Minutes[*]

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Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, October 1, 2003
1:00 – 3:00
238A Morrill Hall

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Present: Emily Hoover (chair), Wilbert Ahern, Victor Bloomfield, Vernon Cardwell, Shawn
            Curley, Gretchen Haas, Frank Kulacki, Geoffrey Meisner, Marsha Odom, Martin
            Sampson, Mary Ellen Shaw, Mary Sue Simmons, Craig Swan, Douglas Wangensteen,
            Joel Weinsheimer

Absent: Dale Branton, Karen Seashore

Guests: Susan VanVoorhis (Office of Enrolled Student Services); Vice Provost Billie
            Wahlstrom; John Ramsay (American Council on Education Fellow)

[In these minutes: (1) teaching evaluation subcommittee; (2) repeating courses; (3) instructors late to class; (4) "Values Added" from the CIC on undergraduate education at a research university; (5) technology-enhanced learning]

1.   Teaching Evaluation Subcommittee

        Professor Hoover convened the meeting at 1:00 and began by reviewing the charge to the ad hoc subcommittee on the evaluation of instruction, to be jointly appointed by this Committee and the Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs. The charge letter asks the subcommittee to look into the following:

        --   Evaluate the adequacy of the current course evaluation instrument for measuring the domain of instructor factors that contribute most positively to learning and suggest remedies for identified deficiencies.

        --   Who should properly be entitled to access to various aspects of the evaluation results, such as the written comments and the statistical summaries?

        --   What are the appropriate uses of technology in collecting student evaluation information (e.g., web-based evaluation forms, paper forms, and so on)?

        --   How are the results of the student evaluation of instruction forms used? What are the practices across different departments, colleges, and campuses? Apart from what is actually done, what are good practices with respect to the use of student evaluations of instruction? Related to the foregoing, what can the University do to assist departments in assessing the results of evaluation of instruction in appropriate ways?

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

--   What are the practices of different departments, colleges, and campuses with respect to peer evaluation of instruction? What should be the balance between the results of student and peer evaluation in the decision-making process about faculty members? What are good practices?

--   Should the University provide guidance to departments, colleges, and campuses on the way in which evaluation of instruction should be used in promotion and tenure decisions, annual reviews, and post-tenure review? Should the University (the Faculty Senate) recommend policy on this matter?

--   How should departments deal with inappropriate written comments directed to women instructors on student evaluation forms?

--   Should instructors have the opportunity to respond to student evaluations?

There is enough work implied in those questions to keep a group busy for a very long time, Professor Hoover commented, but they hope the subcommittee will be able to address them in some reasonable fashion. The subcommittee will be asked to submit its report by the end of the academic year. She asked for volunteers to serve on the subcommittee; Professors Sampson and Weinsheimer agreed, as did Ms. Haas and Mr. LeBlanc.

2.   Repeating Courses

Professor Hoover next turned to yet another question about repeating courses. This instance is provoked by a question from a parent about applying the Senate rule to transfer courses. She noted that Vice Provost Swan had gathered information from the CIC schools about their policies on repeating courses; she and Dr. Swan had talked earlier about the issue and he outlined the issues.

Dr. Swan said there are two categories of repeating courses: (1) by a student who is already at the University, and (2) by a student who did work at another institution and transferred it to the University. In the case of (1), there are four sub-parts:

--   How many times will the credits count? (The universal answer appears to be "once.")
--   How is the GPA computed? (The CIC divides about 50/50; the University says it is the LAST grade that counts, which puts it well within accepted practice.)
--   Are there limits on the number of repeats:
       --   of a single course;
       --   in total; and
       --   who decides if a student can repeat a course (e.g., does a repeat require advisor approval?) The Senate has adopted policy on the first item (only once), has said nothing about the second, and SCEP declined to require that a student obtain approval.
--   How do repeats work vis-à-vis financial aid? (There are federal government constraints.)

How should the University treat transfer work? Should it be the same as work taken at the University?

If a student transfers in a course, such as Calculus I, from an accredited institution, and enrolls for the equivalent of Calculus I at the Twin Cities campus, is that not considered a repeat, Professor Odom asked? It is, Ms. VanVoorhis said, but the system does not know it is a repeat. PeopleSoft will identify course repeats within the University but not for transfer courses. Dr. Swan said he was sympathetic to the idea that the University should treat transfer courses the same as on-campus courses, and the system is getting closer to being able to do so. At Crookston, Professor Odom reported, they are able to evaluate transfer courses to determine if they are duplicates. Dr. Shaw said that the degree clearance process catches duplication of transfer courses; Dr. Swan agreed but pointed out that that was at the end of the process; it should be caught earlier.

The Senate policy is general, Professor Hoover noted, and does not say if it includes transfer credits. Internally on the Twin Cities campus, because the policy does not deal with the transfer issue, the CSAA (Collegiate Student Affairs Administrators) have ruled that a University course may not be bracketed by a course taken elsewhere, Ms. VanVoorhis reported. The policy is ambiguous and the practice varies, Dr. Swan agreed. The concern is that people take a course at the University, get a grade they do not like, and then take the course again elsewhere, get a better grade, and transfer the course back to the University with a request that the University course be bracketed, Professor Ahern said. Ms. VanVoorhis affirmed Professor Ahern's analysis; she said the University course will not be bracketed but the credits will remain. That is different from the instance brought to the Committee in this case, Professor Ahern pointed out, where a student took a course elsewhere first, then repeated it at the University (and received a "C"), and was surprised to learn that it was counted as a repeat and the "C" entered as the grade on the transcript (presumably in accord with Senate policy).

This brings up the question, then, of how to deal with transfer credits, Professor Hoover said. Other CIC institutions have clearer policies. Professors Ahern and Odom said that their campuses have policies that address transfer credits. Mr. Meisner reported the same for Duluth. Mr. LeBlanc said that as a student, the policy does not seem at all unclear: Only credits taken at the University count toward the GPA. He said he could not imagine a student who thought a grade obtained elsewhere would count at the University. That should probably be spelled out in the policy nonetheless, Dr. Shaw suggested.

Professor Hoover suggested that she and Ms. VanVoorhis develop language for consideration by the Committee. Dr. Shaw urged that colleges be permitted to evaluate transfer courses for specific programs (although not for the GPA). Professor Hoover said they would look at the Crookston, Morris, and student affairs administrator interpretations of the policy for the Twin Cities in order to try to write a policy that cannot be misinterpreted.

Dr. Swan noted that this Committee has, in the past, rejected the notion that repeats will be restricted according to what grade a student earned in the course the first time (e.g., there is nothing to bar a student who received an "A" in a course from repeating it). He also promised to provide the Committee with data on repeats and grades earned. He said that the Committee never brought to a conclusion a discussion of whether there should be an overall limit on the number of times students could repeat courses en route to earning a degree.

3.   Instructors Who Are Late to Class

Professor Hoover next noted that there is no Senate policy on how long students must wait for an instructor to show up for class before they may leave. There are a lot of rumors; she said she did

not know if the Committee wished to consider a policy. The Classroom Expectations Guidelines do seem not to address the question of faculty coming to class in a timely fashion. She has had calls on this issue, however, so would like it discussed. (Later in the meeting, Professor Odom pinpointed language in the Guidelines that does speak to faculty meeting their classes on time.)

Professor Ahern said he did not believe a policy necessary, except to say that instructors are expected to be on time. Another answer is that since students had planned to have that time set aside for class, they should wait until the instructor arrives--and if the instructor is late a second time, they should talk to the department head. This is not a trivial issue to students, Professor Hoover observed; the ones she talked to were irate and she told them the same thing: talk to the department chair.

This is a legitimate issue, Mr. LeBlanc said. In high school, after a certain period of time, students may leave and not be held responsible for what may have been taught after that point. How can students be expected to wait 25 or 30 minutes, after half the class period has elapsed? There should be a policy on the issue.

Professor Hoover repeated that this is an issue of concern to students. In one case brought to her attention, the instructor was repeatedly late and wanted to hold the class later to make up for the time. Is there not a policy that the instructor may not hold students beyond the time of the class, Professor Curley inquired? That is implicit in the policy, Dr. Swan responded.

The flip side is that if a class starts at 8:00, faculty members are employed to be there to give their lecture, Professor Kulacki said. If there are 500 students in a class and the instructor is 20 minutes late, that is 10,000 wasted minutes. Perhaps the instructor should be sent a bill. It is a condition of employment that instructors arrive and teach their class; an academic policy is not needed. There is an understanding that when work is assigned, it will be done when necessary; it is implicit that one will show up for classes on time. Professor Sampson agreed; what, he asked, about faculty who are permitted to cancel classes? What about the faculty responsibility to be in class in those circumstances? It is not just when one is to be there; do they also have the latitude to cancel classes for which students have paid? He said he would not favor a new policy that could end up being too rigid.

Ms. Haas also agreed. She said it would be insulting to have a document saying when instructors are expected to show up for class. She said students should be expected to exercise a little judgment.

Dr. Swan said that if students do not receive redress from the department, he would like to hear about it so he can work through the deans' offices on a problem.

4.   "Values Added" From the CIC

Professor Hoover referred now to the "Values Added" publication from the CIC (the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, the Big Ten plus the University of Chicago). She said it was a very positive way to look at how large research universities serve undergraduates in ways that are different from small colleges, for example, and it embodies what Dean Bloomfield said at the last meeting. [Dr. Bloomfield "cited three elements that differentiate a research university education. (1) The research university's advantage is that if one cares that the person doing the teaching is a world-class figure, then the University has them. (2) In general, there is access to higher-level cutting edge

equipment. (3) The research university has graduate students and provides a large part of the acculturation into research and scholarship. It is not a matter of working with faculty, but rather of the sophomore working with the senior, who is working with the graduate student, who is working with the post-doc, who is working with the senior faculty member."] She said that the elements of "Value Added" could be combined with the data that the Committee requested at its last meeting to set some baseline measures for 2003 and later to see how the University is dealing with undergraduate education.

Dr. Swan said that he had emphasized, in conversation with Professor Hoover, that if things are to be measured, the Committee will want to be sure that the things are relevant and unambiguous. Several Committee members alluded to measures of class size at the last meeting; his view is that one should look at the quality of the classroom experience, not its size; one could fixate on the wrong thing if not careful.

Professor Ahern said that it is important nonetheless that students in their major have some classes that allow interaction with students and faculty, which is difficult in a class larger than about 20. One might say that every major should offer small and medium classes to majors. Professor Hoover related that she and Professor Sampson had talked about this; the classes in her field, for example, tend to be smaller than those in his. Professor Sampson agreed that size should not be the only measure of quality. Ms. Haas said that it would still be helpful to see trends in class size; if the numbers appear to be going steadily up, the Committee would know there may be a problem. In her department, for example, the size of writing-intensive courses has been increased. There is also the issue of the percentage appointment time to a class for graduate students. That varies across colleges, Professor Hoover commented, and even within colleges.

Dr. Swan said he believed it would be feasible to obtain data on the number of graduate students on TA appointments; advising, however, is done by a lot of people with different job titles and would be much more difficult to assemble.

The question raised by Ms. Haas, Professor Hoover said, also goes to the responsibility of TAs. To find that out would require a lot more effort, Dr. Swan said, such as surveying departments. If the number of TAs is up more than enrollment, presumably there is no issue. If the number has declined while enrollment has increased, then there is a question about their responsibilities, he agreed.

Professor Weinsheimer said he agreed with something Dr. Swan had written that had been circulated to the Committee: There can be classes that are too small and big classes are not necessarily bad. However, in the middle range, there are connections between the number of students and the quality of the classroom experience because the size of the class affects the number of interactions between students and faculty. There should be an opportunity for students to talk more than once each class meeting in major courses. There is a way to talk about quality about undergraduate education at a research university and he would like to see the University try to protect that middle ground.

Professor Sampson agreed. He said he worried about the silent compromise: enrollment increases, TAs are asked to do more work, and faculty decide not to assign two papers any more because it is too much work for the TA. He said he did not know how to get at that problem but it is one he worries about. One could survey graduate students, Dr. Shaw suggested.

Mr. LeBlanc said that in all his coursework, there is only one faculty member he feels he can talk to. He is double-majoring; in one field, there are a reasonable number of smaller classes; in the other, he said he could go through his entire undergraduate career without speaking to a faculty member in his major. That is not because of this year's budget cuts, Professor Hoover observed. Mr. LeBlanc agreed but said it is related to the issue of class size.

Professor Hover said she is still grappling with the issue of quality in undergraduate education. She keeps after Dr. Swan for data; it would be best if the Committee could look at trends. She encouraged Committee members to talk about undergraduate education in a positive light and said she felt the CIC document had a lot of validity; it would be interesting to try to quantify what it talks about.

As someone from an institution a lot like small liberal arts colleges (Morris), Professor Ahern said, he felt the CIC document needed some amending. The first points it makes, for example, are not unique to research universities. Others, however, are clearly for research universities; the University should hone those for the Twin Cities campus and be sure they are being carried out. They must not be neglected or taken for granted. Professor Hoover agreed. There was a lot of hand-wringing at the last meeting, which is important to do, but then the Committee must get to what faculty hold near and dear and the effect of budget cuts on those things. The CIC document identifies what undergraduate programs at research universities are trying to do. The document includes several insightful items, Professor Ahern agreed, and the University must be sure it has plans of action so they are not neglected.

Professor Weinsheimer said he a different view of "Values Added"; he thought it was a self-serving defense of the status quo. Professor Hoover said she read it as a set of goals, not necessarily what has been attained. On the other side, Dean Bloomfield said, when tuition has risen, it is not just what the faculty and University give to students but also what students can give to the University; if they must work harder to earn money, they can give less to their studies.

Dr. Simmons related that she includes in her instruction a small part about the value of the liberal arts. While students digest this perspective, they are more preoccupied with the increased tuition and fees and what they are getting for them. She tells them they are getting less of her advising time but that they picked the University for good reasons and those good reasons still exist. Many adult students do not understand they are at a land-grant research university--and they ask these questions aggressively. She points out that the University can provide them with insights and that interesting things can happen here.

5.   Technology-Enhanced Learning

Professor Hoover welcomed Vice Provost Billie Wahlstrom to the meeting. She said had asked Professor Kulacki, the Committee's representative to the Technology-Enhanced Learning Council (hereinafter TEL Council), to make a report; he had suggested the Committee hear from Dr. Wahlstrom. Professor Kulacki said he had informed Professor Hoover about the activities of the TEL Council when she was appointed chair, and had asked Dr. Wahlstrom to join the meeting for his report.

Dr. Wahlstrom thanked the Committee for the opportunity to join it and said she hoped there were questions she could take away from the meeting. She handed out copies of materials she had presented to the Board of Regents. She briefly reviewed the contents.

--   The University has 1.6 million web pages. She said she worries that as the University talks about the appearance of old and new buildings on campus, it does not think as much about how it appears on the web--when 65% of people get their information about the University from the web, and that number is increasing.

--   How should the libraries capture the University? The President sends emails, committee records are electronic. "Change is the nature of the digital world. What should be the governing principles for managing that change? Should the University document the history of that change (e.g., by taking snapshots of the University as it is displayed" in the 1.6 million web pages? How are records to be preserved?

--   The University has had a hard enough time advocating for the physical university--buildings, computers, libraries, and so on (the "brick" part); how does it advocate for the "click" part, which is less tangible, more invisible? How will it get full value from its investment in information technology?

The University has a robust infrastructure, Dr. Wahlstrom said. It is well networked and well set for the age of wireless communication. There will be, however, privacy and access issues that will need to be dealt with.

The investment in technology has also led to enhanced efficiency. The University, for example, generated an additional $600,000 in tuition income from online and ITV courses than the year before. They are also trying to develop online evaluations; there was a pilot program in several disciplines last year; research on the program is underway.

In spring semester, 2003, there were 1735 WebCT course sites at the University, a significant increase over the previous spring. There were also 92 related to HIPAA training. When the University decided in 1991 to give email to everyone, it thereafter developed a lot of Enterprise solutions that were tied together--and has put itself ahead of almost all other universities in this regard. It receives national recognition for what it has done, but the fact is that the accomplishments are a byproduct of the decision 12 years ago to give email to everyone. One result is that the University can use WebCT for self-training; what was purchased for students the University can use for other purposes, such as HIPAA training. It has also been used as a template for other things, such as requiring students in one college to learn certain things before registering for classes--which saves the faculty a lot of time when helping students register.

Portfolio, a web-based information management tool ("a digital asset management site") available to all at the University, is an example of how TEL tools can be integrated into existing tools to make them more powerful. New faculty, for example, will be provided workshops on how to use Portfolio for promotion and tenure files. They will work with departments and staff who wish help, Dr. Wahlstrom said. Portfolio is tied to PeopleSoft, so it can automatically populate Portfolio with needed information (such as whether one has completed HIPAA training, if one has had immunizations if one is working in the Medical School, etc.).

There are a lot of exciting things occurring in TEL, Dr. Wahlstrom concluded--few in her office, many in the colleges.

When are new faculty and graduate students assigned an email account, Professor Weinsheimer asked? Students when they are accepted, faculty when the contract is signed, Dr. Wahlstrom said. There is a need to assign accounts earlier and earlier, Professor Weinsheimer said, before they arrive. They are using the portal for prospective students and community people, Dr. Wahlstrom said, and the students are switched to the regular email system when they matriculate.

What complicates the picture is that more and more students have email addresses when they come to the University--addresses they may not want to give up because their friends and family know the address they have, Dr. Swan commented. Students are told, however, that all official email will be sent to their University account and that they are responsible for that information (and failure to pay attention could have consequences, such as not paying a tuition bill). One must also use their University account to gain access to their benefit information, Dr. Wahlstrom noted.

Will there be changes in WebCT, Dr. Shaw asked? Dr. Wahlstrom said the University is going to the new version but it also has a contract to continue the old version for three years--and individuals can stay with the old version if they wish because the University owns it. They will make the migration to the new system as easy as possible, she said, but many will likely want the change because it addresses a number of the problems that existed with the older version.

One must be careful about talking about the enhanced efficiency of TEL, Ms. Haas cautioned, because it is not more efficient for the people doing the teaching. Dr. Wahlstrom said the comment is addressed to students; she said that she is teaching a course on line and one of the students had to move to Chicago, but is able to complete the course anyway. She agreed, however, that the courses take a lot of time for the teacher.

Mr. LeBlanc said that when it comes to using technology, there is the erroneous perception that technology will make learning better. Students can tell if an instructor is not comfortable with technology. He has had great classes where the only technology used was a slide projector. He tells faculty that they should teach in the style they are comfortable with; he said he is concerned about the expectations of faculty that they use technology. Professor Kulacki said that is one reason he has always promoted faculty training with the TEL Council; there has to be a realistic understanding of the time it will take faculty to be completely conversant with technology. There have been pervasive changes, but they are quiet, and slow. Dr. Wahlstrom said that she has two sons quite different in age; she calls one her digital son and one her analog son. She said that as faculty, they must realize that another generation of very technologically savvy students are coming--and she hopes that students are patient with the faculty.

There are also still students who are clueless about technology, Professor Ahern pointed out. Starting a WebCT course can be a great burden for them. The digital divide has not disappeared.

Dr. Simmons reported on an article in the New York Times about PowerPoint--the gist of it was that one should beware of being in the classroom when the PowerPoint bullets start flying. She has had students ask for the handouts so they don't have to take notes. PowerPoint seems to eliminate the need for learning.

Mr. LeBlanc followed up on his earlier comments. He said students would prefer that time in class is spent on the course, not on fumbling around with technology. WebCT has a nice effect but it is not true that students want to spend all their time on the computer. Just because something is on the web does not mean it is better. Professor Kulacki agreed that there needs to be a balance. Students have a learning curve with technology but the curve is steeper for faculty; it takes them time to learn the technology environment.

Are there any policy implications from TEL for this Committee, Professor Hoover inquired? There will be a number, Dr. Wahlstrom said; they have established a subcommittee on the TEL Council to identify policy issues. She said she hoped to have a document ready by January. Professor Kulacki said there are two general policy areas: intellectual property/ownership of products of work and contracts as faculty, as employees of the University, about training and accountability in an environment that demands certain skill levels. TEL has both academic and contract implications, he said. Some institutions require training at a certain level in technology, Dr. Wahlstrom said; would the University want that?

Vice Provost Swan responded to Mr. LeBlanc's comments. He wondered if it would be possible to elicit from students information on what works and what does not, in terms of technology, both in class and on the web. It may be that different things work for different classes and different students, but such information could help faculty as they think about using technology and what is useful, what is not. Professor Sampson said that he has become deeply aware of how effective classroom management back-up is; he said he hoped the University would not lose track of the need for funds for routine replacement or equipment. One of the policy issues is that classroom modernization has never been adequately funded, Dr. Wahlstrom said. A related problem is keeping current with software, Professor Ahern said, because there is no funding for upgrades, especially discipline-related software.

Dr. Swan said Professor Sampson's point is critically important. When there are questions about why the cost of education has one up, one answer is the technology students expect is radically different from blackboards--and it is not cheap.

PowerPoint had an effect on teaching, Professor Weinsheimer said. If one has an elaborate presentation, one should not put it up on a screen and read it, so one must think about something else to do with the time in class. Mr. LeBlanc commented that he had an instructor who read the PowerPoint slides, which made him fall asleep, so he (Mr. LeBlanc) decided to write the material all down instead of making copies of the slides.

On that note, Professor Hoover adjourned the meeting at 2:40.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota