

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, December 4, 2002
1:00 – 3:00
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Martin Sampson (chair), Wilbert Ahern, (Shirley Nelson Garner for) Victor Bloomfield, Dale Branton, Vernon Cardwell, Shawn Curley, Scott Ferguson, Steve Fitzgerald, Frank Kulacki, Sheryl Lazarus, Marsha Odom, Mary Ellen Shaw, Mary Sue Simmons, Craig Swan, Douglas Wangenstein

Absent: Gretchen Haas, Carol Miller, Kim Pinske, Karen Seashore,

Guests: Carol Gruber (Academic Counseling in intercollegiate athletics), Laura Koch (Faculty Academic Oversight Committee for Intercollegiate Athletics); Steve Fitzgerald (Office of Classroom Management)

[In these minutes: (1) work per credit, WebCT; (2) report from academic counseling in athletics; (3) policy changes in athletics; (4) web grades]

1. Two Items of Business

Professor Sampson convened the meeting at 1:00 and touched first on two items of business.

-- The provisions of the policy on the conversion to semesters governing work per credit and contact hours per credit are not clear. The language says both that the average work per credit per course should be three hours per week, in and out of class and that there are to be the same number of contact hours per week as there are credits for the course. It is the recollection of those who were involved that the latter provision was to be eliminated. The Committee needs to revisit that policy.

-- There was concern expressed about WebCT at an earlier meeting: that others could gain access to an instructor's records. Professor Ahern reported that Associate Vice President Cawley has assured him that that access can be "turned off" and it is his understanding that the intellectual property policy **REQUIRES** that access to course materials is provided only with the consent of the instructor. It is his understanding, from an informal conversation, that there would be no access without the consent of the instructor. It was agreed that Professor Sampson would write to Mr. Cawley to confirm this understanding and that he would provide a copy to the Technology-Enhanced Learning Council so it understood the position of the Committee.

2. Report from Athletic Academic Counseling

Professor Sampson welcomed Professor Laura Koch, chair of the Faculty Academic Oversight Committee for Intercollegiate Athletics and Dr. Carol Gruber, Director of Academic Counseling for

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intercollegiate athletics. Dr. Gruber reported that she would be reporting to the Board of Regents the following week on various academic issues in athletics; she distributed a 10-page handout with data and information about the athletic programs.

Dr. Gruber noted that the NCAA issues an annual graduation rate report for all schools in all divisions; the University compares itself to the Big Ten and other major universities. The report only tells part of the story because it only includes athletes who were initially provided athletically-related financial aid; the non-tendered and those who later receive aid are not included.

Dr. Gruber reviewed NCAA, Big Ten, and University of Minnesota academic requirements for athletes. Big Ten standards are more stringent than those of the NCAA in that they require more credit hours and a higher GPA as an athlete moves through undergraduate education. The University standard is the same as the Big Ten except that the University requires a cumulative GPA of 2.0 at all times (the Big Ten requires a 1.8 after the first year and a 1.9 after the second).

In graduation rates, male athletes tend to follow the pattern of the student body at large; female athletes consistently graduate at a rate about 15-20% higher than students generally. Dr. Gruber reviewed the six-year graduation rate for each of the men's and women's teams; the overall men's rate, for athletes who entered in 1995-96, was 44% but is likely to rise for the following year. The overall women's graduation rate, for students who entered in 1995-96, was 78%. For athletes who completed their eligibility (initially-tendered athletes only), 84% of athletes graduated. That rate is the lowest in the Big Ten (Wisconsin graduate 85% and the other schools ranged from 87% to 99%). The good news is that 84% is much higher than the six-year overall rate, Dr. Gruber said; the bad news is that Minnesota should not be at the bottom of the list. Dr. Swan noted that this latter graduation rate included students who had graduated at any time, so some of the athletes had up to 16 years to graduate. Dr. Gruber said that Athletic Director Joel Maturi wants to see the numbers improve and has taken actions to see that they do.

Dr. Gruber next noted six-year graduation rates for all of the Big Ten schools, both athletes and general student body. Minnesota is one of three schools where the graduation rate for athletes is higher than that of the general student body--but that is because Minnesota is dead last in graduation rates for students generally (50%, compared to 56% at Ohio State and ranging from 63% to 92% at the other schools). The numbers can be improved, she observed.

Dr. Gruber noted the GPAs for male and female athletes by term. Male athletes are consistently lower than the general student body; female athletes are consistently slightly higher. Dr. Swan noted that male athlete GPAs are lower than males in general but that they are also quite variable and there is no trend; female athlete GPAs appear to be about the same as female GPAs in general. Women get better grades than men.

Finally, Dr. Gruber reviewed the cumulative GPAs by sport for men and women for spring, 2002. One men's team was above 3.0 (golf at 3.2); all but three (of 12) women's sports were above 3.0. These numbers are a snapshot, she said, and tend to vary from year to year.

Dr. Simmons complimented Dr. Gruber on the richness of the data and inquired if she had any plans to analyze it further. Dr. Gruber said she has been talking with Mr. Maturi about that. They are breaking the data down further, back to 1982, because they want to know WHY athletes leave as well

as who leaves. They also want to identify who left so they can ask them to come back and graduate, even if the individual would not count in graduation rate studies. They also want to know who is coming to the program and how they are prepared--and whether or not athletes leave because they are not academically prepared.

Professor Cardwell suggested it would be useful to gather data on entering athletes so they could be compared with athletes at the other Big Ten schools (grades, ACT, etc.). Dr. Gruber agreed such information would be useful and could be brought to coaches to let them know what kinds of athletes do not succeed. Dr. Swan said that the data Professor Cardwell mentioned is also of interest to Professor Koch's committee and they also permeate a number of reform proposals for athletics. Dr. Gruber also pointed out that NCAA standards are changing in order to ensure athletes are academically prepared--the NCAA standards are catching up to the Big Ten.

The analysis of the data is not done, Professor Curley said, but he wondered if a major factor in some sports may be pressure to turn professional and the lure of the money involved. If analysis bears this out as a factor, it is not clear what the University can do as long as there is a marriage between college and professional sports. Dr. Swan agreed and noted that there have been a variety of suggestions for dealing with that issue. One, for example, is that if an athlete leaves in bad academic standing, the financial aid for that athlete is "locked up" for up to four years; that would provide coaches with the incentive to recruit athletes who want to be students. Dr. Gruber said that the coaches in general have been very supportive of her office and follow up with consequences for athletes who do not take their academic work seriously--including the coaches in the revenue-generating sports.

What would the report look like if it included all athletes, not just those who initially receive financial aid, Professor Sampson asked? Dr. Gruber said she would like to do such a report. Typically, there are more walk-ons in men's sports; males seem to be more interested in being part of the program even if they do not receive financial aid. There are a lot of walk-ons and walk-offs; rowing is the only sport in which one can learn and compete the first year without ever having participated in it before. But the number of students who enter and leave a program is significant and difficult to monitor. There would also be difficulties in monitoring transfer students, Dr. Swan said; it is not clear what the metric would be (when they started college?) and obtaining data is not easy.

The Committee discussed the type of information that might be available in the future through PeopleSoft. Dr. Gruber said it might be possible to do academic profiles, including writing samples, for every entering athlete and to identify those who need to be monitored closely; it would also be possible to keep an eye on retention rates for students who need close monitoring.

Professor Sampson thanked Dr. Gruber for her comments.

3. Policy Changes in Athletics

Professor Sampson turned next to Professor Koch to lead a discussion of athletic policy changes that are being proposed. Dr. Koch recalled that the predecessor athletic committee had reviewed all policies in order to accommodate the change to semesters; those changes had been brought to the Assembly Committee on Educational Policy. In 1999 there were changes in the administrative reporting and oversight structure, with academic counseling changed to reporting to the

Provost and compliance reporting to the General Counsel. Beginning in 2000 there was a change in the committee structure; there are now two committees; she chairs one of them. One looks at finances, facilities, and so on; the other, the one she chairs, looks at academic issues. Last year the two athletic departments were merged into one. So there have been, she concluded, a lot of changes in the last three years.

There has also been an effort to review all of the Assembly policies that apply to intercollegiate athletics to help avoid problems in the future while also not creating second-class citizens. Professor Koch reviewed briefly the many proposed policy changes (she handed out copies of a large stack of proposed changes) and made a few comments.

- The "no contact" rule (between coaches and faculty) has led some coaches to believe that they cannot talk with ANY faculty member. That was not the intent of the policy, which was only intended to preclude a coach calling a faculty member about the performance of a particular athlete in the faculty member's class. No contact at all, however, is undesirable when the University wants to promote integrity in the athletic program.
- The University has a more stringent GPA than the Big Ten. There is, however, no separate grade requirement after one semester, so an athlete could compete with a 1.65 GPA after one semester (which is the Big Ten rule). This has raised questions in her committee, she said; of the students who were in that situation after one semester, very few were academically successful.
- If her committee sees a team not performing as it should, and with a large number of failures and athletes not making progress to a degree, the committee meets with the athletic director and the coach and may write to the appropriate administrative groups.

Professor Koch invited Committee members to contact her if they had any ideas about the policy changes; they are still in draft form.

Dr. Shaw asked if this Committee needed to approve the changes. Dr. Koch said that there is a question about approval. The current bylaw provides that all policies and changes must be approved by the Assembly. Before the most recent changes, the approval authority rested with the Assembly Steering Committee (the Twin Cities members of the Senate Consultative Committee). The advice of this Committee on the policies that affect educational policy has been sought by the Steering Committee. The Committee discussed whether the SENATE or the ASSEMBLY Committee on Educational Policy should review the policies; it was agreed that the ASSEMBLY Committee should have responsibility for reviewing the policies but that the other campuses should be kept apprised of concerns and issues.

Professor Sampson thanked Professor Koch for joining the Committee; it was agreed that the Committee would return to the policies in the near future.

4. Web Grades

Professor Sampson turned next to Ms. VanVoorhis to discuss web grades. Ms. VanVoorhis began by distributing copies of a survey of Association of American Universities about their plans

with respect to grades on the web. Minnesota, she noted, is by no means the first school to propose this; a number of institutions have already moved to grades on the web. She described how the process would occur. (They will use WebCT; with large classes, the instructor can upload a file to the Registrar's office; instructors can provide proxy authority to TA's and department secretaries to enter grades; when WebCT is upgraded, there will be an interface permitting automatic transfer of grades from WebCT to PeopleSoft.) It will be very easy and very user-friendly, she assured the Committee. They will also send out communications about the change. Grades will be processed at night; a student will be able to see his or her grade the day after it was submitted.

They have eliminated the requirement of a department signature before submitting grades. In interviews with departments, it appeared this requirement was mostly used as a device to determine if faculty had turned in their grades; the new system will enable departments to track whether or not grades have been turned in. The signature has been eliminated because it appears that no one looked at the grades; when they learned that, Ms. VanVoorhis commented, they concluded the requirement should be eliminated.

The process for grade changes will not change; the same paper form will be used. They would, however, like to automate the process in the future. Faculty would always be notified by email of a grade change that they have (supposedly) approved. Several Committee members said that a reason for a grade change should be required. Professor Odom maintained that there are good reasons for requiring department head approval for a grade change and this process could be moving too fast for academic standards and the best interests of the students. Dr. Swan said he was sympathetic to the need to review grade changes and that such review is an important part of the integrity of the grading system; he agreed that this issue should be re-thought and brought back to the Committee.

On the issue of department signature for grades in general, Professor Ahern said when he was a department head he reviewed grades not for the purpose of overturning them but to look at patterns; he would talk with a faculty member if there were peculiar distributions. If the practice--which is a policy--is to be changed, the Committee should be clear about what it is approving or accepting. Should department heads no longer review grades before they are assigned? Ms. VanVoorhis agreed that this has been a practice, not a policy, on the Twin Cities campus; it might be policy on the other campuses. Dr. Swan said there will be a variety of new reports that will make identification of grading patterns easier. He said that he and Professor Odom are more concerned about grade CHANGES and that he does not want inadvertently to make policy by practice.

If a student took a course without enrolling, will the University go after him or her, Professor Sampson asked? Ms. VanVoorhis said they had monitored this practice and concluded it would be more work than it was worth.

Professor Sampson adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand