

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, September 6, 2006
2:30 – 4:30
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Richard McCormick (chair), William Bart, Vernon Cardwell, Maureen Cisneros, April Knutson, Peh Ng, Paul Siliciano, Craig Swan, Cathrine Wambach, Douglas Wangenstein, Joel Weinsheimer

Absent: Gail Dubrow, James Leger, Claudia Neuhauser, Donna Spannaus-Martin

Guests: Susan Van Voorhis (Office of the Registrar), David Langley (Center for Teaching and Learning); Associate Vice President Geoffrey Maruyama

Other: none

[In these minutes: (1) issues pending; (2) Minnesota P-16 partnership; (3) issues pending and task force recommendations; (4) University policies on teaching and learning]

1. Issues Pending

Professor McCormick gaveled the meeting to order at 1:35, called for a round of introductions, and then turned to the list of issues pending before the Committee. He asked that Committee member identify those they believe to be priorities and suggest other issues that they believe important but that are not on the list. From his perspective, he said, the big issues for the year will be these:

- review of the liberal education requirements
- the work of the Langley committee reviewing the mandated student-evaluation questions
- the task force recommendations (especially those related to undergraduate and graduate education), and
- the work of the Center for Enhanced Student Learning (CESL) and the proposals for learning outcomes (which this Committee must approve).

One Committee member not present today recommended that the Committee look at Derek Bok's book Our Underachieving Colleges. Vice Provost Swan said he would provide copies of the book for Committee members. Why that book instead of others, Professor Wambach asked? Because it is readable, it has received a lot of attention, it relies on educational research, and it focuses on the forest rather than the trees, Dr. Swan responded.

The use of on-line student evaluations has not been resolved, Professor Weinsheimer said, and there are questions surrounding them that bear reconsideration. Professor McCormick recalled that the School of Dentistry requested an exception to the existing policy (which prohibits students from being

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required to fill out evaluation forms) for reasons related to its accreditation. Their plan was in accord with the spirit of the Senate policy, and the Committee approved the exception—and decided that colleges would need to come to the Committee to request such exceptions. He said he has not seen other requests from any other college in the Academic Health Center.

In the revised policy on evaluation of instruction passed last spring, instructors who use electronic evaluations may require all students to participate as long as there is an opt-out provision, Professor McCormick said. There have been concerns about on-line evaluations because of the low participation rate and the validity of the data. The AHC has found that when the evaluations are on-line, with the opt-out provision, the participation rate is very high. That may not address all the concerns, but if electronic evaluations can improve participation, responses will not be dependent on attendance the last day of class.

2. The Minnesota P-16 Partnership

Professor McCormick welcomed Associate Vice President Maruyama to discuss the Minnesota P-16 Education Partnership, "a voluntary organization made up of the statewide education groups in Minnesota, plus others from government, business, and other private sectors [which] . . . works collaboratively to maximize achievements of all students, from preschool through elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education." The membership includes all statewide educational organizations, including the University, MNSCU, the Private College Council, Department of Education, PTSA, Education Minnesota, MN Assn of School Administrators, School Board Association, Citizen's League, etc. Dr. Maruyama related that President Bruininks is the formal University delegate, and that he and former Dean Steven Yussen have worked with the P-16 Partnership for the last few years; the focus for this Committee, he said, is the interface between P-12 (= pre-K-12) and higher education.

There were several working groups during 2005-06 (P-16 identification system, college access programs, remediation study and action plan, alignment/requirements for college readiness and work skills/standards, aligned math assessment, and coordination of web-based career information sites). The student identification system would create a seamless identification system for public school students from pre-school through college; the working group is dealing with problems related to privacy and the kinds of data that should be collected. For study of remediation, there needs to be a tracking system, Dr. Maruyama said, or the system will be of limited use (for example, there will be data on students who take remedial courses in college; those looking at student college performance will want to look back at the high school performance to see if there are predictors of who will require remedial courses in college, but if there are not individual-student identifiers, they will not be able to do this kind of research).

The college-readiness working group reported to the legislature. It is not clear that high school teachers know what they should cover to prepare students for college; the group is working to provide information to teachers about what they should teach beyond the standards to prepare students for college and careers.

The aligned math assessment group is charged to explore a dual-use test (for both accountability, is the student meeting standards?, and to assess college readiness and appropriate course placement). Dr. Maruyama said that historically the statewide assessments have measured up

through the high end of achievement, and, could be used as a supplemental tool for college admissions and course placement.

The group looking at web-based career assessment sites (of which there are several) has as its goal consolidating them into one system so that high school students can use it for both college and jobs. It would also provide students the opportunity to plan for high-school-plus-two-years, and they could begin to use the system before high school to look at colleges and careers.

Dr. Maruyama commented that President Bruininks is in line to be the next chair of the Partnership, so there will be many opportunities to improve relationships between P-12 and higher education in Minnesota.

Committee members and Dr. Maruyama discussed aspects of the several working groups.

-- The basic standards tests are being dropped because of No Child Left Behind and are moving to annual tests. Within Minnesota, statewide assessments have never been used to track individual students before, just to compare the current class to the class(es) before it.

-- The ACT Explore and ACT Plan tests are given respectively in the 8th/9th and 10th grades. They project an ACT score later, which helps students plan and try to do better if they need to. Unless schools feel they are doing too much testing, these tests should help a lot.

-- The state high school math standard is three years starting in 8th grade, but most high schools have increased the requirement to four years, and the question is what to cut out if schools add a fifth year of math. It is important that seniors take math because it opens doors for careers as well as keeps students current on math before entering college. Putting algebra in 8th grade and allowing students to finish three years of math before their junior year in high school is not good practice.

-- What about integrative math, done differently than in the past? The University has a traditional math program and there are different views on how students do with differing math education perform. The question may be how colleges organize math. It has also been said that the college curriculum stifles curricular innovation at the P-12 level to improve teaching and learning. It will be interesting to determine whether students learn differently with the two curricula and whether one approach is more effective. There are two subgroups of college students, one that plans to major in math and one that does not. Traditional math is better for those who plan to major in math while integrative math is better for non-math students. There is a focus on math readiness because so many careers rely on math and they want to have as many prepared as possible.

-- Alignment is important (education with job skills, with colleges) also with what is used in other countries and how the skills of U.S. graduates match with graduates in Japan, Europe, etc. New global standards underlie much of what is being done, and in an information-age economy, college and jobs are closer: if someone is not ready for college, they are also probably not ready for a job. There are a lot of views on global competitiveness; the U.S. does well in some ways and not in others. Awareness of global competitiveness and the need for 21st-Century skills in the global economy drives the P-16 Partnership. Unless schools improve their success rates, the economy is going to be in big trouble.

-- The level of preparation of University students has gone steadily up in the last 20 years. Will that change? One would guess that almost none of the students admitted to the University did not meet preparation standards. There is a baby-boom echo, but as the number of white students declines and the number of students of color increases, unless preparation levels change, there will be fewer high school graduates and students who are ready for college (as a result of the current performance gaps between the two groups). Statistics suggest there will be a decline in Minnesota high school graduates from 2008 to 2013, after which time the number will recover. North Dakota will not reach the bottom of its decline by 2018; Wisconsin will recover about the same time as Minnesota but not to the level it was at before. These are areas where the University draws students from.

-- What are the implications of this work for University preparation standards: are they OK or should they be more demanding? Does it need to be more clear about what goes into the requirements? The challenge is to have high expectations for all students; some programs begun in kindergarten are beginning to work. The goal is to have all students college-ready, yet educators and others still ask about what we will be doing with students who do not graduate from high school; If a school has low graduation rates, under the provisions of No Child Left Behind, the school eventually will be reorganized and then closed.

-- With respect to readiness for work and college, the hope is to have more robust indices in reading, writing, and mathematics that can be used over time. Standards and expectations are not aligned with assessment right now; there is a need to be clear about what is needed for college and for work.

-- Some say there should be standards for reasoning, thinking critically, and problem-solving. Reading, writing, and mathematics performance is demonstrated through problem-solving and critical thinking. One may not know where those skills will emerge, but they do.

-- Has there been talk about "rising junior" exams at the University, general education tests after the second year of college? Vice Provost Swan said he is not a fan of standardized tests for college students; the diversity of the curriculum is too great and it would be impossible to develop a good test. Moreover, not all students complete their liberal education requirements as lower division students. They are encouraged to take some during their upper division years, and there are always a number of students who must scramble their last semester to meet the requirements. Professor McCormick said the people at the University who are working on learning outcomes are not thinking about standardized tests.

-- There have been efforts to broaden the College in the Schools (CIS) program, which has a ripple effect of raising the quality of instruction in high schools. Is there any way to document that effect? The Committee should ask Susan Henderson to talk with it; if the program provides developmental support for teachers, it cannot help but improve the quality of teaching generally.

Dr. Maruyama said that most of the focus of CIS in the past has been on the top tier of students, and yet the proportion of high school graduates who go to college is about two-thirds. Programs like CIS need to explore ways of looking at those in the 50th to 75th percentile and help them prepare for college.

1 & 3. Issues Pending, Continued, and Task Force Recommendations

Professor Cardwell noted that a number of issues on the list that are not done have to do with the Graduate School; he asked if the Committee should explore issues related to graduate programs more than it has. Professor McCormick said that it should and reported that most graduate education issues on the list are initiatives that Dean Dubrow wishes brought forward to the Committee for discussion.

Professor McCormick then observed that the governance system should be following what the administration intends to do with respect to the many task force recommendations. Which are priorities, which will have funding behind them? To the extent the governance system is to have any effect, it will need to watch what happens and compare that to what it believes SHOULD happen. He suggested that Committee members email him suggesting issues that they believe the Committee should pay special attention to.

4. University Policies on Teaching and Learning

Professor McCormick next asked Committee members to review the draft document summarizing University teaching and learning policies. This was Professor Chomsky's idea, he said, and drafted by her, Dr. Langley, and him. The idea is that it will be distributed to faculty at the beginning of the year. Are there revisions needed?

Committee members suggested a few changes.

- Note that when classes have a longer final exam, the instructor for that course is expected to make accommodations for students who have an exam conflict with another class as a result of the longer exam.
- The language about absence from class for legitimate absences seems vague (but it is the existing policy, so the Committee may wish to revise it).
- Instructors are not required to use the language of the Senate policy verbatim, but the message should emphasize that instructors must make clear their expectations about grade levels (which might include, for example, cut-off scores).
- One paragraph seemed unnecessary and the Committee recommended deleting it (which it was).
- There is need to be more explicit about what students and instructors must do for an Incomplete—when students are eligible for it, when it can be removed. (Vice Provost Swan noted that the policy provides there must be a contract for an I and it is not to be given just because a student wants it.)
- The terminology needs to be made consistent.

Professor McCormick asked Committee members to email him with any additional suggestions.

He also reported that there will be a review of the liberal education requirements this year, by an expanded Council on Liberal Education. There is a "soft" moratorium on new courses and requirements pending the outcome of the review. The review has been planned for a long time, Professor McCormick said, and the Council will report its recommendations to this Committee.

Professor McCormick adjourned the meeting at 3:35.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota