

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, March 15, 2000
1:00 – 3:00
238 Morrill Hall

Present: Judith Martin (chair), Wilbert Ahern, Leanne Baylor, Steve Fitzgerald, Darwin Hendel, Charles Henderson, Gordon Hirsch, Emily Hoover, (Ed Schiappa for) Christine Maziar, Kathleen Newell, Marsha Odom, Riv-Ellen Prell, Tina Rovick, Richard Skaggs, Suzanne Bates Smith, Rita Snider, Thomas Soulen, Steven Sperber, Craig Swan

Regrets: Karen Seashore Louis, Rachel Sullivan

Absent: none

Guests: none

[In these minutes: resolution on overlapping classes; web access to grading systems in Law and Medicine; due date for fall semester grades; update on Student 2000 project; classroom expectation guidelines]

Correction: In the minutes of the February 9, 2000, meeting, there was imperfect representation of the sentiments expressed concerning classroom renovation on the Twin Cities campus vis-à-vis similar efforts on other campuses. The more accurate wording is this: "The Senate Committee on Educational Policy then voted unanimously that it would draft and adopt a statement saying that there needed to be a common effort to improve classroom technology on all campuses." Such a statement will be forthcoming.

1. Resolution on Overlapping Classes

Professor Martin convened the meeting at 1:00 and began by calling the attention of Committee members to a draft resolution that she had prepared following the extended discussions the Committee has had about students arriving late to classes and the inability of the PeopleSoft system to automatically bar registration by students in classes that are too close together in time. The Committee unanimously approved the following resolution:

Be it resolved, the University Senate requests the administration to make changing the PeopleSoft system a very high priority. The system must automatically prevent students from registering for courses which end and start too close together to permit students to arrive on time at their next class.

* 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. (Copies of these minutes may also be found on the web at <http://www1.umn.edu/usenate/scep/scepmins.html>)

2. Grading systems

Professor Martin turned next to Ms. Faulkner, who related that the Office of the Registrar regularly receives questions about grading systems used by colleges that do not use the uniform grading system (i.e., the Law School and the Medical School). They cannot answer the questions and the grading systems those units use are also not accessible on the web. Would it be possible for SCEP to ask that Law and Medicine set up a link to the uniform grading policy, so that those who have questions could find the other grading systems?

Professor Martin said she would, absent objection from the Committee, send a letter to Provost Bruininks and Vice Provost Swan asking that the link to the other grading systems be put on the web.

3. Due Date for Grades

Professor Martin next reported that she had been asked by the Faculty Consultative Committee ("in no uncertain terms") to raise with the Committee the question of whether or not a change in the semester standards is required with respect to the due date for grades at the end of fall semester, and if so to recommend such a policy. FCC hopes that SCEP will come up with a policy that sets a date something like the one that was set this year. This Committee, she recalled, heard arguments from Ms. VanVoorhis about the impact of late grades.

Committee members discussed the issue at some length.

-- Did FCC have suggestions for punitive measures for those who turn in grades late? No, but they wondered why deans and department heads were being let off the hook in terms of enforcing the deadline for grades.

-- What change does FCC want? It does not believe the faculty will find it acceptable to have a due date that falls over the holiday period, and wish to see a policy that sets a due date in January.

-- This Committee was not prepared to extend the deadline; if FCC members feel strongly about the subject, they can send SCEP a recommendation or take up the matter themselves--although it would be strange to take up such a matter without review by the committee in whose purview the matter fell.

-- What is FCC's rationale? They do not believe it will be possible to get grades in over the holiday period, when many TAs (and faculty) are not in town. They also want strong incentives for deans and department heads to get grades in on time. FCC, it was said, should present a rationale for changing the policy and extending the due date for grades. One Committee member recalled encountering the problem with due dates during the holiday period; TAs were not warned, and had to fax grades back to her. In the future, they will be warned about the short period between finals and the deadline for grades. Another Committee member said that if TAs are viewed as faculty-in-training, the same policies should apply to them and they should not receive special dispensation for the holiday period.

-- Grades were not turned in in any more timely a fashion with the later deadline than they were without it; why should the deadline be extended? Because FCC believes that strong language from on high about meeting the deadline will mold behavior. One Committee members said he believed FCC was wrong and it had not heard about how late grades affect students.

-- The period between winter and spring quarters was very short and yet students were able to register and receive advising, in FCC's view; why is it such a problem to have grades due a week before spring semester begins? There were significant problems between quarters when the time period was so short and there were significant hardships for students.

-- Large classes get a dispensation to have finals early so the faculty have a week to get in grades before the break; the problem is really with classes that have later finals. Most instructors should have grades done by the end of finals week.

-- The policy provision that grants the Registrar the authority to extend the deadline for grades at the end of fall semester should be removed from the policy, it was suggested. Why should the onus for this decision fall on the Registrar? This only puts unnecessary pressure on Ms. VanVoorhis from individual faculty members. The policy, it was said, should be for the long haul and the one that makes the most sense; this year was an experiment. Maybe the deadline should be four days; whatever it is, people will adapt.

-- Michigan and Wisconsin have final periods right up to Christmas and a deadline for grades similar to the 3-day rule at Minnesota and the faculty there don't complain about having to get grades in.

It was suggested that Ms. VanVoorhis should meet with FCC and explain what happens to students when grades are late. One Committee member said that her rationale should stand if the University is to have a rational educational policy. Another suggested that she bring a specific proposal, endorsed by SCEP, and perhaps the issue need not be brought to the Senate.

The Committee concluded that for now it would stand by the existing policy and would propose looking at it in a few years. One possibility might be that Ms. VanVoorhis could announce what the grade deadline would be for the next few years; SCEP need not approve the dates, but it could endorse them.

Professor Martin said she would take these points back to FCC.

4. Update on Student 2000 Project

Vice Provost Swan next informed the Committee about the Student 2000 project. Fall semester was a disaster for students, for technical staff responsible for the system, and for the front-line staff who needed information (advisors, faculty, financial aid staff, the Bursar's Office). It is difficult to pinpoint responsibility for what happened; the responsibility is shared. PeopleSoft bears a fair amount but the complexity of the University also contributed. At the same time, it is not productive to take off after PeopleSoft because the University knew it was purchasing a product still in development. The old system was not Y2K compliant and could not handle semesters, but PeopleSoft also underestimated the complexity of the institution. The University is in better shape now than it was in the fall, he concluded, but it is not out of the woods.

Dr. Swan also reported that of the seven CIC schools using PeopleSoft, the University is farther along in implementing ALL of the systems than are any of the others. The provosts and chief information officers from those schools met with PeopleSoft and expressed their concerns.

Dr. Swan also reported on other problems that students and the staff have faced but said they are being addressed. He mentioned that last piece to be added, payroll, will be implemented in June, but the University will continually monitor performance and if performance degrades, the University will not make the change (the decision can be reversed up to the last minute), and both the old and new payroll systems will be running in parallel for three months.

Dr. Swan used the word "fixes" several times, noted one Committee member; who makes the fixes? The University or PeopleSoft? The University has to be sure problems are fixed, Dr. Swan responded, and there has been a problem with lack of quality control by PeopleSoft. But there is no clear answer to the question. Some of the problems are clearly PeopleSoft's; in other cases, it may have been assumed that universities work in a certain way but that the University of Minnesota does not. Whose responsibility is it in that case?

One Committee member said it sounds as though the CIC is putting great pressure on PeopleSoft; Dr. Swan agreed. The Ohio Attorney General has retained outside counsel to determine if they should sue PeopleSoft. But the software is only a small part of the cost; it is the hardware and training and personnel that are the much larger part.

Are there any competitors with PeopleSoft? Are others satisfied with their system? Dr. Swan said the University would not have needed PeopleSoft if it were a small college, and for large institutions PeopleSoft appeared to be the best vendor. Their HR programs are extremely well-regarded.

The whole experience has been challenging, observed one Committee member, but the technical staff must deal with people and put in long hours. Is the end in sight for them? Dr. Swan said he believed it is, but agreed that implementation has taken longer than hoped. If things go right, the system should work reasonably well by the end of June and people should not have to look to the fall with dread. There is reason for guarded optimism, and the administration is thinking about ways it might recognize the staff who made significant sacrifices to keep up the level of service.

Professor Martin thanked Dr. Swan for the report.

5. Classroom Expectations Guidelines

The Committee now turned to finishing its review of the Classroom Expectations Guidelines. Professor Martin reported that she had presented the draft to the Senate in February for discussion and that there had been NO comments or questions or suggestions. She pointed out that deans and department heads had earlier been given an opportunity to make comment and that many of those suggestions have been incorporated in the draft.

One Committee member raised again the issue of certain classes holding in-term exams outside of the regular class time, which creates conflicts for students who have classes at the time the exams are scheduled. Other classes, said another, may schedule field trips every Friday, which takes students out of any other class they may have on those days. This is similar to athletics, it was said; another rejoined that there is a check on when athletics may schedule events that take students out of classes while there is no check on scheduling field trips. In terms of scheduling exams outside of regular class time, existing Senate policy answers the question, it was said; there is no outside review and the department has the sole

authority to approve such exams. There is a difference between field trips and outside exams, pointed out another Committee member: they may be necessary for a course while outside exams are not.

Professor Martin agreed that this issue should be brought back to the Committee for review.

Committee members also inquired how a student is "unregistered" if not present on the first day of classes. Longstanding University policy provides that a student who is not at the first class session could lose his or her seat to another student requesting entry in a course. No one, however, actually enforces this policy. Dr. Swan said that there IS a mechanism for removing a student from a class list, although it is not clear that students are actually removed.

The Committee completed its editing of the document and approved it for presentation to the Senate for action.

Ms. Snider reported that the Office of International Programs is trying to get the word out that the deadline date for forms for summer international travel programs is April 3, which is earlier than usual. She asked that this be noted in the Committee's minutes.

Professor Martin then adjourned the meeting at 3:10.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota