

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy**  
**Wednesday, April 23, 2003**  
**1:00 - 3:00**  
**238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Martin Sampson (chair), Wilbert Ahern, (George Green for) Victor Bloomfield, Vernon Cardwell, Shawn Curley, Scott Ferguson, Gretchen Haas, Frank Kulacki, Marsha Odom, Mary Ellen Shaw, Mary Sue Simmons, Craig Swan, Douglas Wangensteen

Absent: Dale Branton, Carol Miller, Kim Pinske, Karen Seashore

Guests: Linda Ellinger (Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost); Billie Wahlstrom, , Sandra Ecklein (Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost), Tom Dohm (Director, Office of Measurement Services); Tina Rovick (Office of the Registrar); Professor Laura Coffin Koch (Faculty Academic Oversight Committee for Intercollegiate Athletics)

[In these minutes: (1) graduation planner; (2) continuous registration/leaves of absence; (3) on-line course evaluations; (4) Twin Cities campus athletic policies]

**1. Graduation Planner**

Professor Sampson convened the meeting at 1:05 and welcomed Dr. Linda Ellinger to the meeting to discuss the graduation planner.

Dr. Ellinger distributed a PowerPoint slide handout and told the Committee that this was a very preliminary report on the graduation planner. The "Grad Planner" is a web-based tool to give students better planning options for timely graduation; it is a system-level web project that will extend to all campuses and streamline a variety of existing student information systems. It grew out of the Twin Cities campus focus on graduation and retention; it was not a specific recommendation of the original report from the graduation/retention committee of the Council of Undergraduate Deans but it had been talked about as providing students with interesting, engaging, and interactive tools they need to play with graduation options.

There are two committees working on the grad planner, one small group dealing with the technical end and a larger committee with college representation working out the policy issues.

The grad planner lets students plan for four years, based on up-to-date database of majors and on the student's own record of courses already completed. It also lets them try out "what if" scenarios for future planning, such as trying different majors and seeing how long it would take to graduate, based on the courses they have already taken. The planner also provides information for advising and

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

for administrative planning; one question is whether the planner should be required for all freshmen (such a proposal would come in the future and would be brought to this Committee for review). If it were required of students, colleges could learn the number of students who plan to take a course (while students would not be held to taking the course, these data would provide better information than any current planning documents). The grad planner will build on information available in the APAS system but put it into a semester-based framework to allow students to plan semester by semester; it adds a time dimension to APAS.

In developing the linkages with other systems they have learned that a number of functions they thought were automated were not, Dr. Ellinger reported. The goal, however, is to build the first comprehensive, interactive, up-to-date database of all majors and requirements, one "source of truth" for current major requirements. Once that is accomplished, it will serve as the basis for the interactive student phase. But Dr. Ellinger emphasized that the project is in only the very early phases.

Will it be possible to use the grad planner to gauge the number of students who are on course to graduate in a timely fashion, Professor Sampson asked? That is the intent, Dr. Ellinger said. And it will also respond to the problem of students being unable to figure out major requirements? The information about major requirements is available, Dr. Ellinger said, but there are so many sources that no one is clear which is the most accurate. One cannot find out immediately what the requirements are; a student has to call the department to find out. Do students have trouble getting major requirements, Professor Sampson asked? There is that danger, Dr. Ellinger said. Students IN a major get the requirements; the question is about students who are looking for a major. The latter group may rely on the catalogue, which could be outdated (and there is language in the catalogue cautioning that there might be changes since the catalogue was printed).

The grad planner will be for all campuses, Dr. Ellinger said. The proposal will be presented to the deans in May and to the coordinate campuses, including Duluth; there have been conversations with the campuses as the project as developed. They will also offer to meet with chairs and advising staff, etc., at the college level. She said they want no one taken by surprise; they are excited about the project but there is no timeline on implementation. Committee members expressed support for the project.

Will it be possible for a student to simultaneously explore multiple majors without committing to any of them, Dean Green asked? It will, Dr. Ellinger said. That could complicate class enrollment projections, Dean Green observed. To start with they will probably stick with declared majors, Dr. Ellinger said, and try to get a common form and process for those. The idea is not to affect major requirements but rather to get to a form and process that makes it clear to students what they must to in that field.

There are both requirements and "soft" recommendations and "soft" advising; will the graduation planner include that content, Dean Green asked? They have talked about that, Dr. Ellinger replied. The planner is not intended to supplant advisors; it is intended to make their job easier on the mechanical side. They may try to capture some of the "soft" materials (e.g., "many advisors believe that . . ." or "don't forget . . ."). What about professional schools, Professor Wangenstein asked; will there be a place where students can learn if they are taking the right courses to prepare? The professional schools will guide that decision, Dr. Ellinger said.

At UMC all faculty advise students, Professor Odom said, and the missing piece has been the progress sequence. And as a department head, she said she is always looking for a way to help decide on the number of courses and sections to offer; the graduation planner will be useful in that regard.

Professor Cardwell said that students who opt for the four-year graduation guarantee should be required to use the planner. He said he like the capabilities that will be in the system; right now students pick and choose courses and they have no idea when others will be available or fit in sequences. It is important for them to see that they will have a schedule that can work.

Mr. Ferguson said it would also be helpful if departments would be more consistent in informing students if a course will ONLY be offered in the fall (or spring). What would also help students is if the planner tells them the number of credits they have left before they graduate and how many credits they need to average per semester in order to graduate in X years.

Dr. Simmons asked if the system would be secure; Dr. Ellinger said students would use their X.500 ID to work with their own records. The program part of the database will be public and the output will be the on-line catalogue.

Students are held to the requirements of a program that existed when they entered it unless they opt to meet new requirements, Dean Green noted; the system will need to maintain program requirements that existed previously. The system will start with the current requirements, Dr. Ellinger said; it will not capture the past requirements but it will retain records of requirements in the future.

## **2. Continuous Registration/Leaves of Absence**

The Committee turned next to amendments to the continuous registration requirement it had approved for the Senate docket at the previous meeting. Professor Konstan from Electrical Engineering and Computer Science had offered suggestions for rewording. Professor Sampson said he believed the suggestions were friendly amendments that did not violate the spirit of the policy change. One point of the changes is to make it clear to students that they are not taking a risk about being able to return to active student status if they leave for a legitimate reason.

The Committee agreed that Professor Konstan's suggestions are friendly amendments. There was also broad agreement that Konstan's point might be better accommodated through a modification of his proposed language--a friendly amendment of a friendly amendment. For example, there may be a small group of students who need more than the (implied limit of) two leaves in the modified language (e.g., students in co-op programs). The sense of the meeting was that the SCEP chair work and Professor Konstan devise mutually agreeable language and present that on the floor of the Senate. [The Senate subsequently adopted the policy with the revisions proposed by Professor Konstan as subsequently modified by the Committee.]

## **3. On-Line Course Evaluations**

Professor Sampson next welcomed Dr. Wahlstrom to the Committee to discuss on-line course evaluations. Dr. Wahlstrom introduced Mr. Dohm (responsible for the paper form of teaching evaluations) and Ms. Ecklein (working on the on-line course evaluation project).

Over the last several years, Dr. Wahlstrom told the Committee, two things have happened. First, there have been on-line course evaluations for on-line students. Second, units around the University have developed on-line evaluations independently of each other. Her office was asked to take the lessons learned from these experiences and start a pilot project in the Academic Health Center trying on-line evaluations. They are using the evaluations in 15 courses this year.

Dr. Wahlstrom said she hoped this system will work because often when new faculty are up for tenure they must frantically look for their evaluations. This system will allow a place in a portfolio from the beginning. The form will be the same and there will be the same protection of student privacy and same rules about who sees the results that govern the paper evaluation forms. One goal is to let faculty look at the results after making changes in their course to see if the changes are reflected in the evaluations.

Do the faculty receive the comments, Dean Green asked? They do, Dr. Wahlstrom said--they receive a printout of the comments, typos and all.

She is right now gathering research from other institutions to address worries about non-response data. Professor Odom noted that the majority of Crookston faculty participate in on-line evaluations but they have issues they want discussed. One issue is who gets to look at the results. A second is that fewer students participate (if students are allowed to fill out the form at different times, and not required to do so in class, in some classes only a few students may fill out the evaluation). One question is whether the on-line evaluations can be implemented without faculty approval. Dr. Wahlstrom said the faculty have the option of opting out of the pilot program. Non-response bias does not appear, from the research, to be an issue; she said she would distribute the research to the Committee. Professor Odom said she sees the summary sheets with the number of students who respond--and the number is a lot lower. She explained that if another instructor comes into the classroom and presides over students filing an on-line evaluation, the response rate is the same as for the paper survey; if students are free to fill out the form later, the response rate is much lower. In some cases, as few as 2 out of 40 students in a class may fill out the form.

What experience has there been on the Twin Cities campus to date, Professor Cardwell asked? Dr. Wahlstrom said the School of Nursing has been using on-line evaluations for a long time and gets a good response rate. The research she has seen suggests that a concern about low response rates may not be warranted. Students say they need an incentive (10 minutes at the end of class or 5 extra points on a quiz) but that is generally not needed. When he asks that evaluation forms be completed in class, the response rate is high; when he asks students to turn them in later, it drops way down, Professor Cardwell commented. Are the Nursing courses through distance education? They all are, Dr. Wahlstrom affirmed. It may be necessary to establish a culture of responding to increase the rate, Dean Green said.

Nursing and students in some other programs are in a smaller community where they proceed through their curriculum in a lock-step fashion and everyone knows each other, Professor Sampson said. There is a different dynamic in a large undergraduate class; one cannot assume all the settings are the same. Another crucial factor is that evaluations are a matter of some sensitivity; the relationship between grade inflation and evaluations is a question. And what about gender bias in evaluations? These are questions that need to be asked, he said. To move into electronic evaluation,

with lower response rates and in a less predictable context, is an important decision. He said he did not see the questions resolved because one study says low response rates are not important.

Dr. Wahlstrom agreed. She also said that the studies show a difference between male and female students in responses: women do respond, men don't.

Is there other another rationale for adopting on-line evaluations, Professor Sampson asked. Expense? Convenience? Is it a good idea institutionally for faculty to see how their teaching compares with others teaching the same class, Dr. Wahlstrom asked? With digital data one can look at de-identified data, and the University can see if there is a problem (e.g., norms for 1XXX courses are lower than for others). Professor Sampson agreed but said that is a question of how to use the data, not whether or not it will be collected electronically.

Unless there is a way for the instructor to track whether or not students have completed the evaluation (not what the content is), Mr. Ferguson maintained, students will not go home after class and respond. He said he did not believe it would be possible to achieve the same accuracy with on-line evaluations and in-class evaluations. That can be test in the pilot project across units, Dean Green observed.

Mr. Dohm noted that the University has used a paper evaluation form since 1994 and all the records are stored. His office is assisting departments with on-line evaluations; the push for using them came from the departments. The technology to protect privacy exists, he assured the Committee. If there were research funds available, they could look at the pilot projects and the paper results to see what differences exist. One question is whose time is used to fill out the survey: In class or the student's time? Another question is whether they get to see the results. But his office does have data that may be able to answer some of the questions the Committee has raised.

Faculty have questions about the Senate policy, Professor Odom said. Nowhere in the policy does it say that the evaluations can be electronic and because of that the on-line evaluations have not been approved. There is a concern that other people have access to the results (such as central administrators--who do not look at the paper copy results but do they look at the electronic results?) She said she would prefer that SCEP address the question of an implementation protocol. Mr. Dohm said that they have a way to ensure that only those students in the course can participate in the evaluation and that his office generates the reports; identifying information is decoupled before they receive the data. Only a very small group can see the results.

Who sees the reports, Dean Green asked? That is determined by the Senate policy, Mr. Dohm said, and results are guarded like the contents of Fort Knox. The results of the evaluations are not available to anyone who does not now receive the paper copies, Dr. Wahlstrom said.

As for the response rate in large classes, Dr. Wahlstrom said she did not know what it would be because they have not tried on-line evaluation in such courses. They are at the very beginning of the process, trying to help departments use on-line evaluations. There are benefits to using them for both faculty and students; the disadvantage is that faculty do not want to participate if students can see the results.

Can faculty use a supplemental questionnaire, Professor Ahern asked? They can, Dr. Wahlstrom affirmed. Anything that can be done on paper can be done on line. One difference, Mr. Dohm said, is that paper forms are filled out in class on the last day; the on-line form (in the pilot project) can be filled out any time during the last two weeks of class. If a student is sick the last day of class, he or she can still fill out the form. That also raises issues, Professor Sampson responded, because week 12 of a course could be different from week 14; that timing could affect different courses differently. Departments determine how long and when students have access to the evaluation form, Dr. Wahlstrom pointed out.

Will on-line evaluations be a policy issue, Professor Odom asked? Professor Sampson said that there are sensitive issues and it should be a policy matter. He said he assumed it would come to the Committee before any action was taken. The decision has been made locally in some cases, Dean Green observed. The issue is whether the Committee is informed about it; does it not want to say anything or does it want it to be a matter of Senate policy, Professor Curley said. The Committee's view is that it IS a policy matter, Professor Sampson said.

Does that position not allow experimentation, Dean Green asked? It does not prohibit experiments, Professor Sampson said. But University policy is overarching, Professor Kulacki said, and faculty do not have to participate unless it is a policy decision. In some cases on-line evaluations have slipped in along the way and some faculty object, Professor Odom said.

Dr. Swan said it would be a mistake for the Committee to say that the technology per se is the issue. It is absolutely appropriate for the Committee to raise questions about a range of issues (bias, etc.). If the Committee concludes that certain criteria are not met with electronic technology, THEN it should say "no" to on-line evaluations. At the same time, some of the answers may not be known without pilot studies, which are voluntary. The Committee should support the pilots and then look at its list of questions and issues. That is the whole purpose of the pilots, Mr. Dohm agreed; they were grassroots efforts around the campus; the pilot studies will bring consistency to the efforts and provide research. Professor Cardwell urged that the research include large-enrollment, non-professional courses be included.

#### **4. Athletic Policies**

Professor Sampson said goodbye to Professors Odom and Ahern and turned to Professor Laura Koch to lead another discussion of the changes in policies covering the Twin Cities intercollegiate athletic program.

In this, the third time the Committee had reviewed the policies, Committee members asked occasional questions about some of the policies and eventually approved unanimously all but one of them. The policy on eligibility the Committee agreed to defer until the following meeting because it did not have enough time to review the details.

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

-- Gary Engstrand