

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, March 10, 1999
1:00 – 3:00
Room 346 Coffman Union**

Present: Judith Martin (chair), Darwin Hendel, Gordon Hirsch, Robert Johnson, Laura Coffin Koch, Christine Maziar, Darcia Narvaez, Martin O’Hely, Palmer Rogers, Tina Rovick, Richard Skaggs, Suzanne Bates Smith, Thomas Soulen, Steven Sperber, Craig Swan

Regrets: Kathleen Newell, Jeff Ratliff-Crain

Absent: Shumaila Anwer, Laura Beauchane, Angela Bos

Guests: none

[In these minutes: Twin Cities academic progress policy; instructor knowledge of student grading base; future calendars; implementation of policy; award winners; basketball]

1. Twin Cities Campus Academic Progress Policy

Professor Martin convened the meeting at 1:00 and drew the attention of (Assembly) Committee members to a proposal from MSA to revise the academic progress policy that had been tabled at the last meeting of the Campus Assembly.

The principal change requested was to delete language permitting departments or programs, with decanal approval, to require students to be full-time. One Committee member inquired if the administration would interpret the lack of permission in the policy as a prohibition; Vice Provost Swan replied that it would not. As long as that is the case, it was said, then it is acceptable to strike the language. It was noted that some programs do require full-time attendance, because of equipment or personnel or facilities or the need for recency of training, and interconnectedness, in the curriculum. On the other hand, if a program such as English or Geography were to propose requiring students to be full time, the proposal would have a very tough time being approved.

With this and one other modest change, the Committee unanimously approved the revised policy for presentation to the Campus Assembly.

* 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 represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate or Assembly, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

2. Grade Base Information to Instructors

Professor Martin next pointed to an email exchange between several individuals concerning a request from the Duluth campus that instructors not know the grading system for which students in a class registered (A-F or S/N). All grades would be turned in on the A-F system, and the Registrar would automatically convert grades to S or N for students enrolled S/N (e.g., a D would be converted by the computer to an N). One question was whether the entire University should do the same. Committee members made several observations about the request.

-- What is the advantage of blind grading? What is this intended to prevent? There is a concern that knowing a student is on S/N grading could have a subtle effect on how the instructor evaluates the student. Is this really a problem?

-- Can instructors set a higher threshold for an S than the C- (C at Duluth)? They can, and at least some do, although it is not known how widespread the practice is. How is this communicated to other institutions that evaluate transcripts? It is not; the only thing known is what is on the transcript itself, which uses the Uniform Grading Policy language to indicate that performance was at least equal to a C-.

-- One Committee member objected sharply to withholding from the instructor information about which grading system a student enrolled for, and maintained that the instructor has a right to know. Several other Committee members voice agreement with this view, one expressing distaste for the idea that faculty cannot make reasonable decisions about grading students.

-- It is possible that if an instructor is setting grade cutoffs, and uses point totals in some way, the cutoffs could be different if the students enrolled S/N were excluded from the distribution. (For example, what if, on blind grading, all the S/N students received the highest scores?)

-- For students who are tentative about being students (e.g., returning as older adults), the use of S/N grading can be helpful, but instructors can also provide advice to those students based on their grading system.

-- Is Duluth seeking an exception from University policy, asked one Committee member? Duluth is not part of the Senate, so has some autonomy. Strong opposition to approving this practice was voiced. Several Committee members urged that if there is additional PeopleSoft programming cost to be absorbed to accommodate the Duluth request, the Duluth campus should pay those costs.

Professor Martin summarized the views expressed by saying that from an educational policy perspective, the Committee believes there is value to the instructor in knowing the grade base of students in courses, or even if not beneficial, there is no reason that they should not know. There is a strong sense that the Committee does NOT want blind grading for the campuses other than Duluth.

3. Future Calendars

Ms. VanVoorhis distributed copies of the 2000-2001 and draft 2001-2002 calendars, and noted the considerable variation between campuses and colleges. Several points about the discrepancies in the calendars were noted.

-- Ms. VanVoorhis reported that campuses other than the Twin Cities often do not think about calendars more than a year ahead of time, so it has been very difficult to get information from them.

-- One Committee member expressed concern about how changes are made, after the Senate has approved a uniform calendar. Is there official approval from the President's office, as required by policy? A recent policy change requires that exceptions come first to this Committee before going to the President.

Dr. Swan suggested that he and Ms. VanVoorhis remind everyone of the process and of the need for advance notification. It was also suggested that Ms. VanVoorhis could make suggestions to the campuses.

4. Implementation of Academic Policies and Procedures

Professor Martin commented that she has heard concern expressed about implementation of all the policies and practices that the Assembly approved making uniform for the Twin Cities campus last spring. Who is monitoring them to be sure they are followed?

Dr. Swan reported that he, Ms. VanVoorhis, and Professor Koch had met last spring to identify who was responsible for what and to set out a calendar of when things should happen. Much of what the Assembly approved can be made to happen by the Registrar. In some cases, department and college review is required; the timetable calls for those reviews to be completed spring quarter. The Council of Undergraduate Deans is tracking these various items as well.

5. Awards

Professor Martin turned next to Professor Koch and Ms. Rovick for presentation of the nominees for the Morse-Alumni and graduate/professional teaching award. By unanimous vote, the Committee closed the discussion. The nominees were presented and unanimously approved.

In the case of the Morse-Alumni award, there were 28 nominees from across the University. The nominating committee was permitted to identify 8 winners. In the case of the graduate/professional award, there were 31 nominees; the nominating committee was, again, permitted to identify 8 winners. Both Professor Koch and Ms. Rovick marveled at the extraordinary quality of the work of the nominees, and said that those who did not win will be encouraged to apply again. One member of the graduate/professional nominating committee suggested that the dossiers of those who did NOT win be sent to the legislature--to demonstrate how good people are.

6. Committee Schedule

It was agreed without dissent that the Committee schedule would remain the same for next year: Wednesday afternoons, 1:00 - 3:00.

7. Basketball

The Committee held a discussion with Dr. Swan about the situation in the men's basketball program, and agreed that when the time was appropriate, the Committee might wish to visit the question of the structure of academic advising in athletics.

Professor Martin adjourned the meeting at 2:15.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota