

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, May 9, 2007
1:30 – 3:30
238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Richard McCormick (chair), LeAnn Alstadt, (George Green for) Gail Dubrow, Guy Merolle, Claudia Neuhauser, Peh Ng, Paul Siliciano, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Cathrine Wambach

Absent: William Bart, Vernon Cardwell, Megan Cummings, April Knutson, James Leger, Craig Swan, Molly Tolzmann, Douglas Wangensteen, Joel Weinsheimer

Guests: Tina Falkner (Office of the Registrar); Professor Paul Ruden (ROTC Subcommittee); Laurel Hirt (Career/Community Learning Center); Karen Zentner Bacig (Office of the Provost), Professor Jay Hatch (Chair, Twin Cities Steering Committee, Academy of Distinguished Teachers), Professor Mary Rowan (Chair, Executive Committee of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers)

Other: none

[In these minutes:

1. Report from the ROTC Subcommittee

Professor McCormick convened the meeting at 1:35 and welcomed Professor Ruden to report on the work of the ROTC Subcommittee, which reports to the Committee on Educational Policy.

Professor Ruden reported on a number of matters.

-- The subcommittee consists of five faculty (including him); Vice Provost Swan, the three commanding officers, and student representatives serve ex officio. The subcommittee meets twice per year; he as chair has informal meetings with the commanding officers and participated in a performance review board for a student who was not doing well.

-- The three units had a successful year and had a joint commissioning ceremony on May 18 for new officers; all of them graduated with good GPAs, generally above 3.0. Two of the cadets received presidential leadership awards. The Navy program also has students from St. Thomas and Macalester; St. Thomas also has an Air Force program separate from the one at the University. UMD also has an Air Force ROTC program, Dr. Swan said, and St. Thomas also has an Army program.

-- The Army ROTC unit ranked the best in the country (out of 274), even in competition against places like The Citadel and VMI and other very large programs. The criteria include retention, GPA,

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number of students who graduate in four years, and there is also a physical fitness component in the measures.

-- The usual issues having to do with the physical state of the Armory arose and nothing has changed.

-- The subcommittee reviews the nominations of officers assigned to the programs, of which there were a number this year. It also supported the request of one of the commanding officers for another tour of duty at Minnesota, something that has not happened before. (The additional tour was approved.)

-- He attended the annual meeting of Naval ROTC programs, the goal of which is to exchange information between colleges that host the programs. They had a good discussion, especially of diversity and language skills. The Navy emphasizes technical degrees and wants 65% of midshipmen to have them.

-- The gender breakdown is about 80% male and 20% female in all the programs.

-- The student numbers have increased in the program on this campus, which bucks the trend nationally. It is not clear why that is so.

Professor McCormick thanked Professor Ruden for his report.

2. Designation Policy for Community Service-Learning Courses (Twin Cities Campus)

Professor McCormick next welcomed Laurel Hirt to the meeting to discuss a proposal to designate community service-learning courses.

Ms. Hirt distributed a handout containing information on service-learning courses. Over 12-15 years, service learning on campus has grown but it is difficult to find the courses and the descriptions are often incomplete. There are different ideas about service learning, but in general there must be an academic component and the student must reflect on community work tied into a class. To ensure the quality of the courses, her office has prepared a set of criteria for service-learning courses in order to help faculty develop them. (There were 63 service-learning classes offered during 2006 that enrolled about 2,000 students who did community work as a component of the course; the courses were in a wide variety of disciplines.) There is an advisory committee for the Community Engagement Scholars Program, which includes service-learning as part of those requirements; Ms. Hirt said she would like to have a separate committee that would deal only with reviewing service-learning courses." The criteria she has proposed for service-learning courses have been created by looking at criteria required by other institutions and has been reviewed by faculty who teach service-learning courses, Vice Provost Swan, and Associate Vice President Bloomfield; she agreed that students should be involved in the proposal-review process in the future. She also agreed with Dean Green that it would be helpful to have faculty members from colleges that have not participated as much in offering service-learning courses—because doing so could broaden participation.

Professor Wambach asked about the logistics of placing service-learning students in the community. Ms. Hirt said her office has financial assistance from Vice Provost Swan; it is a considerable logistical challenge and involves maintaining/developing relationships

with several hundred community organizations. They take the responsibility seriously and they do not want faculty trying to make the arrangements on their own (badly), creating situations that her office must then fix. They have a good network of organizations that they rely on. They also work with faculty to develop a syllabus and help students tie in their community service into reflection because they do not want to see student evaluation comments that say there was no opportunity to integrate reflection and community work. They also connect classes to organizations and bring organizational representatives to classes to talk about projects. The effort is class-based but her office also advises individual students about volunteer opportunities and how to connect them with a course. They also stay in touch with students and faculty about what they want and how subject matter can be connected to the community.

Ms. Hirt affirmed, in response to a question from Professor McCormick, that many service-learning courses fulfill liberal education requirements (depending on the course, citizenship and public ethics, environment, cultural diversity, and international). They would like to have more courses in the sciences and technology. With respect to that shortage, Dean Green asked about the relationship between service-learning courses and internships and suggested there might service-learning opportunities outside the non-profit sector (e.g., associations, chambers of commerce, etc.) Ms. Hirt said most service-learning opportunities are in government or non-profit organizations because of the community-organization/social-justice elements of service learning. She agreed, however, that service learning can look like an internship and they have had students work with chambers of commerce and business organizations; that is acceptable as long as there is an element of community service and reflection built into the work. A number of those involved in service learning, however, are opposed to having students work in for-profit organizations. That assumes for-profit organizations are all bad and non-profits are all good, Dean Green objected, and that is not true. He said he took issue with the assumption that no benefit could come from service learning in the private sector and urged that her office keep the door open to for-profit organizations. Vice Provost Swan agreed that the issue bears further discussion. Part of the justification for going to non-profits is that they do not want to displace employees in the private sector, Ms. Hirt said, while many non-profits cannot exist without things like service-learning support. The key could be service, Professor McCormick suggested; many businesses provide service to communities and charitable organizations or do other pro bono work, and those kinds of activities could fit with service learning.

In response to a comment that there is no course designator for service-learning courses, Vice Provost Swan said they do not want independent service-learning courses without structure and with students going all over the place, leading community groups to ask what is going on and giving the University a black eye. There is nothing to prevent faculty from adding a service-learning component to their courses, Professor Neuhauser pointed out, so it could be difficult to prevent harm from being caused. It is not clear how many faculty might be interested in offering service learning opportunities. Dr. Swan agreed there needs to be publicity surrounding creating the opportunities; the point is not to stand in the way of faculty but to provide help to faculty who want to do it.

Asked how students could identify service-learning courses, Dr. Falkner said students can search course descriptions. Sometimes students could end up in service-learning courses when they did not plan to do so, so it is important that descriptions indicate there is a service-learning component to the course.

Professor Wambach noticed that nothing requires faculty to propose service-learning courses to Ms. Hirt's office. The proposal requires faculty to come to them, Ms. Hirt said, and they work with the advisory committee. Dr. Swan commented that his office tries to catch any courses where an instructor includes a service-learning component without having it reviewed by Ms. Hirt's office.

Professor McCormick invited Committee members to review carefully the proposal from Ms. Hirt and to communicate to her any comments. He thanked her for the generally wonderful work that her office carries out.

3. Commendation

On behalf of the Committee, Professor Ng thanked Professor McCormick for his service as chair of the Committee. Committee members gave him a round of applause. Professor McCormick said he has enjoyed his work with Committee members and that they do important things. He wished Professor Wambach the best next year as chair.

4. The Amount of Student Work

Professor McCormick welcomed Professor Mary Rowan, Chair of the Executive Committee of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers, Professor Jay Hatch, Chair of Twin Cities Steering Committee of the Academy, and Dr. Karen Zentner Bacig, Assistant to the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs.

Dr. Bacig began by explaining that they had been asked to follow up on concerns arising from a Minnesota Daily article in 2004 about the amount of time students spend on homework. The article suggested that a significant number of students spend fewer than 10 hours per week on academic work. Vice Provost Swan approached the Academy's Executive Committee about the issue, which looked at both national and institutional data. The Academy prepared a short report, "Students' Study Habits: Issue Summary" and invited the Provost's office and the academic affairs offices on the coordinate campuses to explore further how the issues should be dealt with.

Part of the report read as follows:

"Recent data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) fall 2003 Freshman Survey, the spring 2003 University of Minnesota First Year Survey of Freshman, and the spring 2003 University of Minnesota Student Engagement survey of all students all point to what seems to be a lower-than-expected number of hours per week that University of Minnesota students spend studying.

The NSSE survey, in which Minnesota does not participate, reports that 11 percent of undergraduates report studying 25 hours or more each week while 44 percent indicate they study 10 or fewer hours per week. These national data are reflected in our University of Minnesota data as well. Fall 2003 CIRP data for University of Minnesota first-year students indicate just under nine percent study 11 to 15 hours per week, fewer than four percent study 16 to 20 hours per week, and just under three percent study more than 20 hours per week. Spring 2003 U of M first-year student data indicate that students are studying more by the end of their first year at the University. Approximately 23 percent of students in this survey report studying 11 to 15 hours per week and 17 percent report studying 16 to 20

hours per week. Fewer than nine percent report studying 21 to 25 hours per week, and the percentages for studying more than 25 hours per week taper off from there. Finally, the percentage of University of Minnesota students across the four campuses who report in the Spring 2003 Student Engagement Survey that they study 10 hours or less averages around 52 percent, while the number of students who say they study 15 hours or more per week averages about 42 percent.

"National (NSSE) results indicate that among students studying 10 or fewer hours each week, 40 percent indicate they earn mostly A's and 41 percent indicate they earn mostly B's. So, is there cause for alarm? Perhaps. These findings at least raise a number of issues that the Academy of Distinguished Teachers (ADT) believes need further exploration to determine whether and what, as a campus community, we may need to address. We see the need to explore at least the following issues:

- Outcomes – are we seeing a change in student outcomes relative to grades, overall grade point averages, repeated courses, or other performance indicators?
- Definition – how do students define *studying*? Is students' definition the same as how the faculty defines studying?
- Expectations – do we have a common understanding among faculty and students regarding expectations for studying as it relates to course preparation and performance? How do we establish a common set of expectations and then effectively communicate these expectations?
- Workload – have faculty changed the quantity and/or quality of the work required for their classes? If so, in what ways and for what reasons? Do the robust percentages of students receiving grades of A and B with limited study hours indicate evidence of grade inflation?
- Students – do students study and process information differently now than they did 30 years ago? Many students now multitask as they prepare for their classes and have grown up using computers and other forms of technology. How might this impact their time on task relative to studying?"

One question is whether or not there really is a problem, Dr. Bacig commented. If students are performing acceptably, is there a problem?

One question that arose was about significant differences in the data from the national studies and from University of Minnesota students. NSSE does not include the University; it draws from four-year colleges; CIRP data are from freshmen BEFORE they come to college, so may reflect views students carry from high school. Dr. Swan said that the issue is a subject in freshman orientation on the Twin Cities campus; students are reminded that the University is NOT high school and they are expected to spend more time studying than they did in high school. Professor Wambach commented that students expect to do more studying in college than they actually do.

The memo from the Academy of Distinguished Teachers recommended exploring the issues through a series of focus groups and interviews with students, faculty, and others. Dr. Swan reported that the AAU presidents voted to take steps to address these issues, including asking students and alumni.

Ms. Alstadt asked if student grades are improving (they are). So is there a problem, she asked? Vice Provost Swan said there are a number of complicated issues to be considered: student grades, student preparation, and a long-term concern with grade inflation. If there is a problem, Ms. Alstadt asked, is there a way to solve it? Make classes more difficult? Dr. Bacig noted that the Daily article included comments from faculty, one of whom alluded to the reality of student lives compared

to 25 years ago and suggested that faculty have responded to what students can do. The University has tried to be clearer about expectations, Dr. Swan added, and instructors are asked to identify expectations on the syllabus.

The data do seem to suggest, Professor McCormick said, that students do not do as much work as is suggested by the Senate's standard of academic work per credit (three hours of work per week for each credit of a course). Dean Green agreed, noting that a 15-credit load implies 45 hours of work, in class and out; the data record that 91% of students do not do that much work. Dr. Swan noted, on a table of data for Twin Cities and Morris undergraduates, that close to half of students on both campuses report studying more than 15 hours per week and also spending more than 15 hours per week in class.

Professor Ng said the Academy had raised important issues. She asked students in her classes about the amount of work they do—and some did not consider homework (in a math class) to be studying! Professor McCormick observed that "studying" is not defined as all the work students do outside of class, including papers, homework, etc. The data might be different if students understood the meaning of the term, Dean Green agreed. That same ambiguity may exist in the student-release questions, Dr. Swan pointed out, and there needs to be language developed that everyone can accept.

Professor Neuhauser suggested a multi-variate analysis of the data would be helpful. Dr. Swan said he would speak with Professor Neuhauser later about doing a more sophisticated analysis of the data for the Twin Cities and Morris. Professor McCormick suggested testing a hypothesis about whether students in different colleges study different amounts.

Ms. Tolzmann asked whether, because the University is now recruiting more well-prepared students, they might be effective at studying. Dr. Bacig said one student reported spending whatever time is needed to understand the course. There are several concerns, Professor McCormick said, including whether courses are too easy and the curriculum is not demanding enough.

Dean Green said he did not see a clear-cut agenda from the ADT report because he does not trust the data. He did urge that the definition of "studying" be clarified to include all work related to courses. It may also be that the data underestimate student study time, Professor McCormick said, because the students themselves do not take into account peak periods such as studying for finals. It could be difficult for them to estimate the time they spend studying. Professor Wambach said she had asked graduate students the question and they had difficulty estimating.

Professor Rowan commented that Committee members had identified the same issues as had ADT. Their suggestion was a more systematic exploration of them and ADT offered to be a partner in the study. They also suggested, Professor Hatch added, that there be focus groups and interviews in order to permit greater probing. They also suggested reducing the number in the surveys because that increases the "noise" in the data.

Professor McCormick thanked Professors Hatch and Rowan and Dr. Bacig for joining the meeting, and adjourned it at 3:15.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota