

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy**  
**Wednesday, December 12, 2001**  
**1:00 – 3:00**  
**385 Mondale Hall**

Present: Wilbert Ahern (chair), Shawn Curley, Scott Ferguson, Christina Frazier, Gretchen Haas, Gordon Hirsch, Frank Kulacki, Geri Malandra, Christine Maziar, Carol Miller, Marsha Odom, Martin Sampson, Karen Seashore, Mary Ellen Shaw, Mary Sue Simmons, Craig Swan

Absent: Patricia Cavanaugh, Steve Fitzgerald, Kathleen Newell

Guests: none

[In these minutes: (1) accountability riders (metropolitan higher education planning, remedial and developmental education, transfer credits, first-generation college students, identification of top five undergraduate programs; (2) calendars (& the possibility of shortening fall semester on the Twin Cities campus)]

**1. Accountability Riders**

Professor Ahern convened the meeting at 1:05 and turned to Drs. Malandra and Swan to lead a discussion of the University's response to some of the accountability riders enacted by the legislature last spring. The Committee was provided a number of multi-page handouts concerning the riders. Dr. Swan noted a matrix of the riders and the schedule for developing responses. He said he would focus on two that are of most interest to this Committee.

Dr. Swan turned first to the rider calling for the Regents and MnSCU trustees to provide annually a report on progress "under the master academic plan for the metropolitan area." First he pointed to a table developed by Dr. Zetterberg itemizing the degree program duplications in the metropolitan area. The numbers suggest this is not a big issue: there are 11 duplications at the Bachelors level, 3 at the Master's level, and no others. English, Dr. Swan observed, will be a part of ANY undergraduate degree program. At the Master's level, the overlaps are in business and nursing, areas of very high demand; without the duplication the two systems would not be meeting the needs of the market.

Before getting to the substance of the recommendations, Dr. Maziar noticed that Minnesota uses the ACT. Does the University accept the SAT in lieu of the ACT, she asked? So that it does not put the University at a disadvantage in recruiting students from outside the Midwest? The ACT is used primarily in the Midwest; the SAT is used on the coasts. Dr. Swan said the University also accepts the SAT.

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\* 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 represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate or Assembly, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

One of the issues being addressed is college remedial work. 32% of public high school graduates (7200 of 22447) who enrolled in public colleges and universities in Minnesota took one or more remedial or developmental courses in 1999-2000. At the University, the figure was 14.7% for the public high school graduates (755 of 5202). (At the 4-year MnSCU colleges the figure was 21% and at the 2-year colleges it was 45%). Of those who took such courses at the University, 75% took only one and 98% of the remedial credits were in math.

One question raised by the rider is the role of General College at the University. Language prepared by Dr. Malandra notes that GC focuses on preparation of students for transfer to other University colleges and schools (and to other institutions), students who may require special preparation because of personal circumstances or previous education; it also has a special responsibility to support first-generation and urban students. GC offers remedial education only in math and a few ESL courses; the rest of its curriculum carries full college credit. The President has said that GC has played a long and important role in the University; there is continued evaluation of GC's success in getting students ready to transfer and graduate and all of the trends are in the right direction. GC is also playing a national role in developmental education.

Dr. Maziar inquired if there is, in the legislature's understanding, a difference between remedial and developmental education. Dr. Swan commented that there may not be, although there is a difference: remedial education consists of work that should have been completed in high school while developmental education is helping students develop learning strategies (studies and conceptual skills) to succeed in college (not high school) courses. It would be helpful if those who deal with the legislature were educated on this difference; she surmised that many may be confused by the two terms.

Professor Ahern inquired if the Duluth campus has any equivalent to GC. Dr. Swan said not, per se, but all colleges bring in students with special circumstances, including Duluth. He said he was sure that the numbers are smaller at Duluth than the numbers admitted to GC.

It has been suggested that school districts should be charged for remedial education that is provided by colleges and universities, Professor Ahern commented. Can the University distinguish between work that SHOULD have been taken (but did not) and work that COULD have been taken (but was not, for example, because of a change in plans), Professor Seashore asked? The latter students would take developmental, not remedial courses, Dr. Maziar responded. Professor Seashore rejoined that there are courses outside GC the status of which is not clear: some carry college credit but are not very different from high school courses. It is not reasonable to argue for charge-backs for courses students COULD have taken, but it is for work they SHOULD have mastered (i.e., work they took but did not learn). It is not only GC that offers remedial work, she concluded. Entrance standards also have to be considered, Dr. Swan added: the University requires three years of math but IT requires four.

The national figure on the number of students who must take remedial work is 30%, Professor Ahern noted. Minnesota at 32% is above the national average, Professor Seashore observed; there is a drop in students' performance, from middle school to high school, so that U.S. students go from being competitive with peers in Korea and Japan to competitive with students in Austria. The University did have a significant impact on performance with the adoption of preparation standards (although more so in language than math).

These data are subject to interpretation and rely on uneven information, Dr. Malandra observed. She noted that part of the report contains a series of recommendations; if the Committee has any it believes should be considered, she would bring them to the drafting committee.

Professor Cardwell said that the biggest issue in math is the number of non-certified math teachers who are teaching math. One position the Committee could take is to recommend strengthening high school mathematics instruction if the goal is to reduce or eliminate remedial math instruction. Professor Seashore said the University's math department does better than many; it works with the College of Education and Human Development to train teachers.

How do these data about remedial and developmental education relate to being a Research I University, Professor Kulacki inquired? The University's numbers have been stable, Dr. Swan said; at least on the Twin Cities campus there has not been a problem that is increasing; other campuses may have a different experience. He agreed that the University must be clear about what it expects of students and needs to work with districts across the state. He said he would be more concerned if he saw an increase in the number of students taking remedial education. He said he doubted there was any magic bullet that would make the problem go away.

Should the Committee comment on this issue or just let it be public and not worry about it, Professor Kulacki asked? It is already public, Dr. Swan said. The issue is also tied up in the start-stop way the state is moving to standards-based graduation that is not course-based. Common preparation standards with MnSCU already exist; if there is not a lot of change in K-12 education, one hopes that the University and MnSCU could coordinate with the schools on standards.

Following brief and inconclusive discussion about where remedial education should be located (in K-12 education or post-secondary schools), the Committee moved to transfer credits. This is a good news story, Dr. Swan said, although "old ghosts rise again and again"--stories one heard ten years ago still circulate, even though the problem was addressed years ago with the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum, adopted in the early 1990s. The University is working with MnSCU to establish a system to help students at other institutions understand what courses transfer to the University and MnSCU; this service will be available around the clock. The system will be very close to an electronic transfer of credits.

The bigger issue is how courses from technical colleges transfer. The University used to say that none of them did regularly and that any transfers would be granted on an exceptions basis. Some legislators are of the view that if the state is paying for the credits, they should count anywhere in the University. This position does not take into account mission differentiation, Dr. Swan observed.

Do not the technical colleges have some liberal education courses that could transfer, Professor Ahern asked? That is something the University is exploring, Dr. Swan said; it does not yet accept such credits. Even within MnSCU, he said, the 4-year institutions do not accept just any liberal education course from a technical college. The fastest-growing sector of technical college students is those who already have a bachelor's degree, Professor Seashore said, and they argue that since they already have a bachelor's degree from the University they should be given technical college degrees!

The Committee discussed for a short time the number of courses taught at the University by graduate students who do not have a Master's degree. This issue arose from concern about accepting courses from technical colleges because faculty might not have M.A. degrees. It was reported that technical colleges may assign courses to faculty who have M.A. degrees.

Drs. Malandra and Swan next reported on information reported to the state annually on cooperative programs with MnSCU, programs that demonstrate the systems leverage state funds around the state, not just in the metropolitan area. One issue that needs examination is the transferability of courses on the web from institutions the University does not have agreements with or from institutions that are not accredited. The University does not accept courses from non-accredited institutions, Dr. Swan said, but agreed that because the North Central Association is accrediting web-based universities, it may be necessary to revisit the University's policy about web-based courses.

This question has arisen in the Technology-Enhanced Learning Council, Professor Kulacki reported; the University must decide what it will do with students who have taken distance education courses. Or, Professor Ahern added, CLA must decide what to do about students who may have taken a course on the web because it was easier than a CLA course. These are policy questions the Committee needs to take up, Professor Miller said. These riders will help set the long-term agenda, Dr. Swan said, because with the exception of the one concerning the Academic Health Center, all reports are to be provided to the legislature on an annual or biennial basis.

One question not asked, Professor Cardwell said, is what criteria are to be used to judge if programs need to be coordinated or if there should be collaboration. He said he knew of instances where agreements were arranged because of political rather than educational reasons. Dr. Malandra said that the language of the draft report sets out criteria to be used in coordinating programs with MnSCU. There are guidelines on the development of partnership degrees, she pointed, but the issue is a good one to discuss when resources are in short supply.

Dr. Swan recalled for the Committee that the University has an agreement with the metropolitan community colleges that if students apply to the University but cannot get in (and so go to one of the community colleges), or if they start at one of the community colleges but are interested in the University, if the students meet certain criteria in terms of GPA, a second language, and the transfer curriculum, the University will guarantee the students can transfer (and will not charge them an application fee). This started as a pilot program; it now includes all freshman-admitting colleges on the Twin Cities campus except the Carlson School of Management. The program signals the University's willingness to work cooperatively with MnSCU. This is an umbrella agreement, rather than degree by degree, and establishes a close working relationship between the Twin Cities admissions office and counselors at the community colleges.

Dr. Swan then drew the attention of Committee members to the "Minnesota Higher Education Data Profile" prepared by Dr. Zetterberg. Because students are mobile, Dr. Swan said, with movement in and out of the metropolitan area, the University cannot approach metropolitan higher education without considering the broader state picture. High school graduation rates the next 10 years are predicted to be flat and then decline about 2009-2010. There are issues before the University in terms of access to metropolitan higher education with respect to students of color and immigrants; these issues will not be resolved even if the University achieves higher graduation rates. In some states,

these populations are seen as providing the potential for growth akin to that that occurred during the 1960s; the University does not take that view.

Discussion now turned to the accountability rider calling on the University to identify five high-priority undergraduate programs, reallocation priorities, information about first-generation college students, graduation rates, revenues for research, and on the Academic Health Center.

Dr. Swan said that the University recognizes that graduation and retention rates are a prime concern.

First-generation college students are hard to identify. The University has not collected data on this demographic characteristic. Through a national survey, however, it "has data that indicate the proportion of students admitted in fall 1999 who are 'first generation,' i.e., those whose parents have only a high school diploma": 13.4%. Of the students of color, 46.6% identified themselves as first-generation; of those not students of color, 10.5% identified themselves as first-generation. There is a definitional question that needs to be addressed, Dr. Swan observed: does first-generation mean their parents never went to college or never earned a degree? What about an uncle who went to college?

In terms of identifying five high-priority undergraduate programs, at a place like the University undergraduate programs are joint with graduate and professional programs; it is difficult to think about one without the other, Dr. Swan said. They used various criteria (such as the traditional ones the University has used: quality, centrality, comparative advantage, demand, and so on). The University has 299 undergraduate degree programs (counting History at Morris and Duluth as two programs and counting the B.A. versus the B.S. in Chemistry as two programs); it is silly to think about identifying five programs as the highest priority.

As an alternative, the University may use government classification of instructional programs, a list that includes 22 areas, to identify five of high priority. The five would be social and behavioral sciences, engineering and computer sciences, business, biological and life sciences, and visual and performing arts. That does NOT mean, Dr. Swan emphasized, that numbers six, seven, and eight are not important priorities for the University (e.g., the humanities, math, the physical sciences), because they WILL have high priority. They have tried to look at the response to this rider as an undergraduate education improvement strategy that is broader than departments. The targeted areas also have implications for graduate education and research, which is why it is important to look at the context of the University.

In looking at the list, Professor Miller said, it is apparent one cannot devise a list that will please everyone. There is a difference in dimension between the first four on the list and the fifth; how many students are interested in the fifth? What cannot be over-emphasized, Professor Ahern said, is the point in the draft that the University is committed to a balanced strategy because undergraduates take most of their credits in programs other than their major.

These lists are worrisome, Professor Sampson said; at best, they end up on a shelf while in a time of budget problems it may be said that the University should only focus on three of the programs. Has thought been given to avoiding an unsavory result, he asked? Is there a way to emphasize that each program depends on the strength of others? There is language in the document to that effect, Dr.

Swan noted; Professor Sampson suggested it is crucial to emphasize, perhaps with an added bullet, that part of the excellence of a program is excellence in other programs.

The Committee discussed how to make Professor Sampson's point while nonetheless responding to legislative the rider; while not reaching a conclusion, there appeared to be agreement that careful language was needed.

Another shibboleth that needs to be addressed is that the University never chooses, Dr. Malandra said. This document tries to get at it. At the same time, one can speak of these five areas and the distance between them and the next five, which is small. One concern is that investments will be driven by these five undergraduate areas, Dr. Maziar said; this is not necessarily a map with a goal of being among the top five public research universities as measured by the National Research Council. She pointed out that a university can move humanities programs up in rankings with less money than it takes in other fields.

This needs fuller discussion, Dr. Swan concluded.

Professor Ahern thanked Drs. Malandra and Swan for bringing the draft to the Committee before forwarding it to the Board of Regents. Dr. Maziar expressed appreciation to Dr. Malandra for all her work in preparing these reports.

## **2. Calendars**

The Committee next turned its attention to draft calendars prepared by Dr. Rovick. A number of points and issues were raised.

-- Professor Kulacki began by asking whether the Twin Cities could start before Labor Day; the problem of the State Fair was noted. Dr. Rovick said it was a good question; two of the Big Ten schools start after Labor Day, some do either, and some start before. Ms. Frazier said she was troubled by the December 23 semester (finals week) end date; many instructors try to reschedule exams to earlier days. Dr. Rovick said the semester could be shortened to 70 days, which would mean ending on December 22. Professor Seashore said that would be better.

-- Some instructors may decide not to have an exam, Dr. Maziar surmised. That is worse than one fewer day of classes, Professor Seashore commented, unless one thinks the final exam is worthless. She maintained that a lot of learning takes place in preparing for final exams. But the problem with cutting a day, Thursday, is that Thursday is also Thanksgiving, so that Tuesday-Thursday classes then lose two days.

-- Why have a study day, Professor Hirsch asked?

-- Duluth could start before Labor Day, Ms. Frazier pointed out. Dr. Swan said it wants its calendar to be coordinated with the Twin Cities. Dr. Rovick said that coordinate campus calendars, set in conjunction with campus scholastic committees, are usually not changed by the Committee; SCEP has tended to deal with the Twin Cities calendar.

-- There are three factors involved, Professor Sampson said: finishing up in a culture that celebrates Christmas, a minimum number of days of instruction, and accommodating State Fair parking. It does not work to have a final on December 23 because of the luck of the schedule. It is not clear what is to be done; perhaps it is necessary for St. Paul to defect, or to put up with the inconvenience of one week. Better would be to change the policy on the minimum number of instructional days; he said he has been told that good universities do have fewer days. It would be possible to drop the entire last week of classes; the last day of the exam period is a reasonable period to finish up administrative work.

This could mean semesters with very different lengths, Professor Ahern said. Cutting a week from each semester would mean lightening the load for new faculty who must meet the tenure regulations, Professor Sampson pointed out. Professor Ahern agreed that the issue needed looking at; there was a concern that the University would be seen as not working hard enough if the semesters were shorter.

-- At other universities, Dr. Maziar said, large class exams are scheduled early in the exam period; by the end of exams, only small classes with a required paper are scheduled. Dr. Swan said the University tried that but the easiest way to schedule exams is by time of day; otherwise there is a huge scheduling and computing problem. One would guess that large classes cluster at certain periods of the day, Dr. Maziar responded; Dr. Swan agreed the proposal was worth exploring further.

-- Professor Ahern suggested voting on the proposed calendars; if issues arise at the Senate, he will promise that the Committee will re-examine the length of the semester. Would this mean going to 70 days, Dr. Shaw asked? There could be an issue if the policy on semester length is changed, Professor Ahern cautioned; Dr. Rovick responded that no policy change would be required for a 70-day semester but Tuesday-Thursday classes would lose two days.

-- Nomenclature is a problem, Dr. Maziar commented: instructional days versus final exams. This implies that final exams are not instructional.

-- Professor Sampson repeated a point made earlier: he was more worried about canceling a final exam than losing two or three days of instruction. He said he would prefer to see a shorter term than lose the final.

-- How late on December 23 can final exams go, Ms. Frazier asked? They could run until 9:00 p.m.

Professor Ahern suggested the Committee approve the calendars as presented and then revisit the issue at its next meeting.

He then adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand