

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Thursday, May 26, 1994
1:30 - 3:15
Room 229 Nolte Center

Present: Kenneth Heller (chair), Anita Cholewa, Thomas Clayton, James Cotter, Sara Hornstra, Manuel Kaplan, Ryan Nilsen, Darren Walhof, Gayle Graham Yates

Regrets: Robert Johnson, Michael Pawlicki

Absent: Craig Bursch, Sue Donaldson, Megan Gunnar, Darwin Hendel, William Van Essendelft

Guests: Vice President Anne Hopkins, Dallis Perry (University Counseling Services)

Others: none

[In these minutes: Residential college; evaluation of teaching]

1. Residential College

Professor Heller convened the meeting at 1:30 and welcomed Vice President Hopkins and Dr. Dallis Perry to the meeting. He turned first to Vice President Hopkins for a report on the development of a residential college.

Dr. Hopkins distributed a flyer describing the residential college that is provided to students and described the program.

- This will be a pilot program next fall, developed through cooperation with CLA and IT faculty. Freshmen who will be recruited for the residential college have all been placed in two wings of Territorial Hall; the number of students who will elect to participate is not known at this point.
- There is a half-time graduate student in charge of the program; there will also be an advisory committee.
- It is expected that students will study together and must commit to taking at least one course per quarter in common with other residential college students (a range of options will be provided, and will consist of standard courses); funds for social activities and peer advisors will be provided. There will also be one faculty member each from CLA and IT to serve as advisors. Students must also commit to working no more than 20 hours per week.
- The proposal is based on the two strongest predictors of student success: peer/peer interaction and

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peer/faculty interaction.

- It is hoped there will be about 300 students in the pilot; if it works, it can be expanded and also offered on the St. Paul campus. It is not expected to be something every student would want; it is intended to be part of a range of options for University students.
- It is hoped that there will be sections of classes that are composed entirely of residential college students.
- There have been three proposals for residential colleges in the past ten years; all have failed, primarily because they were too grandiose and dependent on construction of facilities. Dr. Hopkins has insisted that this program start small, to be sure it works.
- The goal was a diverse group of students in terms of race, gender, and interests, so grouping majors together was not proposed. The most complicated part of the proposal was the courses in common and the setting aside of sections for the residential college students. They are trying to see what works.
- The program will be for the freshman year only. Some programs do run four years; there is no evidence students benefit any more from a longer program, but there IS evidence of a significant effect of such programs in the freshman year. A four-year program creates a college within the University, set off, and that is not what is sought.
- Evaluation will take place though comparison with a matched cohort of students who are not in the residential college. One different result desired is that the residential college students come back; another is that the students' academic performance is satisfactory. There are no admissions criteria, yet, except that the student must have been admitted to CLA or IT. It is not an honors college. There is no cost to the student for participating in the residential college.

2. Student Evaluation of Teaching

Vice President Hopkins then distributed material related to the Senate policy on student evaluation of teaching contributions. She noted that the policy called for student evaluation as well as peer evaluation, with the latter to be implemented by the Fall of 1994 (she has sent a note to deans and department heads reminding them of the requirement). Student evaluation began in the Fall of 1993.

The process does not work in clinical instruction nor in the many classes in the health sciences that use multiple instructors.

The student evaluation portion of the policy has been implemented. Dr. Hopkins informed the Committee that she had, on the advice of survey experts, added a verbal anchor point to the mid-point of the 7-point scales. The question most raised about the survey, she reported, is whether or not verbal anchors should be attached to the remainder of the points on the scale. The data from the surveys have not yet been normed.

Dr. Perry provided the Committee an overview of the data from the surveys. It is clear that the

policy has led to an increase, by about 40%, in the number of student surveys being administered. On the 1 to 7 scales, for the three questions having to do with the instructor, 90% of the ratings were 4 or above. The scores were lowest on the question having to do with the physical environment; that having to do with the instructor's knowledge received the highest scores. Ratings increased with the course level; ratings were higher for: discussion/performance classes rather than lecture and labs; small classes versus large classes; and electives versus required courses. These results are consistent with the research literature. The one result slightly at variance with the literature is that non-major courses receive higher ratings than major courses--but that effect interacts with the higher ratings for electives rather than required courses.

Dr. Hopkins reported that there has been no policing of departments to learn whether or not they are complying with the policy. While there are a large number of courses in which the surveys were not used, many are not suitable for the surveys: they may use multiple instructors, they may be thesis credits or directed study or research, or may be clinical instruction. The policy is explicit in that it does not apply to courses with more than two instructors. The policy question, Dr. Hopkins commented, is to obtain a sense of how widely the surveys are used--faculty are required to use them, by Senate policy--and what to do if there is non-compliance. She said she would NOT relish the idea of being a policing agency; when the extent of non-compliance is learned, she will send a letter to the departments reminding them of their responsibility to follow the policy. Moreover, she noted, departments are not REQUIRED to use the Office of Measurement Services for administration of the survey results--they may administer and use the survey results themselves. It would be better that the results be part of the pool of data being developed, but it is not required.

The standard deviations on the survey results are between .7 and .8, so the results are fairly consistent, Dr. Perry reported in response to a question.

Discussion then turned to the question of verbal anchors for all seven points of the scales. Dr. Hopkins noted again that experts urged strongly there be an "average" or "satisfactory" anchor at the mid-point of the scale, but recalled that SCEP had deliberated a long time, in its initial development of the policy, about the use of verbal anchors and had decided to use them only at the two endpoints. These arguments, she commented, can "drive you crazy."

Committee members deliberated, with Drs. Hopkins and Perry, for a considerable time about the merits and methodology of the absence or presence of verbal anchors. One of the principal points of debate revolved around the location of the verbal "middle" point; inasmuch as 90% of the results were at 4 or above, it was argued by several, the "average" should be set at 3, providing a greater spread for the positive appraisals. This is a university, it was said, and that SHOULD mean that there would be more good than bad results, and so more discrimination among degrees of good should be allowed.

One Committee member then moved to attach verbal anchors to all seven points, using the words that had been used for many years in earlier student surveys: exceptionally good, excellent, very good, good, fair, poor, and very poor. There was further discussion about this proposed scale. It was noted that the results from the current year would then have to be discarded if this scale were to be adopted and the survey forms changed; this could lead to faculty and student annoyance, because they will have spent time on the surveys and will want to see results. One possibility discussed was to experiment, using the existing form for most units but using the form with all seven anchor points in some, to determine if the

words affected the results.

The Committee then voted on the motion to adopt the seven verbal anchors; the motion passed 5 - 1 with 2 abstentions.

Dr. Hopkins then inquired if there had been any comments on the form. A questionnaire has been sent to a small sample of faculty and chairs to learn their reactions; the results are not yet in.

One committee member pointed out that some of the language intended to guide interpretation of the survey results is not understandable. Dr. Hopkins agreed and said she would try to have it fixed. This, it was said, is but one manifestation of a larger problem, the focus on quantifiable data. Something is missing that should be in a humane institution; there must be a qualitative evaluation in order not to miss the meaning of the experience. It is NOT easy to obtain that information, but that does not mean it should not be done. It was noted that there is provision on the forms for student comments. One piece of information missing is the student's grade in the class; although supposedly there is no relationship between grade and rating, that conclusion was challenged by several Committee members.

Another question is whether or not something should be done to encourage use of the forms in classes with more than two instructors. Units are affected disproportionately. It is hard to generalize, said one Committee member; some multiple-instructor classes might reasonably be able to use the forms while others would not. Dr. Perry noted that Measurement Services works with units to develop customized evaluation plans. It would be helpful to learn if there are effective and efficient ways to evaluate these classes, it was said. The survey is a blunt instrument, and need not be used in every situation.

Dr. Hopkins then reported that there have been inquiries about removing the question dealing with physical facilities and with the level of the instructor's knowledge. It could be noted that the physical facilities are not under the control of the instructor. The question about the instructor's knowledge should not be dropped, argued one Committee member. Although the student may not know enough to evaluate that knowledge in general, it is an opportunity for the student to indicate if instructor communicates that knowledge. Students can tell if the instructor is inappropriate and "bs-ing" his or her way through.

There appeared to be no sentiment among Committee members to make any changes in the questions.

4. Farewell

Professor Clayton, noting he would miss the last meeting, extended appreciation to other Committee members, telling them they were a great pleasure to work with and that the experience had been useful and enlightening. Other Committee members made similar comments.

Professor Heller then adjourned the meeting at 3:10.

-- Gary Engstrand