

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, March 6, 1996
1:00 - 3:00
Room 626 Campus Club

Present: Laura Koch (chair), Avram Bar-Cohen, Anita Cholewa, Gayle Graham Yates, Megan Gunnar, Darwin Hendel, Thomas Johnson, Jeffrey Larsen, Robert Leik, Judith Martin, Ryan Nilsen, W. Phillips Shively

Regrets: Paul Cleary, Elayne Donahue, Robert Johnson, Glenn Merkel

Absent: Helen Phin, Mark Schuller, William Van Essendelft

Guests: Professor James Cotter (Chair, Morse-Alumni Nominating Committee); Sam Lewis (Registrar); Dr. Peter Zetterberg (Academic Affairs)

[In these minutes: Morse-Alumni awards; semester conversion standards (semester length, the calendar, the interim, course reduction); grading policy.]

1. Morse-Alumni Nominations

Professor Koch convened the meeting and welcomed Professor James Cotter from the Morris campus, chair of the Morse-Alumni nominating committee. The Committee accepted the slate of nominees from the nominating committee and elected them the 1995-96 winners. Those selected will be made public later.

2. Semester Conversion Standards

A. THE CALENDAR, LENGTH OF SEMESTER, AND INTERIM

Professor Koch then turned to Dr. Zetterberg to lead a discussion of a possible revision of the first of the Semester Conversion Standards, the one that sets the calendar principles.

Dr. Zetterberg said he has been following the semester discussions very closely and understands the problems that various elements of the University have with the calendar principles; he has, as a result, brought to the Committee suggestions for some slight revisions. He presented to the Committee a survey of the calendars of the other Big Ten schools as well as the calendars of about 30 of the University's peers as well as a draft alternative calendar for the Committee to consider, as follows.

Fall Semester 1999 (70 class days; it could be 70-74 class days, depending on year)

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August 23	Monday	B-base faculty appointment begins
September 6	Monday	Labor Day
September 7	Tuesday	Classes begin
November 25-26	Thurs-Friday	Thanksgiving holiday
December 15	Wednesday	Last day of instruction
December 16	Thursday	Study day
December 17-23	Friday-Thurs	Final examinations
January 7	Friday	Final grades due

Spring Semester 2000 (74 class days; it could always be 74 or 75 class days)

January 17	Monday	Martin Luther King holiday
January 18	Tuesday	Classes begin
March 27-31	Monday-Friday	Spring break
May 5	Friday	Last day of instruction
May 6-7	Saturday-Sun	Study days
May 8-13	Monday-Sat	Final examinations
May 19	Friday	Final grades due B-base faculty appointment ends

Intersession and Summer Session 2000

May 22	Monday	3-week Intersession begins
June 9	Friday	3-week Intersession ends
June 12	Monday	Summer Term I begins
July 14	Friday	Summer Term I ends
July 17	Monday	Summer Term II begins
August 18	Friday	Summer Term II ends

Few institutions have a full 75-day (15-week) semester in the fall, and even the large public institutions that begin in August have fewer than 75 days. Dr. Zetterberg said he has not looked at the spring semester calendars, but will do so. He speculated, however, that there would be equivalent variation among institutions on spring semesters as well, and that the calendars vary from year to year. Everyone would like a semester as close to 75 days as possible, but Minnesota would by no means be out of line to have one less than 75 days.

Dr. Zetterberg said he also looked at the 9-month (B base) faculty contract and how it might affect a calendar decision. He said he assumed a B appointment would begin two weeks before classes begin; he recognizes that some argue one week is sufficient, but two weeks seems to be the minimum time new faculty would need. Under one calendar he proposes, B appointments would begin August 23 and would end May 19.

A May 19 end date imposes constraints on the options for a May term. The three week term can only be fitted in if spring semester starts the day after New Year's (with fall finals having been December 23) and there is no spring break. That, he concluded, would not work.

On the subject of the interim, Dr. Zetterberg said he can identify only four research institutions that have a January term: Johns Hopkins, MIT, Cornell, and Delaware. On the other hand, a May term is becoming increasingly common; four of the Big Ten schools have one. This term, he said, seems to be growing in popularity.

Given the constraint of the B appointment, Dr. Zetterberg said that if the Committee's calendar recommendation is to include the three-week option, it should be offered after spring semester, outside the B term, and considered to be an early summer session term.

One Committee member inquired where the funding for the three-week term would come from. The idea was not to have a revenue-based plan; where would the money come to pay salaries? What about TAs and RAs? It would be funded the same way Summer Session is funded, Dr. Zetterberg replied, and Summer Session is currently a revenue-producing unit. He recognized that this way of structuring the interim varied from the original rationale for the term; if a faculty member wanted to work with a student on a special project, that enrollment would not bring in sufficient revenue to support the activity. But the interim cannot be accommodated in the B appointment.

Committee members made a number of points in the ensuing discussion.

- The calendar proposal appears to resolve the (imputed) legislative concern about the length of the academic year vis-a-vis the nine-month faculty appointments.
- What gain is there to having the interim with a different name; why not just make it part of the summer sessions? Because it gives to departments the flexibility to do things they may not be able to do in a summer session term.
- It is worrisome to label the interim part of Summer Session, because in the minds of many students, once "summer session" begins, they can leave.
- Could a faculty member supervise two or three students during the interim? How would that be paid for? How is it paid for during Summer Session? If it would not work there, it would not work during the interim.
- Faculty would be compensated during the interim just like they are compensated during Summer Session; it is assumed that some but not all faculty would participate in the interim, as is the current practice with Summer Session. There is nothing in any of this language that would prohibit a faculty member from supervising independent study, even if tuition does not cover it--just as faculty may supervise independent student study during the academic year, even though it may not be part of their workload. This would probably play out differently in each college.
- This changes the definition of what would done during the interim. In at least one college, summer salaries are paid through the Summer Session office, using a formula that most feel is not adequate.

If there is low enrollment in a course, it will not be offered, and the Committee is fooling itself if it believes there will be a large number of interim courses. There would have been a lot more were there a January term, and more independent study, small groups, etc.

No one ever thought there would be a LARGE number of courses in a May term. It appears that few programs care a lot about the interim, but for a few programs it is extremely important; it could be possible for a faculty member to negotiate a reduced teaching load during one of the semesters in order to offer courses during the interim.

- The May interim gives students the option of getting better summer jobs, and therefore perhaps not having to work as much during the academic year. . . . no. But faculty could at least feel less guilty for assigning more work for classes!

Student employment at the University declined by 20% when the federal government increased grant and loan funds for individual students.

- The earliest the summer sessions would start would be June 12 or June 15, which is after the K-12 schools are out; a problem with the earlier calendar proposal was that summer session started about June 1.
- The language in the proposed revised standard dealing with faculty appointments should be in the comment, because faculty appointments are properly the concern of the Committee on Faculty Affairs, not SCEP. The provisions for B appointment faculty are a widespread concern, however, and should be included--and reinserted in the standards whenever Faculty Affairs acts on the issue.
- Should the calendar principles be divided into separate motions? There could be separate motions on the length of the semester and on whether or not to have an interim. The question of the interim is a live question, and some colleges have indicated they do not see the need for it.

Dividing the motion risks absurd results, such as 15 week semesters that must begin after Labor Day and end before the holidays. That risk may be worth taking, to ensure support for whatever is adopted.

To not permit the interim, or for the standards to be silent on it (thereby, presumably, not permitting such a session without Assembly approval later), would wreak havoc on some departments that need the late spring for outdoor field work, especially the biological and agricultural disciplines. By splitting the motion, there is the risk that the many departments that do not need or care about the interim will vote it down, inadvertently disregarding the needs of the disciplines that DO need it.

To eliminate the interim also eliminates the possibility, for departments that want it, of offering "short semester" courses by combining the interim and both summer sessions into one course (in which there would have to be minor adjustments to accommodate 14-plus weeks worth of work into 13 weeks).

The language in the proposal from Dr. Zetterberg, as well as the language in the draft standard

already circulated, is permissive, and no department needs to make use of the interim if it does not wish to. Those with a compelling reason, however, can use it.

The issue of how faculty who teach during the interim is not resolved.

The inclusion of the interim with the regular summer sessions would nonetheless mean prescribed periods during which courses could be offered; for the draft calendar from Dr. Zetterberg, for example, there would be six different possibilities for classes:

- a 3-week session, May 22 - June 9
- an 8-week session, May 22 - July 14
- a 13-week session, May 22 - August 18
- a 5-week session, June 12 - July 14
- a 10-week session, June 12 - August 18
- a 5-week session, July 17 - August 18

That is more than enough. Nonetheless, some units may still wish additional variations.

It is incredible that people say they have no idea what they would do with an interim; there are many, many things that could be done. Perhaps only 5% of the faculty will offer an interim, but who is hurt if it is permitted? Departments that have ONLY been trying to imagine how to cram a 14-week course into three weeks need to think more about the possibilities, such as an intensive lab experience, or a make-up seminar, or course supplements; there are an enormous number of things faculty could do with the interim.

It was agreed without dissent that the calendar principles should be voted on as a single item.

- There has been considerable expression of sentiment that departments simply want to be TOLD what the calendar will be so that they can get about their business; they want to quit talking about it and be informed of the FACTS. It may be advisable to act on a specific calendar this year, rather than waiting until next year, it was suggested, given the widespread interest in having the issue settled.
- Various language could be inserted in the standard about when the spring semester would start; the easiest and cleanest, however, is to always make it the third Tuesday of January, which will avoid any conflict with the Martin Luther King holiday and will also ensure a winter break of adequate length.

Dr. Zetterberg confirmed that there would be sent out, after the April 18 Senate meeting, a packet of materials about semesters. It was suggested that he also distribute a memorandum--perhaps the existing one--about who is responsible for what tasks in the semester conversion. Departments do not understand who is doing what. The Graduate School has created a big problem by sending out a memo insisting on semester preparations before departments have any idea what the parameters will be.

B. COURSE REDUCTION

Professor Koch next raised with the Committee the issue of course reduction when the change to semesters is made. Should there be a requirement that courses be cut by one-third across the board? Should departments be told they can do what they wish? Should there be guidelines? This has been a problem at other institutions that have converted to semesters, so should be dealt with in some way, she concluded.

One Committee member thought that course reduction was already part of the conversion standards as an over-arching policy. Since majors have to approved by curriculum committees, would not the authority for course reduction reside with them?

Dr. Zetterberg advised that it would be helpful if there were language in the standards about course reduction. It should say something like "in general, all departments and programs should reduce the credit value of their curriculum by one third." In some cases, it may be reduced by one-fourth while in others it may be more than one-third; that will be up to the deans to decide, he said. It would be a mistake to be silent on the issue--and if the change to semesters is to be neutral with respect to faculty workload, there will HAVE to be a reduction in courses.

The first criterion, argued one Committee member, should be that time to complete a degree should not expand. One worries that people will expand their courses, and thus lengthen the amount of time a student must spend on major courses. The number of courses on the books is less critical than demands on the students; if a department has the staff to offer more than two-thirds of its present course offerings, that is fine, but they cannot demand more courses of students for a degree.

It was unanimously voted that (1) the calendar principles should be reworked along the lines discussed at the meeting today, and (2) a new Semester Conversion Standard would be drafted that spoke to the question of student workload and course reduction. Professor Koch thanked Dr. Zetterberg for joining the meeting and providing the information.

3. Grading Policy

Professor Koch next welcomed Sam Lewis to the meeting to discuss information he had gathered about grades and to raise questions about how transcripts will be treated for students enrolled at the University during the conversion to semesters.

First the Committee considered the number of students who had repeated courses; for the Twin Cities campus, there were 161 course repetitions, although after subsequent conversation, it appeared that the list may not have picked up all of the students who repeated courses. It was pointed out, however, that even if the number were wrong by an order of magnitude, it still wouldn't matter, when one realizes that in any quarter there are well over 100,000 course registrations.

The Committee promptly concluded that course repetition was not an issue worth worrying about, but did review information from other schools about how grades in repeat courses are treated. Of the 30 AAU institutions about which information was presented, the practice varies. All appear to put both grades on the transcript; seventeen count both grades in the GPA (although the credits count only once toward the degree in almost all cases) while six count only the second (or last) enrollment in the course.

The Committee decided to leave the language of the present draft as it stands: students may repeat a course, but the credits count only once and only the last grade earned will count in the GPA.

One Committee member then noted that a student enrolling in fall, 1996, will be at the University for three years under quarters, then one or two years under semesters, and during each period will have a GPA calculated. What happens fall, 1999? Mr. Lewis said there would be continue to be a term GPA, as there is at present, labelled as quarter or semester (as is also the case at present, since there are semester-length courses in CEE). All the quarter grades and credits, however, would be translated into semester credits in order to fit semester calculations. No students will receive a calculation based on quarters after fall, 1999.

Is there a way to ensure that students will not be put at a disadvantage by the translation, asked one Committee member? Mr. Lewis said they will write the program so students are not. If a student has 120 quarter credits and a 3.0 GPA, the conversion to semesters will give the student 80 semester credits and a 3.0 GPA. The program must be built that way, he said, and they will have to be very careful; the result should be transparent to the student.

The transcript will note on the back that the University changed to semesters in fall, 1999, Mr. Lewis said.

In terms of calculating the number of credits a student needs to graduate, Mr. Lewis said, the APAS system does that now. All programs will need to be redone.

Course numbering is also an issue, Professor Koch commented. Would it be a problem to keep Math 1111 under semesters? Mr. Lewis said he did not know; he said his office is considering several course numbering schemes and will try to identify reasonable choices.

Departments need guidelines quickly, it was said; for many that rely on introductory work in other fields, they need to know what the course number in those introductory courses will be (e.g., math, chemistry, physics, psychology, etc.).

How was this handled when the University changed to four-digit numbers, asked one Committee member? No one at the meeting knew, although in that case courses remained the same but were simply assigned new numbers; in this case, many of the courses will be new. Mr. Lewis said they are considering numbering schemes of 3, 4, and 5 digits. Right now courses have four digits, and can have a letter attached as well, so the field is five characters; that may not be a limitation, Mr. Lewis said, depending on what new system the University purchases.

Advisors have expressed a desire that course numbers be different from quarters to semesters.

One possibility that might be considered, Mr. Lewis related, is that 1-XXX courses would be truly freshman courses, with no prerequisites, while 2-XXX courses could require prerequisites.

There is at present no designation scheme for the last three digits of course numbers (except for some enrollments, such as directed study and so on), so departments devise their own schemes, if they wish.

How would honors courses be counted or required? No one has considered the issue; one possibility would be require the same proportion of courses. This could be a problem, however, if a student has taken honors courses under both systems.

One concern to his office, Mr. Lewis reported, is the way course designators are abbreviated on different campuses. On the Twin Cities, FR is Forest Resources; at Duluth, it is French. This is a big problem, and course abbreviations need to be unique. Another issue is whether all of the Psychology 1001 or Chemistry 1001 courses will be the same across campuses.

It was suggested that Professor Koch summarize these issues that need attention and identify those that rise to the level of policy matters for SCEP to consider. She agreed to do so, with the help of an ad hoc subcommittee consisting of herself, Mr. Nilsen, and Mr. Lewis.

Professor Koch then drew the attention of Committee members to a memo from Interim CLA Dean Holt and Interim Associate Dean Skaggs about the semester calendar and grading. They urged adoption of the Wisconsin calendar, because it is with Wisconsin that Minnesota will have the most interaction, and that Minnesota also adopt the Wisconsin grading system, which is as follows:

A	4.0 grade points
A/B	3.5
B	3.0
B/C	2.5
C	2.0
D	1.0
F	0

Committee members offered observations:

- This system would eliminate the problem of whether the C or the C- should equal the S.
- It eliminates the difficulty of trying to decide between an A- and a B+.
- This system could probably be accommodated in a new computer system.
- The system has no definitions of the grades. Many grading systems do not; they are important and need to be retained.
- The system should have a C/D option as well, but a C/D would not be equivalent to an S.
- Some students might think this is worse (the straight A students) but many would be better off (those who are high B students).

It was agreed that Professor Koch would make inquiries about the advisability of presenting this as an alternative grading proposal, including a C/D, to garner views on whether to present it to the Senate.

Professor Koch thanked Mr. Lewis for joining the meeting and adjourned it at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota