

Minutes*

**Faculty Assembly Steering Committee
Thursday, April 29, 1999
12:15 – 1:30
Room 307-8 Coffman Union**

- Present: Sara Evans (chair), Kent Bales, Stephen Gudeman, David Hamilton, M. Janice Hogan, Roberta Humphreys, Marvin Marshak, Judith Martin, Fred Morrison, V. Rama Murthy
- Absent: Linda Brady, Mary Dempsey, Leonard Kuhl, Matthew Tirrell
- Guests: Regents' Professors Ellen Berscheid, Margaret Davis, Joanne Eicher, Richard Goldstein, Ronald Phillips, Paul Quie
- Other: Maureen Smith (University Relations)

[In these minutes: discussion of the intellectual future of the University with the Regents' Professors]

Professor Evans convened the discussion at 12:30 and thanked the Regents' Professors for joining the Assembly Steering Committee for a discussion of the intellectual future of the University. She noted that this has been the topic of an ongoing set of meetings of the Committee, and she inquired where it might fruitfully take the discussion.

One question, she related, is how to ensure a faculty-led discussion of the intellectual future of the institution as it is being pushed one way or another by the exigencies of the time (technology, the legislature, etc.). Another question is what the academic world will be like in 20 years. Yet another is what THIS UNIVERSITY will be like in 20 years--what mix of services, health sciences, undergraduate education, research and graduate education, will make up the University?

The Regents' Professors offered a number of views on these and other topics.

-- As comprehensive as this university is, it has the opportunity to integrate disciplines in ways that other institutions cannot. It provides more opportunities along this line than many, and it should build on those special opportunities that are not being taken advantage of.

One of the factors that contributes to interdisciplinary activity is the structure of the Graduate School with its free-floating graduate programs--they enjoy tremendous breadth. IMG, however, works against it; the faculty view of IMG makes them hesitate to participate in interdisciplinary courses. One Regents' Professor present announced termination of a course that had been taught for five years because there was pressure to quit teaching it because it was not making money for the department.

In the view of some, universities are ill-suited to do interdisciplinary work because of their structure. The way the Graduate School works helps, but interdisciplinary work must be individual.

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Departments do not help; there must be a change in the structure and in the rewards to individuals who work across departments. The community of the academic department is important, but people who work across those lines must receive credit and recognition. (But this may not be true in all cases; some departments support faculty in cross-departmental endeavors. Generally, however, departments see them as competitive with the department.)

-- The University needs to build bridges to the intellectual community in the Twin Cities outside the University. There are interesting and diverse groups in the Twin Cities who often want a link to the University. While faculty may look on such work as service, it can also generate research.

-- One very large change is the international focus of the University. Minnesota is one of perhaps five universities where all of the health sciences schools are together, and all together with the rest of the campus. This provides an opportunity for combined effort, and the University should step up to the plate on international issues. (The big problem for the health sciences is that while it benefited from cross-fertilization from the 50 years up into the 1970s, that work is disappearing as the pressure to generate funds increases; interdisciplinary clinical investigators are an endangered species in every U.S. academic health center.)

-- Although it may be a simplistic view, the intellectual future of the University depends entirely on the quality of the faculty. When one looks at the statistics on faculty salaries, and the lack of progress in gaining on others in the top 30, the intellectual future does not look bright. The future lies in multi- and inter-disciplinary collaborations, and the faculty are the heart and soul of intellectual activities; if the University gets the right people, structural things will take care of themselves. It is not clear, however, who is attending to intellectual issues. The focus must be on recruitment of quality faculty in the disciplines. If the FCC continues the intellectual future discussions, it should not be derailed by peripheral issues; THIS (salaries) is the central issue.

A related problem is that departments in some cases cannot compete for graduate students; top students are being offered twice what the University offers, and in some cases are offered packages for their entire graduate career, not just for one year. Good graduate students attract good faculty. The issue is not just salaries; it revolves around the nature of the people who inhabit the buildings.

One has heard for 25 years that faculty salaries are the first priority, but the University has been unable to sell the idea that it is important to have quality faculty if it is to be a quality university. It may be that the people of Minnesota want a "pretty good university," but right now salaries are not even at the median. (It was noted that in the 1998-1999 analysis of salaries of faculty at the top 30 research universities, Minnesota gained one notch at the full and associate professor level--to 25th and 22nd, respectively, and made no gain at the assistant professor level--at 22nd.)

-- Taking a macro view of the quality of research universities, there are two factors that affect quality most. One, by far the most important, is faculty salaries; if an institution does not pay competitive salaries, everything else does not matter. The second factor is faculty size. There are forces at work at the University pulling it in different directions that work against both salaries AND size. It is understaffed in virtually all areas, AND the faculty are underpaid; the only way to overcome these factors is to shrink the scope of the entire enterprise. (That was tried, unsuccessfully, with Commitment to Focus.)

There has never been a solution to the faculty salary issue; someone needs to identify one that is faculty-driven. One of the lessons of the tenure debate was that the faculty have not done a good job of telling people why they need a really good university. That conversation has to be held with different audiences, rather than the faculty constantly tweaking administrators to get better salaries. There was a lot of outreach during the tenure debate by the faculty.

-- But: the faculty are here to teach and do research, and do NOT have the time or money to sell the faculty. That is the job of the administration and Regents, and it has not been done. Many faculty took large chunks out of their lives during the tenure debate to do what they should not have had to do.

One can argue about who should do what, but part of this is related to public perceptions of the school; in Illinois and Michigan, people feel good about their universities, they have high status, and people believe they are a good place to get an education. That is not true in Minnesota; it is a pretty good university. There should be much more done to raise public interest in the quality of the University. This suggests there should be an active effort, led by the administration and University Relations.

The University has tried to make itself more user-friendly for students, but many alumni are bitter about how they were treated at the University. There has not been enough imagination put into public relations, but the faculty should not do it.

Many organizations are doing things that benefit the state, as does the University, and it can also say what it is doing that is interesting or exciting (that may not be linked directly to a benefit to the state). The private institutions use their faculty to help in public relations (by describing what they do, not pandering). There needs to be an effort made, and worked out, but the faculty are not the ones who can do it. (There is a faculty ambassadors program, but few faculty volunteer to participate; faculty do not seem anxious to tell people about what they do. Part of the reason is that support has eroded, faculty weigh carefully what they can do; they are not speakers because they cannot take on the responsibility.)

-- There is little access to the expertise of the University. It is not surprising that the legislature sometimes makes unsound decisions; it has no staff, so does no research, and gets its information from lobbyists. If the University could organize itself as a place where people--including legislators--could get information, that would help.

(This may be helped by the new grants management system, which includes a web site with a database on University of Minnesota expertise, with a search function, so anyone could find faculty who are interested, for example, in working on K-12 issues. There are 1000 faculty in the database now, and rest have to be included; the legislature will be able to find information.)

But there needs also to be rewards; faculty who provide expert testimony should receive "micro brownie points." The University might also support graduate students whose job it is to find information for the legislature, and who can help the faculty do so. But faculty will need support for this; with no secretaries and no assistance, they cannot cope if information is needed.

At the same time, legislators need to hear from faculty. Most would participate in legislative presentations, if someone else would organize them and get the faculty there. The question is whether the administration WANTS the faculty there. (A lot of faculty do testify on issues before the legislature, but an organized appearance by faculty would be a good idea.)

-- The problem is much worse than what can be remedied by a faculty presence at the legislature: there is a deep cultural view that people should not be paid that much. There is a lack of understanding that the University competes in a national and international market. People understand that about basketball but not about professors. In the Big Ten, the University is close to the top, behind only Michigan and Northwestern--but it is being clobbered by the University of California system and the private universities. Perhaps the University could hope to work its way up to 20th, but the leap to the next group is large, and the University would be competing with the coasts. The culture must be changed; the University must emphasize the international competition it faces if it is to compete in the 21st century.

-- There is a need to better publicize what the University offers, such as \$100,000 research grants, which would attract faculty. Senate committees, including FCC, should think strategically about this.

Professor Evans then noted that there are other changes occurring in higher education, such as (1) that affecting health care, and (2) the rise of distance learning and the shift in teaching away from tenured and tenure-track faculty and away from the classroom; is the University at risk from distance education?

-- There will always be elite, high-quality universities; the poor quality institutions will be in danger. There is less reason to worry about distance education than many would have one believe; students like to be together, and have other agendas at a university beyond learning.

However, one can question if the high-quality schools will survive. It is bothersome that the educational endpoint for many students now is the job; they will go to an institution where to does not matter whether they are educated, if they obtain the credential they need for the job. That is what the distance education institutions offer. Earlier, students went to college to learn to think and to analyze--and hope for a job when they got out. The high-quality institutions may not have enough students to support them.

--- The University should encourage students to be active in the community--but many have part-time jobs, and have no presence in the community. (Community service has been discussed as a graduation requirement at other institutions.)

-- A big demographic change in higher education is who the faculty is. If one defines them as those who do teaching and research, across the nation increasing numbers are not tenured or tenure-track. Departments find it cheaper to hire non-tenured faculty; the only way the faculty can control the intellectual future is to control hiring beyond the department level. Departments need support, but it is they who hire non-tenured faculty; the faculty must point the fingers at themselves, for their solution has been self-destructive.

-- Another threat on the horizon arises when research dollars are hard to get; it is cheaper to contract work out than to do research in labs. This will destroy the graduate enterprise, and do harm to the faculty, in addition to hiring of non-tenured people. Extending the appointment of post-docs is also doing harm to graduate education.

People are available to do this kind of work, however, because of the increasing number of degrees granted; George Will in a recent column argued that higher education is not sensitive to supply and demand. Another problem is the "dumbing down" of the doctorate; if one compares the quality of

incoming graduate students, and the quality of dissertations, over the last 20 years, one would see a significant difference. (This is not true in all fields.)

-- The question of the impact of distance education and oversupply of degrees goes to the issue of how to allocate new positions. The process does not work with departments; there needs to be a broader screen (one has been suggested for the biological sciences). Departments clone themselves. FCC should think about a higher-level body to consider position allocation.

Professor Evans thanked everyone for coming and adjourned the discussion at 1:30.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota