

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, January 21, 2004
1:00 – 3:00
238A Morrill Hall

- Present: Emily Hoover (chair), Wilbert Ahern, Roxanne Beauclair, Victor Bloomfield, Vernon Cardwell, Shawn Curley, Gretchen Haas, Frank Kulacki, Scott LeBlanc, Marsha Odom, Martin Sampson, Karen Seashore, Mary Ellen Shaw, Mary Sue Simmons, Craig Swan, Douglas Wangensteen, Joel Weinsheimer
- Absent: Dale Branton, Michael Edlavitch, Geoffrey Meisner
- Guests: Laurel Hirt (Career and Community Learning Center); Associate Vice Provost Gerald Rinehart (Student Affairs); Professor Laura Gurak (Rhetoric); Susan VanVoorhis (Office of Enrolled Student Services)
- Other: Professor John Ramsay (American Council on Education Fellow)

[In these minutes: (1) community engagement scholars program; (2) student engagement; (3) Twin Cities campus writing intensive and technical writing programs; (4) syllabus policy]

1. Community Engagement Scholars Program

Professor Hoover convened the meeting at 1:00 and welcomed Laurel Hirt to present a proposal for a program that would include a notation on a student's transcript for community service.

Dr. Swan reported that he had asked Ms. Hirt to work on a proposal, which arose from a discussion about how to recognize students at graduation who have done a lot of community work. It is the right thing to do, is consistent with the University's commitment to public engagement, and would place the University among a small group of institutions that offer such a program (although the number is likely to grow in the next few years). The program is starting out on the Twin Cities campus, Ms. Hirt said, although both Crookston and Morris are also considering the idea.

Ms. Hirt reviewed the elements of the proposal. (1) A student would have to have 400 documented hours of service that addresses community needs, 200 of which could come from work completed as a class or degree requirement or paid work at an internship, work-study or a job with a non-profit or public agency. (2) Nine credits in service-learning course work (through existing courses or independently incorporating service learning in another course), including a one-credit Integrative Community Engagement Project Seminar. (3) Completion of eight "reflection points for community engagement." (4) A meeting with service-learning staff and other students enrolled in the program each semester. (5) Completion of an "integrative community engagement project." The program would be

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open to any degree-seeking student and those who complete it would receive recognition at graduation as well as a notation on his or her transcript.

Professor Seashore commended the proposal and suggested there be someone from Student Affairs on the advisory board that Ms. Hirt had told the Committee is assisting. This looks like the leadership minor, she said; they need to be sure they are not running parallel programs. Ms. Hirt said they are aware of the leadership minor; this program does not have required courses but students in the leadership minor could also take advantage of this program. Dr. Swan said they would look into the possibility of making it easier for students in the leadership minor to take advantage of this program.

The proposal will be provided to the faculty who teach service learning courses for their reaction, Ms. Hirt said in response to a query from Dr. Shaw; it will also be distributed to other groups.

Professor Sampson also commended the proposal but indicated it may be important to be clear that participation is an opportunity for students, not a right that students can assert in situations where it does not work or departments lack resources. He also inquired about language saying participation would not "create a religious, political, and/or moral conflict for the student." Ms. Hirt said it could be taken out; any service work would be selected by the student. Professor Sampson also said there may need to be clarification of the language about partisan organizations; what about religious organizations that oppose war? a group protesting health benefits and picketing the University? Partisan means working for a political party or in elections, Dr. Swan said. Professor Sampson commended the requirement that the work be in an organization so that a student cannot stand in front of Eastcliff and protest something for 400 hours for University credit.

Committee members discussed other elements of the proposal for some time.

- why work cannot have occurred more than one semester prior to entering the program; they should consider reducing the number of hours accepted before a student enters the program
- how to treat furloughed students
- the community/service work is not graded
- students will need to log hours and get a signature from the organization to document the hours
- for reflective learning, they should look at the Program for Individualized Learning
- the service learning office and the advisory committee will decide who will be accepted in the program

The proposal has been presented to the Council on Public Engagement, now to this Committee, and will be presented to the Council of Undergraduate Deans next month. The comments from the groups will be taken into account and they will then seek approval to implement the program, Ms. Hirt said, probably next January.

Professor Ahern suggested this item should go to the Twin Cities Campus Assembly if it is a Twin Cities matter. Professor Hoover promised the proposal would be on the Committee's agenda again in the future. She thanked Ms. Hirt for joining the meeting.

2. Student Engagement

Professor Hoover now welcomed Associate Vice Provost Gerald Rinehart to the meeting to discuss student engagement and how better to connect students with the campus. Dr. Rinehart distributed copies of what he described as preliminary notes on the topic, about how the University might interact more effectively with students. Dr. Rinehart reviewed the contents of the notes he distributed and touched on several issues:

-- The University has set expectations for graduation; it can also set expectations about what students should accomplish in their overall university experience. Students spend most of their time at the University outside of the classroom, and it is assumed students are developing positive characteristics as they move through these experiences. Dr. Rinehart said the University needs to be more intentional and purposeful in creating an environment that helps students make progress toward outcomes associated with life long learning and good citizenship. Among the ten characteristics included in the list Dr. Rinehart distributed were the following: responsibility, accountability, resilience, tolerance of ambiguity.

-- Guiding hypothesis: Students who are engaged in their University experience by participation in campus and community activities beyond the classroom receive the greatest gains from their University experience. Many of the key intellectual outcomes sought in the curricula can be reinforced through co-curricular experiences: problem solving, critical thinking, communication skills, teamwork etc. The engaged student is likely to be a more effective learner, and students who are able to integrate classroom theory with non-classroom problem solving are likely to be more successful in both venues (i.e. in the classroom and in the community)

-- Survey and other research data confirm that students involved in co-curricular activities are more likely to persist to graduation and make timely progress toward their degree.

-- Students who successfully engage in classroom and co-curricular experiences and who are able to be reflective regarding what they have learned through these experiences have more opportunities available to them at graduation.

-- The University needs to deepen collaboration among academic faculty/staff and student affairs staff to identify and promote learning and developmental opportunities: civic leadership opportunities (COPE programs, U-YMCA etc); campus leadership (student activities etc.); wellness programs through recreational sports, etc.; arts, music, and Coffman Union special programming; opportunities in campus ministries (Newman Center, Hillel, etc.) These opportunities can contribute significantly to the intellectual/academic and developmental outcomes for our students.

-- Engaged students identify with the campus identity and develop institutional loyalty. The University recognizes the important roles that our athletic teams and arenas can play in creating a positive campus

-- Students need to work with advisers, faculty, community staff, others to develop individual plans for involvement and development.

-- The University needs to establish effective planning and tracking systems which students are introduced to as freshmen and which they contribute to during the University career. Develop portfolios

or activities' transcripts which document experiences related to the Outcome areas. The tracking/documentation system needs to facilitate student self-reflection regarding learning experiences. Self-reflection should produce goal statements and plans for future developmental activities.

-- Additional investment is required to enhance career-related services for students. At the end of the sophomore year/beginning of junior year, students should meet with career advisers to review experiences and further develop plans for their final two years. In addition, the University needs to work with the employment community to facilitate their interaction with students as prospective employees. The University needs to make it easier for potential employers to identify candidates for positions.

Committee members offered a number of comments.

- At expensive liberal arts colleges, they charge a lot of money so the student is with similarly talented students.
- If one wants to enhance community, look into the availability of food in Coffman on weekends and the food service available to students. There are things important to nurturing interactions that get squeezed at the University--at a huge cost. The University is hostile to informal interaction. (One of the student members reported he has been trying unsuccessfully for some time to get a meeting with University Dining Services about these kinds of questions.)
- The University should also increase awareness in students of what the University is about. Faculty tend to feel students know what a university is as a major social organization--what it is about and how it works in shaping lives. This is self-interested, to build support, but students should learn about the organization they have gone through and how important it is to society. It also needs to be more explicit about how education and research address the characteristics of students.
- Challenges differ for different campuses. This is valuable for recognizing that student learning is not only in the classroom and that there are barriers that Student Affairs and Academic Affairs must overcome.
- Spending more time on campus correlates with engagement; the goal should be to make students want to stay on campus. Most leave to go to work, but there is a need to be cognizant of near-campus work and keep an inventory of positions so the University can help students find jobs near campus.
- Expectations fuel behaviors; what does the University expect of students? Freshmen dorms are about the equivalent of summer camp. What forces students out of dorms are the cost and the parent-like environment. No advisors ask students what they are doing outside the classroom; all the focus is on classes and career. Faculty could help create expectations by talking about this in their classes.
- How does this fit with the portfolio as a way to help address what students should be thinking about as they complete their undergraduate education?
- A lot of the goals fit within the freshman seminars and they would be a natural place to start. Some other seminar/experience in the junior year could be another. It would be good to build this option into the rhythm of the curriculum.
- All students know about these expectations; it all comes down to money. "Rich kids at private liberal arts colleges with money from their parents can afford to get into activities and live in dorms." A lot of students at the University are not in co-curricular activities because they have figured out it is cheaper to live off campus and they must work to pay their tuition so they just attend. These problems are hard to fix at a public university.

Professor Hoover thanked Dr. Rinehart for his presentation and promised that the issue would be on a future agenda.

3. Twin Cities Campus Writing Intensive and Technical Writing

Professor Hoover welcomed Professor Laura Gurak, Head, Department of Rhetoric and Scientific and Technical Communication, to discuss technical writing on the Twin Cities campus. She noted that the Committee had spoken with Professor Bridwell-Bowles about writing and writing-intensive classes; she then spoke with Professor Gurak about discussing her perspective on writing at the University, specifically technical writing instruction. Professor Gurak invited Dr. Kirsten Jamsen Director of The Center for Writing, to join her, since they have been working together on ways to improve writing instruction across the curriculum

Professor Gurak distributed copies of slides and talked with the Committee about writing. First, however, she introduced Dr. Jamsen. Dr. Jamsen explained that The Center for Writing is a new unit that was created by the merger of the Center for the Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing and the Student Writing Center; it is housed next door to English but is not a part of the English Department. In University of Minnesota language, the Center for Writing is a "one-stop" for writing on campus, with resources for students, faculty, and staff. It is housed in CLA but serves the entire campus. Her department, Professor Gurak added, is the "one-stop" on campus for technical writing.

Professor Gurak noted that there is "plenty of expertise" on writing, rhetoric, and composition on the campus, including the Center for Writing, faculty in the departments, and the programs in Rhetoric. Writing in the discipline has two parts, in her view: faculty and TAs who are experts in their disciplines and faculty and TAs who are experts in rhetoric, composition, and technical writing. The first is what the Center for Writing is doing; the latter is what is done at many universities but is missing at Minnesota. They are working on a pilot project.

Professor Gurak explained the outreach program in COAFES that includes a faculty writing consultant, other experts in rhetoric, composition, and technical writing, advanced graduate students trained in technical writing, and an online writing center. She suggested that these kinds of outreach programs make sense in places such as COAFES, the biological sciences, natural resources, the Institute of Technology, as well as "any discipline where the writing and communication is primarily technical or scientific and where theories and practice in this field are appropriate." She said she thought it unusual that technical writing was not built into the curriculum for every major and identified the courses that she thought should be included in any major. She described the partnering and collaboration that occurs in technical communication and then said it was time for new such arrangements for the benefit of faculty and students.

A number of points emerged in the ensuing discussion.

-- There is a need for grant-writing help at the University. Post-docs and graduate students need help; it is a technical skill for students and a survival skill for faculty. Professor Gurak said she has talked at the college level about how to bring this training to departments; she has thought about a workshop that starts generically and then breaks down into discipline-specific needs. Right now the faculty have learned and teach their students, but how this gets done is unclear. Dr. Jamsen said this question reminds us that

people do not master writing in one or two courses or even in an entire undergraduate career and that writers need to learn to write for different audiences and contexts; graduate students need support in writing that includes content experts and one-on-one support.

-- The effort to establish collaboration and increase technical writing around the campus are to be commended. Professor Weinsheimer said that CLA students, however, need technical writing skills as well as those in the other colleges Professor Gurak mentioned. The campus lost specialist writing courses at the 3-XXX level when the writing-intensive courses were implemented. Students were more committed in those courses than they are in generic courses. Do they anticipate an increased clientele? Could they serve more of the University? Professor Gurak thought they could and agreed there is a greater need. She said that the less generic the course, the better.

-- This is exciting and badly needed. There is a funding problem, exacerbated by the University's financial structure. There is no way to pay for the improvements that Professor Gurak recommends, but if this is a university, it should be done. Some colleges use writing-intensive funds at the central level and get more bang for the buck, Professor Gurak said. The technical writing needs at the graduate level are also profound, Professor Seashore said. Improvements will not be cheap, Dr. Jamsen said; to teach writing well there must be a small student-teacher ratio. But it is extremely important to the mission of the University. It might be possible to identify a foundation grant that focuses on graduate student writing, Professor Gurak said, and there could be useful research results.

-- There is another side to this: It is not just writing to be clear, it also a way to develop critical thinking skills. Writing as a mechanism for teaching analytical skills is more important than it was 15 years ago. Both Professor Gurak and Dr. Jamsen agreed, and said that writing-to-learn is always part of writing instruction, regardless of the discipline.

Professor Hoover thanked Professor Gurak and Dr. Jamsen for joining the meeting.

4. Syllabus Policy

The Committee was made aware of an email from a former Committee member suggesting that the current policies on the Senate web site concerning syllabi are confusing. Professor Hoover said she had gone through the policies and she agreed; there are a number of seemingly conflicting pieces to the policies. She said there is need for a small subcommittee to work through them and recommend wording changes so that the policies are clear on what is required and what is recommended.

Professor Ahern recalled that the Committee took the position that Senate policy should require a syllabus but that it did not want to include a lot of details on what must be included on the syllabus. The recommendations, some of which appear as requirements, are in the Classroom Expectations Guidelines.

Dr. Swan said it would help if Senate policies were codified so that changes in language did not lead to policy variances. Professor Hoover said that she and Professor Ahern would develop a recommendation, and then adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand