

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy  
Wednesday, May 8, 2003  
1:00 – 3:00  
238A Morrill Hall**

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

Absent: Dale Branton, Carol Miller, Kim Pinske

Guests: Professor John Adams (Chair, ROTC Subcommittee); Associate Dean Arlene Carney, John Ziegenhagen; Susan VanVoorhis (Office of the Registrar)

Others: Leanne Wirkkula (Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost)

[In these minutes:

**1. Report from the ROTC Subcommittee**

Professor Sampson convened the meeting at 1:00, noted that it was the last meeting of the year, and then welcomed Professor John Adams, chair of the ROTC Subcommittee.

Professor Adams thanked the Committee for the opportunity to make his annual report. The ROTC Subcommittee, composed of four faculty, the three unit commanders (Army, Navy/Marines, and Air Force), and one student from each of the programs, is charged to oversee the academic programs. There are about 80-90 students in each of the three programs, including some from area colleges that do not offer ROTC (or complete ROTC) programs. The Department of Defense pays the full salaries and benefits of the officers and civilians who work in the programs; the University receives the benefit of their teaching and leadership and provides the facility.

The students in the programs receive varying amounts of financial support. The courses are sponsored by the University. Students must fit their ROTC requirements in with the regular requirements of their major, which can be demanding for those who major in fields such as engineering. Students participate in the programs during the summer at varying times, depending on the ROTC requirements.

The Subcommittee deals with issues that require faculty attention; their primary responsibility is to review the credentials of officers to be assigned to teach in the programs. Those officers who come here who do not have a graduate or professional degree, but who are qualified to enter such programs, typically do so.

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The only fluctuation this year was caused by the international situation. The commander of the Air Force ROTC program was getting ready to retire; he was sent to Saudi Arabia. The Army commander was sent to Afghanistan. This is normal for officers but it also makes the programs more real for the students.

Professor Adams said he believes the programs run well and are an asset for the young people who participate in them. There are ups and downs in support for them; at present, the support is more up. He said he had nothing special to report. Next year will be his last year as chair of the Subcommittee.

Professor Seashore commented that she is one of several faculty who have been working on a leadership minor; they have been looking for courses to include in it. The ONLY courses on leadership are offered in the ROTC programs. The ROTC people have been generous in allowing students in their courses and have been wonderfully cooperative. They participate in the minor and are happy to do so, Professor Adams said. Officers are usually not on campus long enough to become as connected with it as they would like, and they are also too busy. But they do like to be visible and to participate in University life.

Professor Sampson thanked Professor Adams for his report.

## **2. Assessment of Student Learning**

Professor Sampson next welcomed Associate Dean Arlene Carney to discuss learning assessment.

Dean Carney began by telling the Committee she had been asked by Dr. Swan to chair the Twin Cities Learning Assessment Council (TCLAC). She reviewed the work of the TCLAC that has taken place in the last year.

In April, 2002, there was a campus-wide discussion on institutional assessment of student learning outcomes convened by Dr. Swan's office. Preliminary framing principles were drafted, which provided that the assessment model for the campus should: "emerge from faculty-driven analysis and development of measures relevant to their curricula, build on existing successful practices across the institution, be used as a tool for institutional improvements linked to internally-established mission and goals, have the support of the institution's administration and governance communication structure, [and] reflect the unique character of individual academic units within a simple framework that is consistent across the institution." Assessment is viewed as an ongoing process to see how students learn, which will provide feedback to teaching, which will in turn help students learn.

They distinguish between assessing learning outcomes and the process. Before a summative evaluation is conducted, there is a need to look at what formative assessment can do to determine how well students are learning.

In June, 2002, the TCLAC was formed by Provost Bruininks and includes associate and assistant deans and faculty and staff who have expertise in assessment. The primary responsibilities of the TCLAC are to "develop a campus-wide framework, principles, and general expectations for learning assessment plans and reporting, to provide a forum to consider college assessment plans, and

to identify opportunities to leverage expertise and good practices, to promote the importance of the assessment of student learning and improvement in the teaching and learning process, to contribute to development of campus-wide assessment reports, [and] to support the development of assessment plans on colleges." An important goal is to prepare for the University's accreditation site visit in 2006; "assessment of student learning outcomes is a key focus of the new accreditation standards."

The TCLAC has had four meetings, two in fall, 2002, and one in February and in April, 2003. Dr. Carney reviewed what occurred at the four meetings.

The first looked at student assessment research and the status of instruments nationally. Most were developed institutionally and addressed student satisfaction, basic college readiness skills, and alumni satisfaction. Only 19% of institutions mentioned the importance of assessment in mission statements while 82% emphasized excellence in undergraduate education. This is a key problem, Dr. Carney said, because it appears assessment is sort of a step-child in most institutions. The reported purposes for conducting assessment included preparation for a self-study—which, if it is the only time and reason assessment occurs, means it is not an institutional value and is forgotten about between accreditation visits—meeting state requirements, improving student achievement, and improving academic programs. Assessment only for external purposes does not lead to institutional change but accreditation is a motivating factor.

The second meeting was devoted to assessment and accreditation. The TCLAC reviewed the comments from the last site visit, in 1996. The report indicated that assessment appears to be integrated into University planning but the team could not discover if the plan is well understood and implemented in the colleges. They also reviewed accreditation criteria, especially one dealing with student learning and effective teaching, which includes an itemization of specific activities to demonstrate effect assessment (the organization promotes and assures student learning, nurtures and recognizes effective teaching, promotes improvements in teaching and learning, its internal management systems assure academic quality and respond to external accountability, and the organization provides relevant and current curricula). They reviewed preliminary interviews of college administrators about assessment practices in the colleges; they did a preliminary inventory of assessment practices and identified issues for the colleges. They also began the process of defining assessment of learning and learning outcomes.

At the third meeting, in February, 2003, they began to plan the future before and after the accreditation review and focused on developing institutional foundations for assessment. They established a subcommittee to draft the definition and principles and a steering committee to plan future meetings and for the next academic year.

At the fourth meeting the TCLAC discussed the definitions and principles underlying student assessment.

The plans for 2003-04 include providing education and support for faculty in assessment of learning and outcomes. This includes bringing in nationally-recognized speakers in the fall and a University best practices symposium in the spring (many faculty are doing interesting and creative things in learning assessment). They will also help colleges develop assessment plans, link assessment with a model of teaching evaluation, and promote a systems effort on assessment that will include a

broad range of teaching and learning and will focus on all levels of education at the University—it will be across the institution, not just focused on undergraduate education.

Dr. Carney said that the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) has developed "9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning" that are useful; she distributed copies to the Committee. She also distributed copies of "Teaching Goals Inventory and Self-Scorable Worksheet," an excerpt from a book on assessment; she noted that this inventory is not copyrighted and can be used to help faculty improve their teaching.

Professor Cardwell said it is his sense that the majority of faculty have a clear outline of what they want students to be able to do when they complete a course. Dr. Carney said they do not have data on that point; informally, a cadre of faculty do have such an outline. They hope to obtain information next year as they look at college assessment plans. Some fields are far ahead in assessment, especially the professional disciplines. One question is whether assessment is authentic, Professor Cardwell said. In many cases student work is at the lowest level, such as memorization, but assessment is not integrated into a course; it may be assumed that learning happens with the curriculum. They can analyze exams to see what is required, Dr. Carney replied; she is on the professional standards council, which affects the way exams are made up. Professor Cardwell said he has collected exams and concluded that about 90% of the questions are at the lowest level of Bloom's taxonomy. Professor Sampson commented that the University recruits at a high caliber but tests at a very low caliber.

It is difficult to conduct assessment if one is not exposed to assessment practices, Professor Seashore said. This is an area of development for new faculty—when they come to the University, most focus on teaching, not on assessment. A few years ago she thought the University would get into the portfolio business more than it has; portfolios are both process and outcome. Her college (Education and Human Development) is going to an external vendor for portfolios because they need them for professional students; the University could do a lot more with portfolios in assessing student learning. Students need to know what is important; when they have learned that, they have learned to assess their own work.

The model in the University for assessment, Professor Seashore said, is what the Graduate School requires of every doctoral program, which is both process and outcome. The University is doing well in that area and should draw on the experience. Professor Ahern agreed. The discussion has been about assessing individual courses; there is also a need for assessment of programs, which is of more interest to the North Central Association. Program assessment leads instructors to be more mindful of assessment.

Dr. Simmons commented that the Program for Individualized Learning requires every undergraduate to develop a portfolio. Part of the benefit is that instructors must teach to the portfolio throughout the student's tenure and it creates pressure to instill reflection and critical thinking skills. But it is a burden for advising students, she added.

Professor Seashore said she thought the University would push an on-line portfolio system that would be adaptable for programs; it is something that needs to be done. PIL has, COAFES has, and it is something that should be looked at for the campus. The University may be stuck in older

methods of assessment. That is why the TCLAC is focusing on college assessment, Dr. Carney pointed out. There is also an infrastructure question, Professor Seashore said.

When it conducts the accreditation, what will the North Central Association expect that the University is not now doing, Dean Bloomfield asked? How far has the University to go? Mr. Ziegenhagen said the University is taking assessment seriously. Neither NCA nor the University expect all departments to meet a specified threshold; rather, the focus will be on understanding where departments are and what improvements are being made relative to NCA's three levels of assessment implementation.

(1) They are aware of assessment and implementation, Dr. Carney continued, (2) it is implemented in a certain number of courses, and (3) it is incorporated into a broad range of classes. The University can highlight some programs at the third level but NCA wants all departments to be at least at level (1). The University was called on last time (in 1996) to pay more attention to assessment—and the North Central Association is now much more serious about the subject. Mr. Ziegenhagen said they hope that a lot of assessment will be internally-generated rather than developed to meet external standards.

Many faculty do not necessarily think of what they are doing with students in courses as assessment, but if they dig deeper, they learn that is what they are doing. There could be hidden assessment taking place. He said he did not know the extent to which faculty must change what they are doing. Dr. Swan agreed; he said an important outcome of the process is that faculty become more self-reflective. They are not starting with nothing but may need more help in reflecting on what they are doing.

This effort is not just for the accreditation review, Dr. Swan said; it is to help faculty in the way they work with students and can lead to a broader integration of courses in a curriculum in order to better serve students.

Students do not like being asked to critique their peers, Dr. Simmons said; they do not feel expert enough. Instructors should do that. What Dr. Swan is saying is that they should reflect, as instructors, what they expect from students and why they are doing what they are doing. Dr. Swan said he liked the comments from the chair of the Council on Liberal Education; they ask faculty to justify why a course should be part of the liberal education requirements. Faculty are very articulate in their responses—but those responses are often not incorporated in the materials provided to students in the class. The Council has recommended that faculty be more direct on why the course meets requirements and that they provide students more framing principles.

Professor Cardwell said one must look continuously at assessment and more faculty must be engaged in it. Typically, a small group of faculty in a department or college are given the charge to look at assessment but they have not done a good job; K-12 education looks at assessment much more closely. Generally faculty have not done a good job of including items from the "Teaching Goals Inventory" that Dr. Carney distributed so that they move from a subject-matter focus to a learning-outcomes focus. Nothing in the existing teaching evaluation form helps improve instruction, Dr. Carney observed.

They have the GPT in CLA, Dr. Carney noted, which is an assessment of learning outcomes. They have been told that students do not like the GPT, but of 600 evaluations, only 2 said they did not like it. It is a broadly-used proficiency-outcome measure.

Is the current course evaluation form part of the problem that needs to be fixed, Professor Sampson asked? Dr. Carney said she believed so. There is nothing process-oriented in the strange questions on the form to indicate whether students have learned as much as the instructor thought they should. It does not help faculty evaluate their teaching. One question it is important the University think about is if faculty teaching evaluations reflected more emphasis on learning, it could change the focus in instruction.

Professor Sampson said he was struck by one of the questions in one of Dr. Carney's handouts, which asks students "overall, I would rate the value of what I learned in this course as [a scale from 1-5]." That does not address issues of critical thinking or reflection. It is appropriate for the University to reach for more than just learning and there are nuances that should go across the University—or perhaps there are differences across the institution that make it hard to use more than "learned."

All fields talk about critical thinking, Dr. Carney responded. Is it the same thing in all of them? The ability to think more clearly and to write better are good self-evaluation questions. If students say no, faculty must think about what they are doing. In her courses, for example, she tells students what she expects them to be able to do—analyze data and tables and evaluate them.

Professor Ahern said that one must distinguish between evaluation of instruction and evaluation of student learning. The student evaluation surveys are used for merit, promotion, and tenure decisions.

Professor Ahern also said that this effort is not University-wide but rather campus-wide. Campuses are in different places in assessment; the Twin Cities is the most challenging case because of its size, diversity of programs, and getting campus agreement on assessment. It could help to look at the Morris and Crookston campuses; they may not deserve blue ribbons but they are a ways along in the assessment process. If there are funds made available for assessment of learning on the Twin Cities campus, it would be nice if they could be shared. The expertise would be relevant to other campuses. They have discussed this issue, Dr. Carney said, and have arranged the TCLAC meetings so that coordinate campus representatives could attend.

Professor Odom said that UMC faculty are more aware of the terminology and the three levels that Dr. Carney mentioned, and have incorporated assessment in the faculty accomplishment form. Advisory groups give feedback about assessment and outcomes. It is also important to look at the program itself, she said, to see if it has the right mix of courses, and to look at the graduates.

Assessment occurs at different levels, Dr. Swan said—for courses, department curriculum, the student experience. The graduating senior survey tries to get at this by asking about improvement of writing skills, analytical thinking, and so on. They have just concluded the survey for all four campuses for the first time and will bring the results to the Committee in the fall.

The University of Washington has an extensive web page on Student Outcomes of Learning (SOL). It is very positive, Dr. Carney said, although a new hire at the University from Washington

does not believe it is as successful as it says it is. It is not fully successful, Professor Seashore agreed, but she said she was interested in knowing the degree to which it dealt with the syllabus problem (no list, no nothing). It has shaped faculty behavior without infringing on flexibility and has improved teaching. One can think of assessment the same way; at the program and course level, one can accomplish a lot with small changes. Assessment need not be thought of as a large effort and it can be easier than some may think.

Digital technology also has had an effect, Dr. Carney added. Faculty are changing their teaching to use it.

Assessment must be faculty-driven, Professor Ahern said, so it will not be as neat as a top-driven web page system but it will be more authentic. They have a web page, Dr. Carney said, but it has best practices and how they are used, and is intended to be a resource for faculty.

Ms. Haas asked if there are any initiatives for individual instructors; they must reach out to graduate students who are teaching courses as well. Dr. Carney agreed.

Professor Wangenstein inquired, with respect to external accountability, if they intend to add the performance of graduates once they leave a program. They must do this in the Medical School, he said—but they are able to do so because the students are in residency programs. Public accountability is part of the charge to the TCLAC, Dr. Carney said, and they will poll the colleges on what they are doing. The most challenging case is to follow large cohorts of CLA graduates; they need to identify a way to survey them and see what came from their whole program (that is easier to do with graduate and professional students than undergraduates).

Professor Sampson thanked Drs. Carney and Ziegenhagen for joining the meeting.