

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, May 13, 1998
1:00 – 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall

- Present: Laura Coffin Koch (chair), Darwin Hendel, Gordon Hirsch, Robert Leik, Judith Martin, Kathleen Newell, Palmer Rogers, Craig Swan
- Regrets: Avram Bar-Cohen, Elayne Donahue, Thomas Johnson, Tina Rovick, Gayle Graham Yates
- Absent: Adam Miller, Kevin Nicholson, Jessie Jo Roos, William Van Essendelft
- Guests: Professor Catherine French (chair, IMG subcommittee)

[In these minutes: curriculum subcommittee; reconsideration of honors policy and policy on in-term exams outside class times; semester curriculum; report on IMG]

1. Twin Cities Curriculum Subcommittee

Professor Koch convened the meeting at 1:00 and reported that she had received nominees for the curriculum subcommittee from some (but not all) of the colleges that offer undergraduate instruction. The Committee agreed that names should be drawn from those colleges that had submitted names (CLA, CBS, IT, GC, CALA, Nursing) and that those colleges that did not respond would have to wait until next year to have representatives considered. Professor Koch said she would solicit nominees from the deans and circulate a draft membership list by email.

2. Policy Reconsiderations

Professor Koch next brought to the attention of the Committee several requests for reconsideration of policies.

- On the honors policy, the Committee was requested to base consideration of a degree with honors on the last two years of work, rather than the entire record. One problem is with transfer students who bring in a low GPA; those students are eligible to enter honors programs, but University students with the same GPA would not be. Committee members deliberated the merits of the entire record versus upper division work, and concluded it wished the honors degree (and degrees with distinction) to be based on the students' entire record. [The Senate subsequently decided, on motion by a member of SCEP, that the qualification for these degrees be based on the upper division record, with the understanding that honors programs will have criteria in place to screen students who have a poor lower division record.]

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- There has been a request that the Committee reconsider the prohibition on in-term exams being offered outside of the normal class meeting time. The problem is that students may be afraid to ask for an exception, even when faculty are accommodating, and such exams can conflict with other classes or with other activities (e.g., work) that the student may have scheduled. It was agreed that the requirement that any such exams be included in the printed class schedule beginning winter, 1999, and that for fall, 1998, if the instructor receives administrative approval, the exam times are included on the syllabus, and any student with a conflict is accommodated, such out-of-class exams would be approved.

3. The Curriculum on Semesters

Professor Koch reported that there is a concern that the change to semesters may have an impact on the curriculum. For example, quarter courses could be expanded to semesters, for the same number of credits, but with no additional content. Or quarter courses could be combined into one semester course, with a much-accelerated pace. There is need for a way to evaluate the curriculum once the University has converted to semesters.

One possibility, since the teaching evaluation forms need to be changed to accommodate the 10 questions approved by the Senate, is that the forms also include a question about the curriculum after the change. One problem is that many students will have no basis for making a comparison. One way to proceed would be to wait for a year or two after semesters have been in place, and THEN ask students for an evaluation of the curriculum; faculty will be exploring what can be done during the first semester terms, and it will take time for things to shake out.

Another possibility would be to speak with the institutions that have changed to semesters, and to bring in faculty members to talk about the conversion. Advising could be considered as well as course content.

Following the report from Professor French, the Committee returned briefly to this topic, and agreed that SCEP should appoint a working group to consider the implications of the change to semesters, and in doing so be sure that many pieces of data are pulled together and evaluated. One thing that happens is that people get worn out making the change to semesters, and no one evaluates what changes need to be made later.

4. Report on Incentives for Managed Growth (IMG)

Professor French, chair of the IMG subcommittee, now joined the meeting. She explained the work of the subcommittee during winter quarter. She explained that they had tried to identify problems and recommend actions. Dr. Bruininks has suggested that the subcommittee identify the top six items and take recommendations further, by giving more direction on what should be done.

Professor French and Committee members made a number of comments about the recommendations that bore on educational policy issues.

- There needs to be involvement of the Graduate School in the compact process to champion interdisciplinary activities

- Use of adjunct faculty and graduate students for teaching has changed much, and SCEP should monitor this closely. Professor Swan said that Dr. Zetterberg will be gathering data on this matter, and it should be presented to SCEP.
- The curriculum committee for the campuses should not only consider course duplication, but also grade inflation and course credit inflation
- In terms of the need for some University-wide initiatives, Professor Swan commented that the general biology program works well and the Council on Liberal Education is looking at writing as a degree requirement.
- One concern is that IMG may lead to growth, but unmanaged growth. There could be more students than expected. There will always be demand; the University must see that it is met. The problem is a clash between what the colleges are enabled to do under IMG and what the administration might think about for the larger good of the University.
- A question that has arisen is whether the administration should give away ALL the discretionary dollars; it may be that a growth tax will be considered. That would provide funds for problems (e.g., support for interdisciplinary work) or units that go across college lines, or units that suffer revenue decreases but that the University wishes continued.
- Tuition income should follow the designator, but there will be more flexibility in the future. Some colleges are more costly (e.g., they have more labs), and those difference must be recognized. There are two related issues: the University may wish to support an activity that does not generate revenue, and some units may be able to fund themselves – but are not activities in which the University wishes to engage.
- There are valid reasons for enrollment caps, but they do have an impact on the ability of a college to grow, and SCEP should review them.
- Has anyone inquired about the quality of entering students? One concern under IMG is that units will “dig deeper into the pool,” while the goal, for the Twin Cities campus, is that 80% of entering students will be from the top quartile. This is another issue for SCEP: maintaining standards.

Asked about the timeline for the study of issues, when the subcommittee called for such study, Professor French said that the subcommittee identified issues, but that it will be up to Senate committees to decide what to do with them. The subcommittee, she noted, has no power to implement its recommendations.

Professor French also pointed out that there needs to be a consideration of the term limits for subcommittee members.

One Committee member said there is a cause to be concerned about IMG: if it pushes efforts toward the larger and more popular courses, there will be an impetus to spend less time on research; as enrollment drives tuition, there will be more focus on enrollment. There have been proposals for new MA programs, for example, but with no cuts anywhere else. The research mission of the University may

be jeopardized. It is simply untrue to say that with new programs and courses, there is no implication for faculty work.

Professor Koch thanked Professor French for the work of the subcommittee.

Professor Koch announced that Professor Martin would chair SCEP next year. Professor Swan moved that the Committee commends Professor Koch for her service as chair, and the Committee gave her a round of applause. Professor Koch then adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota