

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, November 1, 2006
1:30 – 3:30
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Richard McCormick (chair), William Bart, Vernon Cardwell, Maureen Cisneros, April Knutson, James Leger, Peh Ng, Paul Siliciano, Craig Swan, Cathrine Wambach, Douglas Wangenstein, Joel Weinsheimer

Absent: Gail Dubrow, Claudia Neuhauser, Donna Spannaus-Martin

Guests: Karen Zenter Bacig, Associate Vice Provost Laura Coffin Koch (Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education), Vice Provost Arlene Carney, David Langley (Center for Teaching and Learning Services)

Other: none

[In these minutes: (1) undergraduate student learning outcomes (Twin Cities); (2) eligibility for teaching awards; (3) student support task force; (4) academic work per credit]

1. Undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes (Twin Cities)

Professor McCormick called the meeting to order at 1:30 and turned to Vice Provost Carney.

Dr. Carney distributed copies of a motion for the Committee that she and Dr. Bacig drafted to accept the student learning outcomes for the Twin Cities campus.

Committee members offered a number of editorial suggestions that involved the following points.

-- Rather than diverse philosophies and cultures in a global society, the outcome should refer to diverse philosophies and cultures within and among societies, in order that it not be construed to apply strictly to cultures outside the US. The outcome should not be read as excluding the US. General sentiment was to eliminate the phrase "global society" because it is not clear what it means.

-- Students should not believe that artistic and creative work occurs only in the fine arts; one can see them in the sciences as well.

-- Reference to creativity, innovation, discovery, and expression should also include the "applied" sciences (e.g., engineering), in addition to the natural and social sciences.

-- There is no specific reference to mathematics. That topic was discussed at great length as the outcomes were being developed; the colleges will specify quantitative proficiency required. There

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was no agreement, in those discussions, on a level of quantitative proficiency that all undergraduates should have. That is why there is the problem-solving outcome. The Committee accepted this position.

-- It is still expected that colleges and departments will elaborate on the campus-wide learning outcomes.

-- Skills for effective citizenship and life-long learning are linked because the latter is required for the former.

-- The list appears to encapsulate the skills accumulate during their education; it cannot be claimed that all of them are taught. (But there are places in the curriculum that further the outcomes (e.g., internships, study abroad).)

-- Students should learn to evaluate and analyze texts, not just discrete facts. (The language is broad and can take many forms—texts, facts, quantitative data, maps, artistic information, and so on. It is assumed texts would be a part of what students learn to evaluate and analyze; the college and major will specify text and other things.) One problem in high schools is that an A at one school does not equal an A at another school and students are being given high grades but lack capability to perform in college, which is engendering lawsuits. There is merit to defining outcomes by field and there should be comparison of outcomes across fields and universities. (That is a large topic; many universities do not articulate learning goals and the question is what the measures would be. First institutions must articulate learning outcomes and identify assessment techniques that are valid and reliable. The outcomes document is living and can be changed if the University sees the need.) It would be possible to see if outcomes for UMM, UMD, UMTC, etc., are comparable. Or across majors; it will perhaps be possible to see if the goal levels are even across fields. If there is assessment, the results could provide a guide about improving outcome achievement—the assessment could be formative as well as summative.

-- The document should refer to coordinate campuses, not specific campuses, in suggesting they consider adopting the learning outcomes.

The final version approved unanimously by the Committee was this:

At the time of receiving a bachelor's degree, students will demonstrate the ability:

- To identify, define, and solve problems
- To locate and evaluate information
- To master a body of knowledge and a mode of inquiry
- To understand diverse philosophies and cultures within and among societies
- To communicate effectively

- To understand of the role of creativity, innovation, discovery, and expression in the arts and humanities and in the natural, social, and applied sciences.
- To acquire skills for effective citizenship and life-long learning.

The learning outcomes will be brought to the Faculty Consultative Committee for placement on the docket of the Faculty Senate. Professor McCormick thanked Dr. Bacig and Vice Provost Carney for joining the meeting.

2. Eligibility for Teaching Awards

Dr. Bacig now explained that a department inquired about nominating for the Morse-Alumni award someone with a non-salaried appointment as a term faculty member (a category of appointees who are eligible for the award) but whose salaried appointment is in 97XX series (a category of appointees who are NOT eligible).

Dr. Knutson asked about Lecturers and Teaching Specialists, both of which fall in the 97XX appointment series; why are they not eligible? Non-term faculty are divided into Lecturer (someone with a Ph.D.) and Teaching Specialist (non-Ph.D.). Most non-regular faculty are Lecturers or Teaching Specialists. Professor McCormick explained that those appointees have not been eligible; the definition is largely limited to tenured and tenure-track faculty, which is why the Committee voted last year to set up an award for those who hold P&A appointments.

Professor McCormick asked for the views of Committee members who are also members of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers. (1) The general view was that the distinction between regular and non-regular faculty made no sense for recognizing teaching excellence. It should be recognized wherever it is found, irrespective of distinctions between kinds of appointments. (2) Individuals must demonstrate excellence in teaching in several categories; those who demonstrate excellence in only one will not likely be considered for the award. But people should not be ruled out from consideration because of the category of their appointment. (3) The Committee should err on the side of generosity, and allow the award committee to consider people whose primary appointment is not instructional, at least in this instance.

The fact that the Committee shared this sentiment, however, suggests the Committee might need to reconsider the recommendation to have a separate award for non-regular faculty, Professor McCormick suggested.

The Committee voted unanimously to permit consideration of candidates whose salaried appointment is not in one of the categories eligible for a teaching award but who have a non-salaried appointment that would make them eligible.

3. Student Support Task Force

Professor McCormick now welcomed Associate Vice Provost Koch to discuss the Student Support Task Force.

Dr. Koch said she wished to talk about process and direction; there are no outcomes, yet, but she would be glad to return to the Committee to talk about them when there are. She distributed

copies of materials: a list of seven projects & project teams and a "Student Support Advisory Committee Structure" containing the task groups and related committees working on various student support issues. These projects and efforts, she pointed out, will not be completed in one year; they will take time to implement.

The biggest project is advising across the Twin Cities campus, Dr. Koch related. At present advising is done in the colleges and there is no central function; it is done differently across colleges (e.g., by advisors, by faculty, by peers) and training, advising load, and facilities vary considerably. The goal is to develop consistency across colleges, provide campus-wide materials and a training program; there may also be a need to look at policies SCEP has brought to the Senate.

Strengthening the undergraduate experience for undecided students is another major topic; they will evaluate how those students are advised and develop a plan for supporting them.

Dr. Koch said they would also like to develop a faculty mentoring program, which would require (or at least enable) every undergraduate to complete a scholarly, creative, professional, or research experience with a faculty member.

In terms of the Student Support Advisory Committee Structure, Dr. Koch discussed briefly each of the task groups:

- Assessment/Evaluation of advising
- Academic, Career, and Life Planning: career advising often begins the first year of a program; planning may involve discussions about going to graduate school (which a student may have as a goal that is unrealistic), and they have also talked about 8-year plans, from the last two years of high school through two years after the baccalaureate degree
- Philosophy, Policies, Practices, and Standards across the campus
- Faculty Mentoring
- Students in Transition (transfer and undecided students)
- Diversity (how to serve diverse students and how to make sure that the University is more welcoming to them)
- Communications and Technology (within the student advising community across campus as well as with students); students say they don't read email and want paper copies (!); there is also the issue of what messages are being sent in what the University says—about what the University is and what its goals and expectations are.

There are also related committees doing work in advising, student support services (how well are students served outside advising; this is now achieved in pockets across the campus), advising and technology (Dr. Falkner can discuss this with the Committee, and it is probably less a matter of policy than a subject that might be of interest to the Committee), and retention and graduation (Dr. Koch and Dr. Swan are talking about having an ongoing advisory committee on the subjects).

Committee members offered several observations.

-- In one college, advisors are hired with an M.A. in an advising-related field but have no training the disciplines of the college. Students may pick a major without faculty involvement. Dr. Koch agreed most advisors are trained in counseling, not content, and that also allows them to move across colleges. In terms of helping students select a major, that is where the faculty should come in, she said. Some colleges use a mixed model, where faculty do not advise on regulations because they change, but they do help students with choices of field. Some colleges also have an orientation course, an introduction to majors, which can be helpful.

-- In another college, there are college-level advisors who deal primarily with college and campus rules, and then major department advisors (either faculty or advisors hired by the department who have a background in the field).

-- Another college has a cluster of advisors for first-year students and an orientation to the college; curriculum questions are handled by the faculty.

-- In yet another (large) college, a subset of the faculty do all the advising and there is only one professional advisor; it works well but one shortcoming is that the faculty may make mistakes when policies change.

-- This discussion goes to the student personnel debates that have been going on since the 1930s: should advisors focus holistically on the student or on skills and the major? Both have been argued as valid and the approach a college takes depends on its perspective. The University has gone back and forth on which approach to take. Their goal is not one model of advising, Dr. Koch said; they want to provide advisors with the best support possible—and have a five-page list of barriers to advisors doing the best work they can.

-- Students report they are inundated with University-generated spam ("spam" from their point of view), and they may be right; perhaps only 25% of the messages are relevant to them. There are First Amendment questions, of course, but if the deluge of messages is impeding their ability to progress, one can ask what the University is doing. Students also ask for paper copies of things because they do not recall messages (that they deleted).

-- A subcategory of mentoring is the student who wants to go to professional or graduate school and needs a letter of recommendation: One wants to cry when a student says he is the only faculty member they know—and he has to ask the student's name. Students need to be advised on working with faculty. That is a two-way street, Dr. Koch said; the University tells students to get to know faculty, but what do faculty do to help? The institution should help faculty get to know students. Most faculty also find that office hours are under-used, although students do use email (which does not help to identify faces).

Professor McCormick thanked Dr. Koch for joining the meeting.

4. Academic Work Per Credit

At a meeting earlier in the year the question had arisen about the language of the Senate policy establishing the amount of academic work expected per credit for undergraduates. The existing standard now reads as follows:

The Senate affirms the standard (first adopted by the University Senate on February 16, 1922, and reaffirmed subsequently) that one semester credit is to represent, for the average University of Minnesota undergraduate student, three hours of academic work per week (including lectures, laboratories, recitations, discussion groups, field work, study, and so on), averaged over the term, in order to complete the work of the course. Enrollment for 15 credits in a semester would thus require approximately 45 hours of work per week, on average, over the course of the semester. All grades for academic work are based on the quality of the work submitted, not on hours of effort. It is expected that the academic work required of graduate and professional students will exceed three hours per credit per week or 45 hours per semester.

The question was whether the standard should include the phrase "for an average grade." The Committee concluded, after brief discussion, that it wished to recommend no change in the policy. The point is the quality of the work, and what is required can vary by field.

The discussion touched on the performance of students who work while taking classes. The average credit load is now close to 15 credits per semester, which presumably (if faculty are observing the policy standard) requires about 45 hours of academic work per week, on average. What number of students are also working (for money) 20-25 hours per week? Dr. Swan said the numbers could be provided. The evidence is that students can work up to 15 hours per week and be a full-time student, and students who work 15 hours or less typically get better grades than students who do not work. Students who work 20 or more hours per week generally do not do as well, Professor McCormick said, and risk failing.

Professor Cardwell observed that the evidence suggests that students put in nowhere near the amount of time on academic work as the standard suggests they should. The message is more for faculty than students, he said. Faculty who try to adhere to the standard receive adverse feedback from students (although later may say the course did more good for them than any other they took). He said he would like to see more consistency among courses in terms of what is expected. The policy is a compromise, Professor McCormick commented, about what students can expect and what faculty want; it is an attempt to ground faculty and students in reality. It may not be close to reality, however; how many faculty know how many hours of work they are requiring of students? Dr. Swan said he thinks about the standard when he assigns work in a course. He also reported that the higher the price of a book for a course, the lower the percentage of students in the course who purchase it.

Professor McCormick adjourned the meeting at 3:25.

-- Gary Engstrand