

Minutes*

Faculty Consultative Committee
Thursday, February 15, 2001
1:30 – 3:30
238A Morrill Hall

- Present: Fred Morrison (chair), Wilbert Ahern, Muriel Bebeau, Susan Brorson, Dan Feeney, Richard Goldstein, Marti Hope Gonzales, David Hamilton, Joseph Massey, Marvin Marshak, Charles Speaks, Billie Wahlstrom
- Regrets: Linda Brady, Les Drewes, V. Rama Murthy, Paula Rabinowitz, Gwen Rudney
- Absent: none
- Guests: President Mark Yudof; Vice President and Dean Christine Maziar
- Other: Nick Bussey (Minnesota DAILY)

[In these minutes: (1) various topics with the President; (2) NIH exceptional status, Graduate School applications, university presses with Vice President Maziar]

1. Discussion with President Yudof

Professor Morrison convened the meeting at 1:30 and welcomed the President. The President and the Committee had a desultory discussion that touched on a variety of topics.

- Political and budgetary issues related to the biennial request, the Governor, and the legislature: The President said the University was providing considerable information on how it uses funds and is accountable to the state. He noted that of the \$220 million increase requested, only \$35-40 million is for increases beyond inflation.
- Police background checks for administrators, which have been put in place recently: The President explained they have been limited to about 100 positions; they are required by state agencies now (some require them for all employees). They are not required for faculty. He suggested the Committee speak with Vice President Carrier if had questions.
- Responsibilities of this Committee for approving the suspension of a faculty member: there are no procedures in place. Nothing was required in the current instance (Professor Pervo) but Professor Morrison said he would draft some for review.
- Elevators from the new East River Road parking ramp to the Academic Health Center: the President said he would review the issue at an appropriate time, when it has crystallized.

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- Support service units and their responsiveness to academic priorities: the Committee noted a number of instances when units seemed not to understand the needs of the academic community. Auxiliary services need to be faculty-friendly.
- The President commended the job Professor Morrison and the Interim Health Benefits Advisory Committee have been doing in examining the issues associated with health care. He said the committee will be an integral part of the process and noted that there will be difficult issues to deal with.

Professor Morrison thanked the President.

2. Discussion with Vice President Maziar

Professor Morrison next welcomed Vice President Maziar to the meeting.

Vice President Maziar began her comments by exulting about the removal of “exceptional status” by the NIH. This is a remarkable achievement for the University, she said. She asked that it be noted in the minutes how important to her and to the University have been the sacrifices and enormous talent and energy of Professor David Hamilton in achieving this outcome. It was in large part because of his leadership that the University “has been returned to the good graces of the federal government.” This comment elicited a round of applause from the Committee. Now the University will go beyond “exceptional” and on to exemplary.

For faculty and students the change will not be noticed in any material way. The faculty have been successful in obtaining NIH and other grants during the period of “exceptional” status--it was never an indication of the quality of research conducted at the University. The concern was about administrative practices. The University is now being used around the country as an example of how to do things right. NIH has commended the University for its candor and its willingness to share its lessons; this has been beneficial for biomedical research at large but also has application well beyond the biomedical sciences.

Is there any concern about NSF funding, Professor Speaks inquired? Dr. Maziar said that NSF wants to “look under the hood” to be sure that the systems in place are not just for NIH. The Corrective Action Plan was with NIH; other agencies were bystanders. NSF and the Department of Defense are simply exercising their public trust; there are no specific issues being raised and no reason to be concerned.

In terms of the Graduate School, Dean Maziar said, admissions applications are up 4% over last year; that compares favorably with what she is hearing from around the country. About one-third of the applications are via the web, which is a great benefit both for the Graduate School and for programs (which get more immediate access to applicant data).

International applications are roughly 50% of the total, up from about 40% earlier. The overall applicant pool is growing modestly but international applications are increasing a lot; this is a concern to programs that typically draw more on domestic applicants.

There is a difference in the distribution of applications between engineering and the liberal arts, Professor Goldstein observed. Dr. Maziar agreed; she said there has been an explosion of international

applications in recent months. She noted that there has been some national media attention related to fraudulent credentials from some applications from China. She related that the University has been tracking these applications more carefully because of problems with GRE test results from that organization. She emphasized that students are not admitted or disqualified solely on the basis of the tests. Another problem is oral and written skills, Professor Goldstein observed; language test scores have not proven to be helpful. That is also true for domestic students, Dr. Maziar observed. (Professor Morrison related that the Law School holds telephone interviews.) She also said that programs have been advised to adopt “good practices,” such as acknowledging letters of recommendation (doing so is good public relations and can “prime the pump” for the future; doing so also provokes responses when the purported author did not write the letter and thus exposes fraudulent letters).

Even with the problems, Professor Goldstein observed, the University still manages to get some of the very best students. Dr. Maziar agreed and said it needs to be made known that there are very few fraudulent applications and that most who are admitted make major contributions to research at the University and to the economy of the state and nation.

On the topic of the University Press, Dr. Maziar said she is a big fan of the Press and has increased its subsidy since she came to the University; her office pays the Director’s salary and the Press’s share of the IRS. She cautioned that her office may not continue to absorb increases in the IRS as the Press becomes more successful.

University presses play an extraordinarily important role in forming young scholars in many disciplines, Dr. Maziar said; many university presses decide whether or not young scholars will be published. It is important for them to exist in the academy and it would be a tragedy if the only presses were commercial--with all the values that go with commercial presses.

How is the University Press regarded in the country, Professor Speaks asked? It is her sense it is quite highly regarded, Dr. Maziar responded, especially in its fields of specialty. It sees healthy sales and good proposals. It is solvent because of its success in regional publications.

Professor Goldstein then related that he has heard concerns about students who are admitted to one program and then transfer to another shortly after their arrival at the University. Dr. Maziar related that this was a discussion at Big Ten meetings. It is a dilemma: students DO change their aspirations and interests--and should be free to do so. But the University does not want fraudulent admissions, whereby students get into a less-competitive program and then transfer to a more-competitive one. There needs to be communication between the faculty supervising the student and the faculty who would be the student’s next supervisor. Transferring between programs requires a “change in status” through the Graduate School and the new department must accept the students.

This is not a big problem, Professor Goldstein said, and he agreed that students should be able to change programs; he said it was not worth worrying about.

Dr. Maziar thanked the Committee; Professor Morrison thanked her for joining it and adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand