

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy**  
**Wednesday, March 2, 2005**  
**1:00 – 3:00**  
**238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Emily Hoover (chair), Victor Bloomfield, Shawn Curley, LeAnn Dean, Gretchen Haas, Adam Hirsch, James Leger, Richard McCormick, Christopher Pappas, Mary Ellen Shaw, Craig Swan, Douglas Wangensteen, Joel Weinsheimer, Jenny Zhang

Absent: Dale Branton, Vernon Cardwell, Emily Ronning, Karen Seashore

Guests: Susan Van Voorhis, Tina Falkner (Office of the Registrar); Nathan Wanderman (Student Senate Consultative Committee); Jamie Larson, Sara Kempner (Graduate and Professional Student Assembly)

[In these minutes: (1) report of the chair; (2) evaluation of instruction policy: student release questions; (3) MSA/GAPSA resolution on closure of programs due to financial constraints; (4) 4XXX-5XXX courses; (5) evaluation of instruction policy; (6) students with three finals in one day; (7) dropping courses]

**1. Report of the Chair**

Professor Hoover convened the meeting at 1:00 and began by reporting that she had been contacted by Vice Provost Rinehart for the name of a member of the Committee who could serve on a group to discuss releasing from housing contracts and providing tuition refunds to students who have mental health problems or who have been the victim of sexual assault. Dr. Shaw agreed to serve.

Professor Hoover distributed copies of the bylaws language that creates and establishes the remit of the Committee. She noted that the Committee had reviewed and amended the language about 18 months ago but that it now needed to go on the docket for approval for the new Senate structure. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the language.

**2. Evaluation of Instruction Policy (Part I): "Student Release" Questions**

Professor Hoover next welcomed Mr. Wanderman to the meeting to discuss the "student release" questions that would be included in the revised policy on the evaluation of instruction.

Mr. Wanderman reported that the Student Senate is aware that this Committee is working on the student evaluation policy and decided to focus its attention on reworking the student release questions. They will be discussed by the Student Senate the day after this meeting and any revised proposals will be brought back to this Committee. The questions are modeled on the existing ones but changed slightly to clarify them; they tried to be neutral about the instructor but want to give students

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a tool to select courses that mesh with their learning style in order to reduce course-switching during the first weeks of the semester.

Ms. Haas recalled that about 20% of faculty approve the release of the results of these questions; perhaps release could be made mandatory if there is nothing about the instructor—and two of the questions about the instructor are eliminated. (8. "Rate 1-7 . . . any of the following strengths that apply to your professor. a) approachable b) gave constructive feedback c) returned course work quickly d) lectures were well-structured and clear e) concepts and theories were well-presented and understandable f) passionate and excited about course material. 9. I would take another class with this professor? Yes/No) Mr. Wanderman said they had discussed that and did not want to eliminate the questions about the student's preference. He said he believed about 75% of the faculty did not release the results not because they were bad but because they do not believe anyone cares or they are not aware of how to do so. Dr. Swan noted that he and Professor Hoover send an email to all who teach undergraduate classes and said he would welcome the participation of students in that communication.

Is the information from the questions accessible by course and instructor, Professor Curley inquired? Dr. Swan said that one can search by course or by instructor. There are currently questions about the instructor, Professor Curley asked? There are. Can one see all the results? One can.

Dr. Swan said that apropos #6 ("For this course, I learned most: Inside class <--> Outside class), students should think about the class overall, not just in-class assignments and readings. What do they have in mind with it? Inside class means not a lot of homework, most everything is learned in the class, Mr. Wanderman said. Outside means, at the extreme, class is not convened, students read books and take tests on line. He said he would welcome different wording.

Mr. Pappas asked about questions 2 and 4 ("2. In this course I was primarily expected to: memorize, analyze, complete activities/projects"; "4. I would recommend this course to: everyone, if in my major, no one"). One must choose one, he asked? On #2, that won't produce much information because in both teaching and taking courses, he does all of them. #4 is not a good measure, he said. And for #6, learning more inside or outside class, he surmised that most students would not understand the distinction. And the question about #6 is, what is good, Professor McCormick added. Is it good that all the work is inside, or outside, of class? And the same question applies to #5 (5. This course was <--> difficult): is it good because it is difficult or bad because it is difficult? Mr. Wanderman said that he believed #5 should be ambiguous. He said he would not include #2 (memorize/analyze/do projects) but some students want it. For #4 (recommend the course to everyone/in the major/no one), student satisfaction surveys do show a distinction, but if a question is worthless he would favor discarding it. With #6 (learning most inside/outside class), he does not use it but again, some students want it retained.

Professor Hoover suggested replacing the word "professor" with "instructor."

Professor Hoover inquired if there would be anchors. Professor Leger suggested there should be a "does not apply" option, and for questions like #2 (memorize/analyze/do projects) the option should be to check all that apply. Professor Curley pointed out that there are more divisions of learning than the three categories mentioned in that question. There is also need for a question about how much effort the student put in, such as the number of hours, Professor Leger said; it could be that

there would be different workloads, week to week, and that students might not be able to estimate effort, so it would be better to have a scale with anchors that students could use.

Professor Wangenstein said that apropos learning inside versus outside class, he learned a lot redoing his lecture notes, which would have been outside of class but based on the lectures. Mr. Wanderman said perhaps the question should be eliminated if it cannot be made useful enough for the student or the instructor.

Dr. Shaw said that numbers used in #3 ("3. I spent approximately 0-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7+ hours per week on this class outside of the classroom") seemed low, well below what should be expected for a four-credit course. Mr. Wanderman said they had higher numbers and it is clear students do not spend that much time. Mr. Hirsch said that he spent 25 hours in the studio for an Art class, which is a great deal more than the "7+" option offered by the question. There will be anomalies, Mr. Wanderman said; students taking Art or Architecture courses would not use that question. Professor Curley pointed out that a three-credit course is supposed to require six hours of work outside the class; this scale is skewed below expectations. But a lot of students spend less time than expected, Dean Bloomfield observed. Mr. Pappas suggested adding more time. If one looks at the percentages, most are in the 1<sup>st</sup> category so it becomes difficult to aggregate, Mr. Wanderman said.

Dr. Swan suggested that Mr. Wanderman ask the Academy of Distinguished Teachers members for their views because they are recognized for the quality of their teaching. Dr. Falkner asked if the students had looked at use of a free-form answer box (they have not, but it would be difficult to tabulate responses, Dr. Swan said) or if they had looked at what other schools are doing (they have).

Mr. Wanderman said they would reformat the questions and return to the Committee.

### **3. MSA/GAPSA Resolution About Program Closures Due to Budget Constraints**

Professor Hoover turned next to Mr. Pappas, who distributed copies of a resolution that the Minnesota Student Association and the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly had adopted concerning program closures. Following nine "whereas" clauses, there were two "decided" clauses:

Decided, [GAPSA and MSA] urge the University administration to seek input of all affected students, as well as student government, before any action toward program closure or suspension of enrollment is taken. The information provided by students should be distributed to any committee or group involved in the review of the program, and be it further

Decided, that [GAPSA and MSA] urge all students to be consulted for input and all student input should be distributed to all committees or groups involved in the review of this program.

They want to ensure that there is a student voice in the process, Mr. Pappas said, and would like something from the administration indicating it understands the sensitivities and will hear students, and there will be a public meeting where students can be heard.

Dean Bloomfield said that Graduate School policy and practice concerning closing a program specifies that there must be student and faculty input. That has not always happened, he said, but they are reminding programs that it is required.

Suspending admissions is more complicated and depends on timing. Action to suspend admissions means they want to think about closing the program (usually because of program quality, not for financial reasons) or they believe a program may be of low quality, not serving students well, and they want to revise it before they admit more students. If the decision is early enough in the year, there is time to discuss suspending admissions with faculty and students. Typically, however, it is November or December or after before people realize the program needs evaluation—and at that point admissions are on the verge of happening. One must recognize that sometimes there is a need to move quickly; that causes distress, Dean Bloomfield agreed, but it would be worse to have a prolonged discussion, admit students, and THEN to decide the program needs revitalization. The Carnegie Commission on the doctorate says that Ph.D. students are the prospective stewards of the discipline; it is thus right they should have a voice—and they are often harsher critics than the faculty. He said he has no objection in principle to talking with students about suspending admissions; it is often, however, a pragmatic matter of timing.

Professor Curley said he could not understand what the second "decided" clause added. After some brief discussion, Mr. Pappas agreed it could be struck.

Professor Wangensteen said that admissions could be suspended without consultation; closing a program, however, could not be. Dean Bloomfield agreed. Consultation would be desirable in the fall about admissions, to decide if new students should be admitted the following year, but if it occurs to people in January that the program is too small or of low quality, the administration has to suspend admissions. It is not a death sentence to suspend admissions. Mr. Pappas said he believed it would be odd to make such a decision mid-year; Dean Bloomfield said it was not at all odd. That's part of the problem, Mr. Pappas responded; even if there is need for a quick decision, there could be consultation with students—the decision will not be made overnight. Professor Leger said such consultation need not be extensive and student views could be obtained quickly.

Professor Hoover asked what Mr. Pappas would like done with the resolution. He said they would like it brought to the Senate and a change in Graduate School policy. Dean Bloomfield said that Graduate School policy is largely in accord with the resolution. Ms. Larson said the resolution will be on the Student Senate agenda; the goal is to have it approved by this Committee and then placed on a Senate docket. Professor Hoover pointed out that the Student Senate Consultative Committee could bring the resolution to the Senate; they do not need this Committee's approval. Ms. Larson said they would prefer to have SCEP approval. Professor Hoover said she needed a motion; Professor Curley moved that the Committee endorse the resolution minus the second "decided" clause and with the understanding it is "should" and not "must." Mr. Pappas said they would prefer to retain "must," which applies mostly to the Graduate School. Dean Bloomfield said he would like recognition of the fact that Graduate School policy already mandates such consultation. Ms. Haas said that Graduate School policy is not always followed; she also said that the budget constraints references could be confusing because the resolution implies that admissions suspensions are due to budget constraints. Professor Curley said that perhaps the resolution should go back to GAPSAs for rewording.

Ms. Kempner said, with respect to Dean Bloomfield's point, that student involvement is lacking at the Policy and Review Councils. She was the only student who reviewed a program closure proposal, and there were no students from the program concerned, and they would have no way to know the subject was on the P&R Council agenda. The policy may require student consultation but only a small number are involved. There are two kinds of students, Dean Bloomfield said: those in the program and those who serve on P&R Councils. The Graduate School policy speaks to faculty and students who are in the program, and each graduate program is supposed to have a student representative to the P&R Council. Not all do, Ms. Kempner said. Her P&R Council has only three students, although it deals with a much larger number of programs. There is always the opportunity for students and faculty to testify to the P&R Council, Dean Bloomfield said. Graduate School policy is that when there is thought about changing or closing a program, students should be consulted. Since they have moved to close programs recently, they have sent letters to the Directors of Graduate Study reminding them of the policy.

Ms. Haas made an important point, Dean Bloomfield continued. Budget constraints are not generally the reason for suspending admissions; the decision comes because of program quality—are there enough faculty, courses, and students. Those are the issues at the heart of the decision. This resolution does not reflect that fact. Professor Leger said this is actually a weak statement, even if it does say "must"; he noted that Dean Bloomfield said a requirement for consultation is already in place and the resolution should refer to it. If they mean consultation should be required, the statement should be stronger.

Dean Bloomfield said he did not disagree with the resolution but asked about the language calling for consultation with all affected students and student government: does that mean the Graduate School would need to ask MSA and GAPSA as well? And the Faculty Consultative Committee?

Professor Hoover suggested the students revise the resolution and bring it back to the Committee.

#### **4. 4XXX/5XXX Courses**

Vice Provost Swan recalled that the Committee had asked him to inquire of colleges about adherence to the rules governing enrollments in 4XXX and 5XXX courses. The Committee was concerned about the use of 4XXX and 5XXX numbers. 4XXX courses are undergraduate but may be taken by graduate students under certain conditions; 5XXX courses are graduate but may be taken by undergraduates under certain conditions. The 4XXX level was new when the University changed to semesters; many departments, however, kept the 5XXX numbers. They identified a number of courses where the substantial majority of the students in 5XXX courses were undergraduates. The Committee adopted a statement asking him and Dean Bloomfield to ask the colleges to investigate and inform them what they do. They have received only a small number of responses.

Professor Leger said that the SCEP discussion led to an entire faculty meeting in his department to address the issue; they adopted a policy. They require a certain GPA before undergraduates will be admitted to 5XXX courses—the student must be one who they would admit to their Masters level program. Dean Bloomfield said that he had received responses from a number of departments and they seemed reasonable. The ones that he found most disturbing are those that said

there are not enough graduate students to populate a 5XXX course so the department wants to put undergraduates in them.

There was a practice of cross-listing 3XXX and 5XXX courses, Professor McCormick recalled, in order to boost enrollment in courses, and most undergraduates would register at the 3XXX level.

Professor Hoover asked that Dr. Swan and Dean Bloomfield convey the displeasure of the Committee at the lack of response to the inquiry about the use of the 4XXX and 5XXX course numbers.

## **5. Evaluation of Instruction Policy (Part II)**

Professor Hoover reported that she and Professor Kleiner would be discussing the evaluation of instruction policy with the Faculty Consultative Committee the next day. FCC has been informed of the different views of this Committee and the Committee on Faculty Affairs about who should see written comments on the evaluation forms. The email to FCC about the issue generated more responses from FCC members than any issue she has seen before.

Professor Hoover distributed copies of two emails that had been sent by FCC members and were provided to the Committee with their permission. The first came from Professor Martin Sampson:

Three points.....in increasing order of difficulty.

### **(1) Degree of difficulty 1.2**

Some student criticism is an affirmation of good teaching.

Do our quantitative procedures acknowledge that? Answer: no. Why not? This is fixable. It is a HUGE problem, as a passage of the [Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs] discussion points out. Let's fix this.

Averages are vulnerable to one student who took offense at having to work harder than anticipated and circles "1" throughout the evaluation. The incentive for the instructor is to keep customers like that happy. Absurd! The incentive to avoid two or three of these evaluations in a course of 75 students is huge.

A solution is to ban average scores as a description of quantitative data. The data should instead be described by medians and the percentage of respondents who rated the instructor as a 6 or a 7 on a seven point scale.

Medians and comparisons based on the percentage of 6 or 7 ratings are not vulnerable to one or two unhappy "customers." They change the incentive for the instructor from avoiding a few low ratings to making the course work for students who are serious about learning something new. It is important to do that.

**(2) Degree of difficulty 3.3**

The same point applies to how we regard qualitative evaluations . . . except that I do not have a quick answer here except to reinforce that qualitative evaluations not go to administrative levels until there is a solution. Morris may have a solution.

**(3) Degree of difficulty?? Maybe 7.8**

Our evaluation questions are generic, good for use at any liberal arts college or community college or research university or MNSCU campus or online university. That is not entirely bad. It fits nicely at a place that has no articulated ambition for its undergraduate mission other than "good teaching" or "outstanding teaching."

This means (a) instructors are encouraged to do what instructors do everywhere and (b) students are encouraged to view their education as students at the lowest common denominator would do everywhere. This cup is at least half full, yet my sense is that something is wrong here. The incentives should aim higher.

Maybe Morris could do so. It is unfortunate that the TC part of the university has no institutional vision of what its undergraduate teaching is supposed to be, hence there can be no link between evaluation questions and an inspired vision of what a research university should do in its undergraduate classrooms.

Do we want TC students to discover that because of being at the U of M they think more clearly than their high school friends who have gone to other places? Do we want U of M students to feel they have developed research instincts and intellectual curiosity that their friends at [other institutions] have not? If so, the evaluation form should ask if a course has contributed to that kind of development. A few of the questions should be part of the articulation of what the university is trying to do in its undergraduate classrooms that differs from what normally happens at a different kind of institution.

The second email came from Professor Judith Martin.

A HUGE "Thank You" to Martin for wading more deeply into the question raised by SCEP and SCFA. I would like to strongly second two points that he made:

"1) Any one ever experienced a department tenure discussion of outside letters in which someone cherry picks one passage that is at variance with everything else in all the letters and then attempts to build an overall case for or against tenure on that one passage?"

I have -- and it was not pretty. It became a battle between my department and the dean -- and required the provost to reverse a decision based on just such a cherry-picked passage.

"2) Averages are vulnerable to one student who took offense at having to work harder than anticipated and circles "1" throughout the evaluation. The incentive for the instructor is to

keep customers like that happy. Absurd! The incentive to avoid two or three of these evaluations in a course of 75 students is huge."

I'll offer a personal and recent example of how badly the current system works: in a fall course with 110 students (2/3 at the 1000 level and 1/3 at the 3000 level) there was a 1.5 point variance in question #1 between the 1 and 3 level students -- and it was all about having to work harder than they expected.

I hope we do the sensible things and recommend Martin's solution of a median score and also recommend that comments stay with the instructor alone.

Professor Hoover noted that Professor Sampson raised the issue of what kind of questions should be asked. The Durfee Subcommittee and this Committee decided not to take that issue on, but Professor Sampson urged that the generic questions alone are not good enough. She said she did not know if the Committee wished to hold up the policy to consider his points.

How difficult would be it be to add questions, Professor Wangenstein asked? The current policy mandates specific questions, Dr. Swan said, and if they are to be changed, the Senate would have to approve. If the Senate would delegate that authority to this Committee, the process would be easier. There is nothing in the policy that prohibits departments or colleges from adding questions, Professor Hoover observed.

Professor Curley said he thought Professor Sampson made good points, but he said he was not sure students were the right ones to ask about research instincts and intellectual curiosity. There was an article recently suggesting students do not know the answer to these questions because they do not have enough experience. Professor McCormick said it sounds like FCC is interested in questions about undergraduate education; perhaps they could come up with some, he suggested. Students typically have one experience; it appears that Professor Sampson's question asks for comparisons they cannot make. There can be questions about cutting-edge research and teaching, but not about comparisons, Professor McCormick agreed. Professor Curley said that students won't necessarily know anything about cutting-edge research, either. Dean Bloomfield said that liberal arts colleges also provide instruction that interacts with research. What is characteristic of the University is that it is moving to more interdisciplinary connections, something that other institutions do not have the breadth to do. He wondered if it is possible to craft a generic question along the lines that Professor Sampson has suggested; it is not clear how generic one can get when what is special is in small areas.

Professor Hoover said she would ask Professor Sampson to draft a couple of questions the Committee might consider.

## **6. Students with Three Finals in One Day**

Dr. Falkner reported, as she had promised to do, the result of her discussion with her college contacts about student comments about faculty who were unwilling to change an exam when a student has three finals in one day. There have been no complaints on this score. It appears to be a non-issue.

Professor Hoover moved to the next agenda item.



## **7. Dropping Courses**

Professor Hoover distributed copies of an email from a faculty member who said that the current policy of allowing students to drop courses up to the end of the second week without penalty (without transcript notation) was a problem because too many students were dropping courses. UP to 25% of students in a course may drop. Several results follow: classes may be assigned to classrooms that are too large; departments must pay for a larger number of syllabi and handouts than is necessary, an additional TA hired for a lab section may not be needed, transportation may be reserved that is not needed, and so on. In the past, he wrote, when students had to wait in line to get a piece of paper, dropping was fairly uncommon. Now the burden has shifted from the student to the University. "I am sufficiently old-fashioned to believe that, in a civil society, an apology is due when a commitment is not honored--and that registration for a course is indeed a commitment to the University. It would be salutary, and even educational, if students were required to send the instructor, or the Registrar, or both, a formal note of regret when they drop a course. On and following the first day of class, permission from the instructor might be required before a course can be dropped."

Professor Hoover also distributed copies of a survey provided by Ms. VanVoorhis of the drop policies at AAU universities. They are, she noted, "all over the board." Some have much later drop dates than the University, Professor Curley observed, including up to the day before the final.

Professor McCormick said this issue had been discussed in CLA. It is not JUST a question of the change from paper to electronic registration; it is also related to tuition banding. Tuition banding has a good effect on graduation rate but it also means there is no financial consequence to the student for overbooking courses, just to be safe. He said he did not believe it possible to get around the "open shopping period" in a modern university. After that period, however, the University should be more restrictive. They have talked about requiring the instructor's permission to withdraw after the first two weeks, but that would not fly, he concluded. Ms. VanVoorhis noted that a student receives a full tuition refund if the drop is the first week of classes, but only 90% if the drop is the second week—unless there is a swap for another course. On the Twin Cities campus, the tuition implications of dropping a course depend on whether a student drops below 13 credits or not.

Ms. Haas said that as an instructor, she thinks the drop period is too long; as a student, she thinks it's appropriate.

In many cases, dropping is due to the difficulty of getting IN to some courses, Professor Leger said. It depends on students' places in the registration queue; if they do not get the classes they need, they will register for other courses but then see if students drop the courses they need.

Dr. Shaw said that the 25% drop rate in the course mentioned by the faculty member seemed unusually high. Is there a question about what students expect of the course? The problem could be specific to that course. She said she supported the current drop period and the eight weeks to obtain a W. She said she also supported, although it was not supported by the Committee, a requirement that the advisor be contacted after the second week of classes before a student is permitted to take a W in a course. This would not be as difficult as going to a faculty member and now the system looks at financial aid in a way it did not do before; requiring advisor contact before dropping a course could help students avoid getting in trouble vis-à-vis financial aid requirements.

Dr. Swan reported that the incidence of W's is down after the first two weeks of classes. He said he believed that although post-two-week withdrawals have declined, the University's policy is more generous than average for the University's peers. He agreed with the email from the faculty member: to the extent students over-enroll, class scheduling is affected. There are other considerations as well: if students are shopping to find out about a course, that was what the course guide was about, but it has not been as successful as some had hoped it would be. There has been talk about posting syllabi on line, although that will only inform students how the course was taught in the past. It is possible that some of the questions used at Northwestern could be helpful, and the Committee should perhaps review the data on drops during the first two weeks of the term. Professor Leger agreed with the last point; this could be a non-issue, he said, and the Committee should see the statistics. Taking a course is like buying a car, he said; he wants to test-drive it before he buys and he wants to see the instructor lecture before he decides on the course.

Ms. VanVoorhis recalled that there was at one time talk about imposing a \$10 drop fee, but that engendered a very hostile reaction. She said the University would not be able to make everyone happy; last week she heard from a group of students who wanted the drop period to be LONGER than the first two weeks of the term.

Professor Weinsheimer observed, apropos Professor Leger's quip, that students also want to see what they get on the first exam and on other things that will not come in the first few weeks of a semester. He said he favors a generous drop policy and is not worried about students dropping courses; of much greater concern to him are students who want to add the course in the third week or later. What happens is that a class is cancelled because an instructor is ill or for some similar reason, so students must scramble to find another course, Ms. VanVoorhis explained—and since they are paying for 13 credits, or must have 13 credits for financial aid purposes, they must enroll in another class. In a large class, one can expect 10-15 students who will ask to get in after the second week of classes, Professor Weinsheimer said; he said he does not know what to say, even though it is an emergency; is he supposed to go over all the materials again with those students?

Dropping late is also an opportunity cost for other students, Dr. Swan pointed out. One way to deal with class expenses, he said, is to charge a course fee that would not be refunded if a student drops.

Professor Curley said he was flabbergasted to learn that a course would be cancelled after two or three weeks. Dr. Swan said he would follow up with Ms. VanVoorhis to look at the number of classes that are cancelled after the term begins.

The Committee agreed that it did not wish to consider a change in the current drop policy, subject to reviewing data.

Professor Hoover adjourned the meeting at 2:45.

-- Gary Engstrand