

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, March 3, 2004
1:00 – 3:00
238A Morrill Hall

- Present: Emily Hoover (chair), Wilbert Ahern, Roxanne Beauclair, Victor Bloomfield, Vernon Cardwell, Shawn Curley, Michael Edlavitch, Gretchen Haas, Frank Kulacki, Scott LeBlanc, Marsha Odom, Mary Ellen Shaw, Craig Swan, Douglas Wangensteen, Joel Weinsheimer
- Absent: Dale Branton, Geoffrey Meisner, Martin Sampson, Karen Seashore, Mary Sue Simmons
- Guests: Dr. Peter Zetterberg (Institutional Research and Reporting), Dr. John Ziegenhagen (Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost), Dr. Linda Ellinger (Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost); Professor David McGowan (Law School)

[In these minutes: (1) certificate programs; (2) Law School calendar and grading; (3) ACT writing sample; (4) graduation planner; (5) transfer student graduation rates]

1. Certificates

Professor Hoover convened the meeting at 1:00 and welcomed Drs. Peter Zetterberg and John Ziegenhagen to join Dean Bloomfield in a discussion of certificates.

Dean Bloomfield started by describing certificates as an informal way for people to keep up with the times and as educational opportunities for non-traditional students who may need to upgrade their skills. The University has an abundance of policies on the web concerning certificates. As one looks to the future of higher education, life-long learning, and more professional education, certificates may play a bigger and bigger role. This Committee is the right place to talk about certificate programs.

Certificate programs use regular courses but often with more adjunct faculty, which raises questions. The transferability of certificate programs into degree programs (or the lack of transferability) also raises questions, Dean Bloomfield said. The Provost has established a task force on post-baccalaureate certificate programs that he and Dean Mary Nichols co-chair; they plan to discuss the operation of and philosophy behind certificate programs. There are pre-baccalaureate certificate programs, which the task force will not address, but its actions will be directed at ALL post-baccalaureate programs.

His issues are different from those of Dean Bloomfield, Dr. Zetterberg told the Committee. His questions have to do with the basic University mission and with policy considerations. About two years ago there was a task force on certificate programs that he was not a member of but that he met with once. He said he became alarmed at what the task force decided to do. While the representation on the task

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force was good, it made a questionable decision, in his view: that the University should have two kinds of certificate programs, one set approved by the Board of Regents with official coursework and notation on a transcript, and unofficial programs that any department or faculty members can create, advertise, and award certificates for. This struck him as odd, Dr. Zetterberg said, but he learned that the Academic Health Center wanted that option. Medical residents were certified in their specialty, even though they were never formally enrolled in a certificate program. The Medical School had operated this way for a very long time and did not see why it needed to have Board of Regents' approval. Dr. Zetterberg said he agreed with the Medical School's position, but that is the reason why informal certificate programs were permitted.

Since that time, requirements for international students have led to a change (they must be enrolled in a degree or certificate program) and the Medical School, Dentistry, and Veterinary Medicine have changed their views.

The issue, Dr. Zetterberg said, is whether a department/college/faculty member should be allowed to create certificate programs and advertise them. That seems strange, because the President could receive a call complaining about a program that neither he nor the University would have any record of. With the Medical School issue resolved, there is no reason to allow informal programs--and there is no way to know if there even ARE such programs because there is no record of them and nothing in the student information system or on transcripts. The University does award formal certificates for the teaching-training programs in Education and Human Development, but seldom awards formal certificates in any other area.

There are eleven possible degree and certificate levels in the Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) system that is used by the National Center for Education Statistics. Two colleges have recently granted post-Masters certificates, Education and Management. (Dr. Zetterberg checked after the meeting and found that Management also currently awards post-Masters certificates, rather than just Education, which he cited at the meeting.)

A second policy issue, Dr. Zetterberg said, is that for many years there have been a number of certificate programs on the Twin Cities campus at the pre-baccalaureate level (e.g., Liberal Arts, Mechanical Engineering, Computer Science, and others). What do these programs certify? In his view these programs are meaningless and should not be offered. Since the Twin Cities campus does not award degrees below the Bachelors degree level, it also should not award certificates below the Bachelors degree level. These pre-baccalaureate certificate programs exist for two reasons: First, Continuing Education was once a back-door entrance to the Twin Cities campus (it no longer is), and students would enroll in certificate programs so that they could get financial aid. Second, some faculty members probably wanted these programs created to increase enrollment in their evening classes.

The Provost would like these issues to be considered, Dr. Zetterberg said: Should the University allow informal certificate programs (the Provost does not favor them and Senior Vice President Cerra does not object to prohibiting them)? What should be done about undergraduate pre-baccalaureate certificate programs that affect a handful of students? If the University does not favor MNSCU institutions establishing doctoral programs, the University at the same time should not infringe on MNSCU's role in offering pre-baccalaureate programs; he said he did not believe there is any reason the Twin Cities, Duluth, and Morris campuses should be offering pre-baccalaureate certificate programs.

Is this a Twin Cities or a system issue, Professor Hoover inquired? It is system but mostly Twin Cities, Dr. Zetterberg said. Morris does not have any certificate programs, Crookston has one or two, and Duluth has mostly post-baccalaureate programs. He said he was not sure there would be a lot of activity at the post-baccalaureate level, but there is interest in some programs. Whether they will ever take off is not clear, but that is the level that the University should be offering such programs, given its mission, he said. Dean Bloomfield said it was his guess that this will not be an issue in the next couple of years but it could be in the next decade.

Are official certificate programs approved and on the transcript, Professor Curley asked? They are approved just as is any regular degree program and they are in the student information system just like any degree program, Dr. Zetterberg said.

Professor Cardwell inquired about the long-standing MAST program in the College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Science; it is primarily for international students who receive a certificate but not an official transcript. There are about 140-150 students per year. He said he did not know if the Board of Regents has approved the program. It is important to the College, he said, and has a long heritage. Dr. Zetterberg said it may have received Board approval many years ago but said he would check.

Dean Bloomfield said that Graduate School certificate rules follow federal law. International students may not come to the U.S. only for a certificate program, but they may pursue a certificate if they have a work visa.

Professor Ahern recalled that the Committee had been informed it would receive a report on the policy implications of the guidelines for certificate programs when they were adopted a few years ago; did it ever receive the report? (It seems not.) Dr. Zetterberg said that Dr. Geri Malandra had chaired a committee appointed by the Provost to develop guidelines for certificate programs and he emphasized again that his concern was not about approved programs but about credit-based certificate programs that were not approved by the Regents, but only by a college or department, with no University record of student participation. If the program was not approved by the Board of Regents, it was not approved. He repeated that he did not know that any college has created unofficial programs; most of the colleges interested in certificate programs wanted ones that are officially approved.

Dean Bloomfield noted that courses a student takes while in an unofficial certificate program WOULD be on a transcript; Professor Ahern said he agreed with Dr. Zetterberg that was too loose an arrangement. Dr. Zetterberg added that there would be no record of a certificate, just the courses.

Professor Kulacki said that if someone attends a professional workshop they usually need a document in order to obtain reimbursement, and often that is a certificate. That is mostly handled through CEUs (Continuing Education units), Dr. Zetterberg said, which certify attendance in non-credit programs (short courses, conferences, symposia). That is the traditional method of recognizing participation and is not an issue, he said.

Professor Kulacki asked if the University would be creating a quagmire if it tries to prescribe departmental behavior. Dr. Zetterberg said he did not believe so. There is a difference between a non-credit course and a program built around the regular curriculum (which is what he has been talking about).

Will the task force that Dean Bloomfield mentioned prepare language that this Committee should consider, Professor Hoover asked? His recommendation is that the Committee needs to understand the broad policy issues, Dr. Zetterberg said; unless it disagrees with what he has said about undergraduate certificate programs, the Provost can develop a plan and bring it to the Committee. Dr. Shaw said it would be helpful to know what exists before asking the Committee to say what cannot be done. Dr. Zetterberg said he would find the last list of certificate programs, and pointed out there is a difference between awarding a bachelor's degree plus a certificate and awarding a certificate to someone who is not earning a bachelor's degree.

Professor Hoover thanked Dean Bloomfield and Dr. Zetterberg for their presentation.

2. Law School Calendar and Grading

Professor Hoover next welcomed Professor David McGowan of the Law School to the meeting to discuss proposed changes to the Law School calendar and grading system.

Professor McGowan told the Committee that he is chair of the Law School educational policy committee and in that capacity asked to report two policy changes the Law faculty have approved. One is a change in the calendar; the Law faculty have long been concerned that they begin a week before the rest of the Twin Cities campus so they propose now to start at the same time. To make up for the lost week of classes, they have extended class periods to 55 minutes; the result is a net increase of 15 minutes in instructional time over the course of a semester (they could not give up the time because of American Bar Association accreditation requirements). They will also adhere to the standard class schedule for start times; they will allow non-standard end times if a class starts in the afternoon and does not create conflicts with other classes.

Dean Bloomfield asked if the Law School had worked out problems with the longer class period with joint degree programs; Professor McGowan said they had.

Mr. Edlavitch asked if the extended class time extended the class day to that students would lose time; it will not. Professor McGowan said the students were surveyed and favored the change. Mr. Edlavitch asked if they had examined practices at other campuses; he said he believed most law schools had the extra week and this would be non-standard. Professor McGowan said the Law faculty have been concerned about standardization with the rest of the campus and integrating programs and activities with it, so did not survey other schools. He also reported that this would not be an issue for students who have classes in other buildings because they have relatively few such students--and most of those are from the Carlson School, which is quite close. They have asked the faculty to be accommodating for those students who may have classes elsewhere on the campus, and none of the first-year law students take courses outside the Law School.

Mr. Edlavitch said that reducing the period between classes from 15 to 10 minutes has educational policy implications. Vice Provost Swan pointed out that at most of the University's peer institutions the standard time between classes is 10 minutes; the Twin Cities only has 15 minutes because it is such a large campus.

Professor McGowan then reported that the Law School has long had a 16-point grading system, where 16 equals an A+, and the lowest grade is a 4. The main concern is about the employment market; they have had significant student complaint about the 16-point system. An outsider looking at the scale will assume that 16 equals an A, not an A+. They propose moving to a 4-point system with pluses and minuses, because in the region where most of the students practice, that is the scale that most students use. Most of the firms in the area also favor the change.

They also looked at the mean grade awarded, which was a C+, something that no other peer institution does. One faculty member at another Big Ten school asked why this Law School is so mean to its students. They have as a result changed the mean to a B-B+. Dr. Swan commented that few faculty are likely to think of the mean grade as a policy variable, although one can compute a mean grade. Professor McGowan said the Law School has had a forced mean of 11.5-11.8 for first-year students. They still have that requirement, and the reason is to separate the pool of students to get employment information; for second- and third-year students the mean is recommended but not required.

Do they find they need the A+ grade, Professor Kulacki asked? Can he explain why it remains? Professor McGowan said he was not able to find that out; they retain it so they conform to employer expectations and because most of the peer schools use it. The Law School would prefer to conform completely to the University's grading system but labor market considerations require they keep the A+. Do all their peers use a grade above 4, Professor Weinsheimer asked? There is great variance in how they use it, Professor McGowan said; some have a forced distribution of grades. If he saw a 4.2 grade average, he would assume there was a computer error, Professor Weinsheimer said, but that perhaps does not happen in Law. Professor McGowan said he hoped to have a note on the transcript so that employer eyebrows are not raised.

Professor Hoover thanked Professor McGowan for presenting the information, which is not something this Committee needs to take action on.

3. ACT Writing Sample

Vice Provost Swan recalled that the Committee had discussed whether the Twin Cities campus should require the optional ACT writing sample for admission. Since that discussion a couple of things have happened, he reported. The time is approaching when a decision must be made for the Fall 2006 admissions. In his view, he said, this Committee's view is important but that the administration may adopt the requirement as a way to implement existing policies to be sure that students are college-ready. He emphasized that this is not a system issue; he said he believes it is the right thing to do on the Twin Cities campus and that it would be best if all the campuses would adopt it. He has spoken with the vice chancellors on the other campuses about it. Professor Odom said she believed that if the Twin Cities campus adopted the requirement, UMC would also.

Dr. Swan reported that every CIC school (Big Ten plus Chicago) except Minnesota and Iowa has opted to require the writing sample. Iowa, like Minnesota, is still in the middle of their deliberations.

Professor Bridwell-Bowles provided the Committee information about the writing prompt that the test will use, Dr. Swan noted. They have used the prompt in some sections of Composition courses in CLA and GC on the Twin Cities campus and learned that fewer than 10% of the students scored 5 or 6 (6 is the highest score possible). Most scored 3 or 4. This underscores the importance of the University

being clear about its expectations in writing. He has talked with four superintendents of schools, two in the metro area and two outstate; all four support adopting the requirement. It is not a perfect test but it is the right thing for the University to do, he said.

The University of California in the past used a writing test for admission; if a student did not pass, he or she needed to take non-credit remedial courses. In the California high schools at the time, they taught to the test, which was not a bad thing and it seemed to work well, Dr. Swan said.

One question from the earlier discussion was how the information would be used, Professor Curley recalled. It could be weighted in the admissions process; it could be used for screening to identify people for remedial work; or both. Is there any indication how the test result will be used? No one believes the test is perfect and the University will move slowly with it, Dr. Swan replied. Admissions decisions will be made on the basis of a holistic review; the writing sample is one element that would not by itself determine admission. If a student with an otherwise good record received a 1 on the writing test, the file would receive more intense scrutiny. The campus now exempts some students from first-year writing courses on the basis of test scores, not writing samples--if a writing sample were at variance with the test scores, they would look at both for placement purposes. As the campus gains more experience with the writing results, it might use the information in different ways. Will the administration return to the Committee after it has some experience with the test? It will, in two or three years, Dr. Swan promised.

Professor Cardwell said he favored the writing test and sees it as a tool for placement. If a student receives a 6, he or she is exempt from writing course requirements; if a 1-2-3, it's back to basics. That could be where the campus ends up, Dr. Swan said. It is premature, however, to know what would be done with students on the low end of the scale; it may be that the General College two-semester writing course would be appropriate.

Mr. LeBlanc asked if the writing test would also be part of the SAT. Dr. Swan said it will be--and for the SAT, unlike the ACT, it will not be optional. It will also take into account students whose first language is not English. The writing test will add \$10-15 to the cost of the ACT. Dr. Swan said he did not know if the MNSCU system or the Minnesota private colleges would use the writing test.

Professor Cardwell moved that the Committee suggests the campus enter into a pilot study to use the writing test as part of the ACT for students applying for Fall, 2006. The Committee voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

4. Graduation Planner

Professor Hoover now welcomed Assistant Vice Provost Linda Ellinger to the meeting to discuss the graduation planner.

Dr. Ellinger noted that she had talked with the Committee about the planner last year and distributed a handout showing the phasing of the planner and how it would work. She affirmed that it will be for all campuses. Ms. Haas, a member of this Committee, is the project director for the web.

After reviewing the history of the planner and explaining that it arose from the discussions about the University's graduation rates, Dr. Ellinger explained that it is hoped the planner will be a tool that

students can use to navigate through the University. It will be integrated into PeopleSoft on all campuses for all courses and programs; it is only for undergraduate four-year degrees). She said that many people have worked on the planner for about 18 months and they hope to have a deliverable version by spring 2005. The planner is a very complex system that relies on a database of ALL majors and minors and programs. Dean Bloomfield said the Graduate School hopes there will be something similar for graduate students later.

Committee members made a number of comments/asked a number of questions.

- Will there be a wait list? That exists now for departments, although it is optional; they hope to link the planner to those wait lists. The "blue sky" version of the planner is that a student plans his or her semester and then hits a key to register; the student would be told what is available and the wait list options.
- Professor Weinsheimer said he has always wanted to know the number of students who tried to get into a course but could not; to know that would help in planning sections. They are working on that, Dr. Ellinger said; students will be able to do more than one plan ("what ifs"), but they will always be asked to have one current active plan. The data from those active plans will be provided to departments as a guesstimate. They KNOW that the farther out such plans get, the less accurate they are, but presumably with experience there will be useful data that can be provided to departments.
- This is a popular idea with advisors; the only concern is that students still need to talk with someone. The planner will remove the need to do a lot of nitty-gritty work and allow more substantive discussions. Dr. Ellinger agreed that the hope is that advisor time will be freed up for those discussions.
- There will be the option to select a class within a major without specifying a particular class.
- It would be helpful if a student could choose courses and then see what major they fit, rather than just choosing a major. That is a major challenge, Dr. Ellinger said; they have talked about it and the option may be in future versions, but not the first.
- It will be extremely easy to change plans over time, and students will be able to save different plans. Nor must students do more than their freshman year, to start with, or any year, and there is no requirement that a student follow a saved plan. Dr. Ellinger said they hope that advisors will use the planner to tell students whether or not they are on-track for graduation, given what the student has planned. If not on track, students can be advised either to change their plan or change what they are doing (e.g., an engineering student taking only art and music courses).
- They have talked about the sign-off on student programs. There is not a lot of support in the Council of Undergraduate Deans for an official college sign-off. The colleges believe that if they move to a sign-off, it should be at a milestone (completion of the freshman year, the major, ready to graduate). They do not want to restrict student flexibility and they want advisor review, but not an official sign-off. Dr. Swan said that planning is important but it will be absolutely OK to change plans or to be undecided early (but not as a senior!). The University must set up systems that help students make decisions that will permit them to graduate in a timely fashion. The

planner will also include a wizard that will help students look at different AREAS of study, Dr. Ellinger added. Dr. Swan observed that what would be a big mistake would be to have the computer say the student is graduating and the advisor say the student is not graduating. They do not want to have anything not on the computer (e.g., transfer credits). Dr. Swan related that he had accidentally received an email from a student to his father exulting that the computer said he would graduate. Dr. Swan commented that he sure hoped the computer was right.

- One new feature in the ECAS course database will be that departments will be asked to indicate when a course is normally taught (e.g., fall and/or spring, every year or alternate years). This will help students with their planning, and will help to assure that required courses are available for students. Electives draw on the richness of the faculty, but required programs must be taken seriously by departments and they must commit to having the courses available. (This does not mean they have to commit to MWF or TTH or particular times of day.) They are asking departments for the "normal" time a course is offered; they will not hold departments to that but it will help students plan, Dr. Ellinger said.
- In terms of what transfer courses will count toward a major, that is already in the system; the graduation planner will rely absolutely on the data in APAS. Dr. Swan said the University is providing more information to transfer students so they will know if courses transfer; they are building a system that any student anywhere can look at. What it will not provide is information about courses from schools that have never or only rarely had students who transferred to the University. And there will always be courses that do not transfer, Dr. Ellinger pointed out. The system will allow regular transfers to be automated so that it will be easier to deal with the exceptions, Dr. Swan added.
- Requirements change a lot at the University; how well will the system track the changes? Dr. Ellinger said she hoped a lot better than at present. That is one reason for the system--there will be one place to go for an approval and for information. Everything will be in one database that everyone will use.
- The planner will provide an option for five-year graduation; whether or not six is not yet determined. It will default to eight terms and will allow ten, plus summer terms. It will not be designed to allow for three-year graduation but that will fit in easily.

Dean Bloomfield complimented Dr. Ellinger and her colleagues. He said he once read that airline scheduling was the most complicated computer program ever developed; conceptually, this is as or more complex. Professor Hoover thanked Dr. Ellinger for informing the Committee about the planner.

5. Transfer Student Graduation Rates

Dr. Ellinger distributed data on the five-year graduation rate of transfer students for the Twin Cities campus. There is a small committee looking at transfer student issues, she reported, such as transfer credit evaluation and how quickly transfer students learn how to apply to a degree program. There was a minor alarm bell in the student-satisfaction surveys: transfer students were less satisfied than students who came as freshmen, so they established a group to look at issues. They will do a survey in the fall as the start of an effort to make the experience better and will have focus groups in the spring. In preparation for that effort, they have prepared the graduation-rate data.

On average, for transfer students who entered in fall 1995 to fall 1998, students who entered from MNSCU community colleges, MNSCU state universities, or the University of Wisconsin graduated at about the same rate, roughly 60%. Students from the Minnesota private colleges graduated at a slightly lower rate and those who entered from other institutions graduated at a lower rate (slightly less than 55%). In general, the previous institution seems not to matter very much. Transfer students graduated at a notably higher rate than students who came to the University as freshmen, but the comparison is only with freshman-admitting colleges. Not surprising, the higher the transfer student's GPA, the more likely the student is to graduate.

There are some puzzling data with respect the likelihood of graduation as a function of the number of credits the transfer student brings to the University. It is logical to assume that the more credits the student has accumulated, the more likely he or she is to graduate, and this is in fact the case, but not to a significant degree. Dean Bloomfield said it was striking that of students who bring 90 or more credits (75% of what they need to graduate), only 60-65% graduate. Dr. Swan pointed out that it is not just a case of needing 30 more credits; in many fields, the students graduate with more than 120 credits.

6. Issues Pending

Professor Hoover distributed copies of the list of issues pending before the Committee and said that she and Dr. Swan would go through it to develop an action plan. She asked Committee members to please let her know of any issues they believe the Committee should take up--or if there are issues they believe the Committee need not deal with.

She adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota