

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, January 17, 2007
1:30 – 3:30
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Richard McCormick (chair), LeAnn Alstadt, William Bart, Vernon Cardwell, (George Green for) Gail Dubrow, April Knutson, Peh Ng, Paul Siliciano, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Craig Swan, Molly Tolzmann, Cathrine Wambach, Joel Weinsheimer, Kristen Wendtland

Absent: Maureen Cisneros, James Leger, Claudia Neuhauser, Douglas Wangenstein

Guests: Vice Provost Arlene Carney (Office of the Provost); Dr. Tina Falkner (Office of the Registrar)

Other: none

[In these minutes: (1) student learning outcomes; (2) course numbering; (3) S/N grading (blind in undergraduate courses & graduate courses); (4) Bok's book; (5) Governor's State of the State address]

Professor McCormick convened the meeting at 1:30 and welcomed the new student members of the Committee.

1. Student Learning Outcomes

Professor McCormick noted that the Committee discussed the (Twin Cities campus) undergraduate student learning outcomes in November and approved them (with slight revisions); when they were discussed by the Faculty Consultative Committee, there were additional suggestions. Professor Chomsky and Vice Provost Carney made changes in light of the FCC discussion, so they have been brought back to the Committee for review.

At the time of receiving a bachelor's degree, a student:

- Can identify, define, and solve problems
- Can locate and critically evaluate information
- Has mastered a body of knowledge and a mode of inquiry
- Understands diverse philosophies and cultures within and across societies
- Can communicate effectively

* These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represents the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

- Understands the role of creativity, innovation, discovery, and expression across disciplines
- Has acquired skills for effective citizenship and life-long learning.

Dr. Carney said they are proposing that students be made aware of the seven statements beginning at freshman orientation. The original statements came from the Council on Enhancing Student Learning and they have been discussed with a large number of faculty committees since. When this Committee changed the syntax to make the statements all parallel, the changes were not well received by either FCC or the Steering Committee for the Twin Cities Council on Enhancement of Student Learning because there were changes in meaning. The version being presented today restores the original intent of the framers, with substantive changes intended by this Committee incorporated.

Committee members debated several points of language.

- "are able to" versus "can" (Dr. Carney and Professor McCormick argued it should not be conditional)
- the second bullet is ambiguous; evaluation does not imply critical thinking or analysis and some could view this learning outcome as simply gathering descriptive information, and it could be the subject of criticism from the outside (this was discussed endlessly at faculty committees over nearly three years, Dr. Carney said, and they decided not to use the phrase "critical thinking" because it is overused and because they wanted the statement understandable to parents and the public; the outcome applies beyond statistics and science to the humanities as well. There are also wildly different views about what "critical thinking" means.)
- there should be attention to the interconnectedness among the learning outcomes; some may be needed before others, or may be a bridge to others.

Professor Wambach pointed out that any group of 10 faculty would produce a slightly different list of learning outcomes; over many discussions, these are the ideas that kept coming to the top. The Committee could start all over but it would come up with a very similar list; other universities have adopted similar language. It is important the Committee act on these outcomes, allow the University to implement them, and identify problems. There will need to be measurement and assessment in order to decide where revisions may be necessary. The process has been inclusive and from the ground up; the Committee could talk about this for 10 years; the process needs to go forward.

After additional discussion, the Committee voted 8-3-1 to add "critically" to the end of the second bullet. In Professor Weinsheimer's words, "critical" is so overworked that it is vacuous without a definition, which the Committee does not want to try to devise, but the term has such cachet that the learning outcomes look strange without it. Professor Bart said the term ("reason critically") does have meaning in the psychological and philosophical literature; adding the term to the outcomes makes it more difficult to say that the second bullet is simply data analysis.

Professor McCormick thanked Dr. Carney for joining the meeting.

[Note: the student learning outcomes were subsequently edited in very minor fashion before being placed on the February 15 Faculty Senate docket. For the "final" version on the docket, go to <http://www1.umn.edu/usenate/usen/070215agenda.html> .]

2. Course Numbering

Professor McCormick turned now to Vice Provost Swan to discuss the issue of course-numbering, a topic the Committee visited last semester. The question is whether course-number definitions, now hidden away in a memo prepared during the change to semesters, should be made part of Senate policy so they are more visible; there are some problems with the definitions, but the Committee could adopt the definitions with small changes.

The current course-numbering scheme is the following:

- 0xxx Courses that do not carry credit toward any University degree.
- 1xxx Courses primarily for undergraduate students in their first year of study.
- 2xxx Courses primarily for undergraduate students in their second year of study.
- 3xxx Courses primarily for undergraduate students in their third year of study.
- 4xxx Courses primarily for undergraduate students in their fourth year of study; graduate students may enroll in such courses for degree credit.

Note: Use of 4xxx Courses in Graduate Programs

4xxx courses can be counted for a Graduate School degree. However, no 4xxx course can be counted for a Graduate School degree unless it is taught by a member of the graduate faculty or an individual appointed to Limited Teaching Status (LTS). Also, a graduate program may restrict the use of 4xxx courses in the program (e.g., by stipulating that no more than y credits of 4xxx courses may be counted or by stipulating that only certain 4xxx courses may be counted). Such restrictions may be applied both for 4xxx courses in the major field and for 4xxx courses outside the major field. These are matters left to the discretion of each graduate program.

5xxx Courses primarily for graduate students; undergraduate students in their third or fourth year may enroll in such courses.

6xxx Courses for post-baccalaureate students in professional degree programs.

7xxx Courses for post-baccalaureate students in professional degree programs.

Note: 6xxx and 7xxx Courses

6xxx and 7xxx courses are to be used primarily for post-baccalaureate professional programs that are not offered through the Graduate School. 6xxx and 7xxx courses may be counted for a Graduate School degree, if a degree program wants them to count. Similarly, 5xxx and 8xxx courses may be counted for a non-Graduate School degree, if a program wants them to count. Those departments or programs that offer both Graduate School degrees and non-Graduate School degrees should decide for themselves how best to number courses in the curriculum.

8xxx Courses for graduate students.

9xxx Courses for graduate students.

Committee members made a number of points in the discussion.

-- A beginning statistics course could be 1xxx for statistics majors but 5xxx for graduate students in another field; the courses could be the same or the 1xxx course could be more cognitively demanding. The course number says nothing about the content; it is for an intended audience and it is difficult to understand what the course numbers mean without looking at the whole curriculum. This can be dealt with, at least in part, by cross-numbering courses.

-- There are a number of such problems around the University; is the course-numbering system the way to address them? There should be curriculum committees or graduate programs that address those issues. This Committee needs to think about the larger system of course numbers and whether it should be part of Senate policy.

-- There are also discipline-specific situations: a course suitable for graduate credit outside the discipline might not be acceptable within it. Departments will not let its own students take one of its 4xxx courses for graduate credit, but graduate students from outside the department can take such a course and receive graduate credit in their own field. The numbers do indicate where graduate students should look for course work.

-- The Committee should consider the rationale behind the current definitions. It could be argued the course numbers should relate to learning outcomes. That is a bigger project, however, and perhaps it is important simply to codify the definitions now and make them more visible, which will make it easier for people to think about them and identify where they are not working.

-- What about conventions (if the number ends in a 5, it is a lab; if it ends in 0, students can take it again if there is a new topic)? Many colleges and departments have such conventions; the Committee need not deal with them now because it is more important that the numbering system be brought down from the attic. Vice Provost Swan suggested that a policy might include language providing that finer-grained course-numbering policies should be brought for review to this Committee by the Office of the Registrar, and if approved, posted on the web.

The Committee voted unanimously to approve the policy on course-numbering.

3. S/N Grading

Professor McCormick noted that there are two issues associated with S/N grading before the Committee: one, "blind" S/N grading (the instructor does not know whether a student is registered A/F or S/N), and two, S/N grading in graduate courses (must the C- be equivalent to the S in graduate courses?). In graduate courses, a C is not a satisfactory grade; he has heard from the Graduate School, deans, and faculty that they do not want for graduate courses the rule that an S equals a C-. That could be addressed by exempting graduate courses from the rule.

The question is whether the (computer) system will allow that solution, Dr. Falkner said. Another possibility might be to define the rule in terms of the student, Dean Green said; those enrolled in programs beyond the bachelor's degree would not have the rule applied to them. So in a 5xxx course, an undergraduate who received a C- would receive an S but a graduate student could receive

an N, Dr. Swan asked? That is the idea, Dean Green said. Professor McCormick said that made sense.

Professor McCormick said he's also heard from a number of faculty about problems if they do not know which students are enrolled on an S/N basis for undergraduate courses (for example, they may put students together in teams based on their registration, or a student may receive a grade for a course (e.g., D) that would count but not if they enroll S/N. It also explains why a good student may not be performing at a level one would expect. He suggested the Committee exempt graduate courses from the rule that an S must equal a C- and that it change its mind on the blind S/N grading for undergraduate courses. The latter would not require a policy change, because adoption of the blind S/N grading was advice to the administration, not a change in policy.

It was agreed that Dean Green and Dr. Falkner would develop a proposal to revise the rule so it applied differently for undergraduates and for students in post-bachelor's degree programs.

The problem is not with S/N grading, Professor Weinsheimer said, it is with letter grading, if a C in a graduate course equals failure. Most students take a course S/N because they cannot afford a B, not because they are concerned about an F. That is when the system is being used appropriately, Professor Wambach said; it allows students to explore courses outside their program and not take a risk.

The Committee voted unanimously to advise the administration to end blind S/N grading.

4. Discussion of Bok's Book

Professor McCormick reviewed the assignments for discussion of Derek Bok's book *Our Underachieving Colleges*, to begin at the next meeting. He reported that the Committee will also consult with Professor Schiff, chair of the Council on Liberal Education, which has also looked at Bok's book. Dean Green suggested that Professor Schiff also identify issues that are of interest to the Council on Liberal Education.

5. Governor's State of the State Address

Vice Provost Swan reported that there were several items in the Governor's State of the State address that could affect things the Committee might deal with in the future.

- 3R high schools: rigor, relevance, results.
- A \$75-million expansion of the AP and IB programs.
- New and more rigorous math standards for all students.
- A requirement for individual graduation plans for 8th-graders and beyond.
- Four years of a second language required to graduate from high school.

-- If a student completes a year of college in high school, he or she receives money to pay for a year of college (average tuition at public universities) regardless of high school rank or ACT score.

This is an interesting set of ideas, he said, and there is bipartisan concern about the schools.

Professor McCormick adjourned the meeting at 3:15.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota