

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, April 27, 2005
2:00 – 3:30
238A Morrill Hall

- Present: Emily Hoover (chair), (George Green for) Victor Bloomfield, Vernon Cardwell, LeAnn Dean, Adam Hirsch, James Leger, Richard McCormick, Mary Ellen Shaw, Craig Swan, Douglas Wangenstein, Jenny Zhang
- Absent: Dale Branton, Shawn Curley, Gretchen Haas, Christopher Pappas, Emily Ronning, Karen Seashore, Joel Weinsheimer
- Guests: Dr. Wayne Sigler (Director of Admissions, Twin Cities campus); Vice Provost Billie Wahlstrom; Susan Van Voorhis, Tina Falkner (Office of the Registrar)

[In these minutes: (1) Dean's list policy; (2) fall retreat; (3) the faculty role in admissions; (4) technology-enhanced learning and on-line student evaluations]

1. Dean's List Policy

Professor Hoover convened the meeting at 2:00 and turned to Dr. Falkner to discuss the proposed change to the Dean's List policy.

The current policy calls for requiring a 3.67 GPA for a dean's list (among other requirements). They are proposing to add a digit to the requirement so that it would call for a 3.666 GPA, which simply brings the policy requirement into conformity with the way that PeopleSoft calculates GPAs. The policy change will avoid ambiguity as a result of rounding numbers from three digits to two. The current policy on Degrees with Distinction and Degrees with Honors already uses three decimal places. Dr. Falkner reported that the Council of Undergraduate Deans recommends the change; if the Committee approves it, it would be brought to the Faculty Senate in the fall for action.

Professor Hoover noted that this proposal had been circulated before coming to the Committee and reported she had heard from several people asking if the requirement could be 3.665 or 3.667, because 666 in the view of some is a sign of the devil. She said she was not endorsing the request, merely reporting it. Dr. Falkner noted that the existing requirement for a degree "magna cum laude" is 3.666. Dean Green declared that "we do not want to give into this nonsense," a sentiment with which Dr. Shaw quickly agreed.

Professor Leger inquired if the number should not be 3.667. Dean Green pointed out that individuals who have a 3.666 would then be cut off from the Dean's List; the correct number, he said, is 3.666. That is already the standard, Dr. Shaw added.

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

The Committee voted unanimously in favor of the recommended change to 3.666 for the Dean's List policy.

2. Fall Retreat

Several Committee members expressed interest in having a fall retreat at the Morris campus.

3. The Faculty Role in Admissions

Professor Hoover turned next to the faculty role in undergraduate admissions. She recalled that the issue came up in the context of a Faculty Consultative Committee discussion with the chair of the Faculty Academic Oversight Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics about admissions; not one of the members of FCC could talk knowledgeably about how undergraduates are admitted to the University. She thought it a problem when faculty who are engaged in institutional governance do not understand the admissions process. The question is what involvement faculty should have in undergraduate admissions. Wayne Sigler, the Director of Admissions for the Twin Cities campus, came to her office and talked with her about the process, which was eye-opening in some ways. She learned that he had been making some assumptions about how the faculty are involved in the colleges, assumptions which may not be true in all colleges. She decided to invite Dr. Sigler to meet with the Committee to talk about admissions, a topic that may become more important in light of the strategic planning process.

When the University of Michigan diversity cases were decided by the Supreme Court, Dean Green recalled, the University had to examine all its admissions policies to be sure they were not race-based. The policies could not use numbers; each applicant had to be given a holistic review.

At this point Professor Hoover welcomed Dr. Sigler to the meeting.

Vice Provost Swan provided context for Dr. Sigler's activities. Dr. Sigler came to the University in 1992. Before his arrival, there was a mix of centralized and decentralized responsibilities for admissions and the system was not very efficient. Each college had its own admissions office and there was a central office; it was not clear who had responsibility for what. When Dr. Sigler came there was a change: he was to be the Director of (undergraduate) Admissions for the Twin Cities campus and there was a transfer of funds from the colleges to his office; the colleges do not have admissions offices any longer.

Dr. Sigler said that his operating philosophy is leadership management that is stakeholder-focused and results-oriented. They have stakeholders both on and off the campus; the faculty is a major stakeholder because they live or die by what the admissions process delivers to their classrooms. His office's approach is not to control but to coordinate and orchestrate. They present information to prospective students about the opportunities at the University, make individual decisions about applicants, and bring in students who have a reasonable chance of doing well; they try to ensure (1) there is a diverse student body, (2) the student body represents a cross-section of Minnesota, and (3) that the number of students admitted is line with the resources available to serve them.

Dr. Swan inquired how this approach compares with institutions such as Michigan, Wisconsin, and Illinois. Dr. Sigler said the admissions and enrollment practices at Minnesota are

pretty much the industry standard for flagship public research universities. They have moved to holistic admissions for freshmen; the University was fortunate in that it was one of the leaders in this effort and so was not affected that much by the Supreme Court decision. They have moved to holistic evaluations of transfer students as well; it was primarily a GPA-driven process before, and the numbers remain a large part of the evaluation, but they also now factor in other considerations. Customer service has been one of the University's strengths, Dr. Sigler said, and it gives it a competitive advantage. If prospective students are provided a great admissions experience, and made aware of the resources available at this institution, the University has a tremendous advantage over its competitors.

What is the role of the faculty compared to that at peer institutions in the Big Ten, Dr. Swan asked? Admissions policies are determined by associate deans and the central administration, Dr. Sigler said. His office carries out the objectives set in the policies and there is a lot of discussion with the various offices. Associate deans are all faculty, and the colleges are big stakeholders in the process—and all of it, of course, is shaped by the legal climate.

How is the process here different from that at Michigan or Wisconsin or Illinois, Dr. Swan asked? Dr. Sigler commented he had more contact with faculty when he worked at other institutions. That does not mean faculty are not driving the process here, he added.

A broader question is how his office interacts with the colleges, Dean Green said. His college, CLA, for example, is doing a lot more recruiting, holding prospective student days, and having meetings with parents; faculty are pulled into those activities. He said he has the sense that the college was less active in recruiting before Dean Rosenstone began to emphasize it. It may be, however, that some colleges may prefer to have more non-resident, non-reciprocity students who will pay higher tuition and increase college revenues. There are some niche areas especially where the college can recruit (e.g., theater because of the link with the Guthrie).

The process has evolved, Dr. Sigler said. Thirteen years ago the University did not fill its entering class numbers and the University was not viewed by high-school students as attractive as it is today. The faculty and Vice Provost Swan have done a lot since then to enhance the attractiveness of the campus and they also use state-of-the-art recruiting procedures. They are now seeing students with a different set of choices: thirteen years ago, the University's competitors were the MNSCU institution; now applications have increased significantly and the students who apply to the University have more opportunities. Holistic evaluation was originally largely a private-college model for admissions, but the University uses it because relying on numbers alone is too restrictive and because there is a need to shape the student body in order to bring in skills, help students flourish, and enrich the classroom. And "this is not a one-dog show," Dr. Sigler assured the Committee; colleges, faculty, and alumni play a significant role in the process. His office coordinates it.

Dr. Swan responded to Dean Green's comment: this is still the University of Minnesota, he observed, and while it receives less money from the state than it did in the past, it is still state-supported and has a responsibility to the state. There remains sensitivity about the need for a broad cross-section of the state to be represented in the students admitted to the University. The University, however, has not been the only post-secondary education option in the state for 100 years or more, and Wisconsin students and those from elsewhere enrich the experience of all students. The University

must balance its admissions of non-Minnesotans with its primary responsibility to students in Minnesota.

Dean Green observed that colleges are given target class sizes while his office recruits for all colleges. How do they decide which student goes to which college? Dr. Sigler said it is the student's decision. They ask the student to identify a first and second choice college and they try to admit the student to the first choice, or if not, the second. If neither of those works, they evaluate the student's background in light of the clear expectations from each college and make a decision. Do they consult with the colleges on individual cases, Dean Green asked? They would if a student were way out of the norm, Dr. Sigler said; he meets monthly with the associate deans to review the numbers and they also work hard to supply high schools with the information that high-school counselors need.

Does it require more time to look at each applicant holistically, Ms. Zhang asked? It takes an enormous amount of increased time, Dr. Sigler said. When the University used only a formula, it was streamlined; if students met the standards, they were admitted (although there was also individual review for students who did not meet the standards). Now every application is read at least twice and some more often. Ms. Zhang noted that the University, except for honors programs, does not require an essay, while other institutions do. Dr. Sigler said the University does not require an essay because they do not believe it adds much to the process, although students are invited to write anything else they wish to in support of their application.

In terms of reflecting the Minnesota community, Ms. Zhang asked, what steps are being taken to recruit from such groups as the Hmong and Somali communities? There are ties to the General College through the ESL program, she pointed out. Dr. Sigler said they are determined to have a diverse student body, defined broadly (including gender, such as in IT, as well as ethnicity). They also work hard with small high schools in greater Minnesota. While the University will continue to improve its efforts to recruit students of color, it has been successful in doing so: 17/18% of the students are students of color and most of them are from Minnesota. They do targeted recruiting with certain groups and work extensively with the urban high schools so that students are not intimidated by the admissions process.

Dr. Shaw said there could be a role for broader faculty involvement. The thinking about diversity has changed over time to include not only race but also socio-economic background, immigrant status, and disability status. There is a lot of faculty interest in diversity but those who are interested in it have no pipeline into recruiting students and what Dr. Sigler's office does. It would be a good idea for all colleges to be invested in recruiting a diverse student body.

The biggest challenge is retention, Dr. Sigler said—they will always work to improve recruitment but retention is what makes or breaks the result. Higher retention means "satisfied customers." If there is a silver bullet in recruiting and admitting students, it is retention: with higher retention, students are happier, the University needs to recruit fewer students, and there is a direct correlation between retention rates and what the University can charge. The University is making major improvements in its graduation and retention rates, Dr. Sigler observed. Finally, he said, in terms of the silver bullet of retention, satisfied students become advocates for the institution. The faculty are the jewels, are what they sell in the recruiting process, and they play a very large role in the success of what they do.

With respect to the question of restructuring General College, Dr. Swan said, if it happens, there will still be students who look like the General College student profile (although they may be drawn more from the upper end of that profile, and there may be somewhat fewer of them). But there is NO plan to discontinue successful programs such as TRIO and Commanding English. The academic strategic planning task force called for retaining the strength of General College and to restructure the College of Education and Human Development in order to provide General College's efforts a stronger foundation. The President also announced, in his State of the University address, a program to pay the full tuition and fees of anyone who receives a Pell Grant in order to be sure that low-income students can attend the University if they otherwise qualify for admission. While there is much that is not detailed in the academic strategic planning recommendations, one point is that the University must do a better job on the pipeline issue. Dr. Swan said the President will launch an initiative to work with the P-12 system to provide better support, which will have a special effect on students of color. The University needs to do a better job of working with the public schools, to be there to help; it is in the University's self-interest as well as in the state's interest—because the state's success is at risk if public schools fail. Dr. Sigler underscored the proposition that the University should do this because it is the right thing to do—and because much of the University's future depends on being successful in this area.

The efforts with respect to diversity must be cross-college and also centrally-driven, Dr. Shaw said, because that will help create a sense of community. If a student of color shows up in a class and he or she is the only student of color present, he or she will say "no way" and go home. There must be a sense of belonging. Dean Green reported that CLA has a program, SEAM, which includes freshman seminars and honors classes for students of color; CBS and GC also have them. There is no reason such a program could not be adopted across the campus.

This begs the question of the role that faculty should have in setting admissions standards and the admissions process, Professor Hoover said. Dr. Swan observed that there is a Senate policy on admissions.

Ms. Zhang asked what the reasons are for the University's low retention rates. Dr. Sigler said he wished he could say there were two "big things" that could be changed to fix the problem; unfortunately, there are multiple reasons. The University has identified a number of institutional reasons (not all of which are fixed but which are being worked on, such as large classes, class availability, and residence halls). He added that if he could do anything, it would be to give students with the means a way to live on campus; were that to happen, retention would increase because students can put down roots, join study groups, find support, and so on. The University is on the right road. Ms. Zhang agreed that more housing on campus would help, as would eliminating waiting lists (e.g., 700 to get into Middlebrook Hall).

Building smaller communities is also important, Dr. Swan said; the University would not build Middlebrook Hall again if it were starting over.

Dr. Shaw asked if there is any place in the governance structure or through the deans that there could be an advisory committee on diversity. There are a number of people around campus interested in the subject, she noted again; if there could be a forum and a research agenda, that could help the University in recruitment and graduation rates. Dr. Sigler said he would be available, and that he would be glad to return to the Committee next year to provide an update.

Professor Cardwell asked about the extent to which Dr. Sigler has worked with the colleges to address retention. Professor Cardwell said that most colleges have associate deans who work with admissions but there is not a lot of effort to engage faculty in a broader discussion about retention—and it is faculty who are key, because if they do not provide the experiences that students hope for, the students will leave. Professor Hoover commented that Dr. Sigler's office is responsible for getting students to the campus; it is the college's and department's responsibility to make sure students want to stay here once they arrive. Retention is very different across colleges, Dr. Swan said, and the Carlson School sets the standard. The Provost has written to the deans to inform them that he will hold them responsible for graduation rates, but it may be appropriate to try to get at the issue beyond what the deans may try to do.

Dr. Sigler said that in corporate terms—which are not always appropriate—it is four to seven times cheaper to keep a customer than to recruit a new one.

Professor Hoover thanked Dr. Sigler for joining the Committee.

4. Technology-Enhanced Learning and On-Line Student Evaluations

Professor Hoover now welcomed Vice Provost Billie Wahlstrom to the meeting to discuss technology-enhanced learning and on-line student evaluations of instruction.

Dr. Wahlstrom distributed folders with materials for Committee members to review. She described a number of the University's activities in portals, portfolios, efforts to increase interest in science and math, and others. These are all part of a bigger project to tie people to the University "from K to gray" or "from birth to endowment."

Those who have not looked at portfolio recently should, Dr. Wahlstrom suggested. The University has given it to hundreds of institutions—and has begun to reap the benefits, as other institutions make modifications and ship the changes back to the University. There are about 30,000 users on the Twin Cities campus. It can serve a variety of purposes, including accreditation, setting standards for students and outside groups, promotion and tenure, and so on. It can provide help to new faculty and aid them in making the best case. The same is true for faculty who seek promotion to full professor. Everyone at the University has one and it is populated with information the University knows about each person.

Dr. Wahlstrom described other tools that are available to members of the University community. One of them is portals, which have 69,000 users. The University has 1.6 million web pages and receives about 150,000 hits per day; it accounts for about 1% of all Internet traffic in the world. (It is in the top part of the second tier of the .edu domain traffic.) She described the ways in which students use portals to make academic and other plans. Dr. Shaw suggested it would be helpful if advisors could see what students are seeing on their portal; Dr. Wahlstrom said they are working on a toggle between portals, but students have expectations that the University will not read their messages. People should not WANT to read their messages.

Because of the press of time, Dr. Wahlstrom distributed a report about on-line student evaluations. The Committee asked for research, she noted, and it is under way and will be provided.

The low response numbers for on-line evaluations are not across the board; response rates vary greatly by departments and some had low response rates with paper surveys.

Professor Hoover thanked Dr. Wahlstrom for joining the meeting and adjourned it 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota