on what position, if any, the Committee should take.

7. Semester Conversion Standards

Professor Koch then brought up the issue of the length of the semester. She recalled that SCEP had originally proposed a 15-week semester, but that had not worked. She said she was not prepared to sacrifice the 14-week semester at the price of breaking the 15-week fall semester into two pieces, sending students on break with work to do or in order to prepare for exams, when all other schools are not on such a schedule. That would be a disaster, she said, as well as educationally unsound. Perhaps in some fields, adding the five minutes per class will not work, but in most it should serve students well.

Those who argue the need for a 15-week semester and that 14 weeks are not enough must also argue, it was said, that Michigan and Wisconsin do not offer good undergraduate education, because their semesters are not 15 weeks, either.

One Committee member said that the concern in at least one discipline was that they could do nothing with the three-week interim, so proposed the 15-week semesters, with fall semester split, in order to fill out the academic year.

Another Committee member took sharp exception to this position. Faculty are not 100% teachers, it was said; they teach, do research, and provide service, and in some units, the general rule is that teaching is about 40% of the workload. One must take issue with the argument that if a faculty member is not teaching, he or she is not working. If the legislature has not learned that, or cannot be taught that, then the University is in trouble. Moreover, the faculty who work with the legislature have not indicated that the proposal for 14-week semesters is seen as a problem. The Minnesota State University system is probably also going to adopt a 14-week semester. If legislators wanted to be critical, presumably they could find objections to any academic calendar where the faculty are not teaching for 36 weeks a year.

The possible problems with GAs can be overcome, it was said; they can work in August or in May, whether or not there is a three-week interim. They need time for research in any event. Faculty appointments could run from August 16 to May 16, and they could bring in GAs early or late for training.

Hearing no further comment, Professor Koch adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand