

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, February 18, 2004
1:00 – 3:00
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Emily Hoover (chair), Wilbert Ahern, Roxanne Beauclair, Victor Bloomfield, Dale Branton, Shawn Curley, Michael Edlavitch, Geoffrey Meisner, Marsha Odom, Karen Seashore, Mary Ellen Shaw, Mary Sue Simmons, Craig Swan, Douglas Wangenstein, Joel Weinsheimer

Absent: Vernon Cardwell, Gretchen Haas, Frank Kulacki, Scott LeBlanc, Martin Sampson

Guests: Associate Dean Arlene Carney; Karen Zentner Bacig (Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost), Professor Murray Jensen (Morse-Alumni Nominating Committee); John Ramsay (American Council on Education Fellow)

[In these minutes: (1) assessment of student learning; (2) Morse-Alumni and Graduate-Professional award winners and discussion of award criteria; (3) update on Bush faculty development grant; (4) athletic exception; (5) 04-05 schedule]

1. Assessment of Student Learning

Professor Hoover convened the meeting at 1:00 and welcomed Associate Dean Carney, Chair of the Council on Enhancing Student Learning.

Dean Carney began by explaining that she will talk about the assessment of student learning portion of the accreditation process; she works with John Ziegenhagen, who is the point person on the accreditation. She recalled that she provided the Committee an update last spring, when she chaired the Twin Cities Learning Assessment Council. That group, composed of associate deans and ex officio members from various University offices, developed a definition of assessment and looked at the relationship between assessment and accreditation. The goal was NOT simply to engage in the assessment of student learning for the purpose of accreditation but to really look at assessment as an important goal.

She and Dr. Ziegenhagen made a presentation to the Regents in July, 2003; 2003-04 is the year of faculty engagement in discussion of what assessment means and its implications across the colleges. She learned from attending several national meetings that assessment is far advanced in small liberal arts colleges, and some large universities have also undertaken assessment for undergraduates. She has also met with Dean Bloomfield to discuss whether assessment could also take place with graduate students. The Council decided that assessment would be campus-wide. The Twin Cities Learning Assessment Council became the Council on Enhancing Student Learning (CESL--with the same membership plus a few more, including students) last summer, which meets once per month and is keeping the momentum going across the units. They have made considerable progress, Dean Carney said.

* 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.

They held a large conference in the fall that included national expert Tom Angelo; they hoped for 100 attendees and had 300, with representation from most departments. CESL broke into working groups to look at classroom assessment, curriculum, assessment of learning techniques, and advising, and those groups have been meeting during winter and into spring. In the curricular area, they are looking at learning objectives for all undergraduates on the Twin Cities campus regardless of college as well as the goals within each college. They plan to prepare a working document that will be presented to the faculty and key groups (such as this Committee). Professor Chomsky is chairing the group that is looking at classroom assessment and providing opportunities for faculty to interact and learn from each other. Dean Carney described briefly what the other working groups are doing and said that there is great enthusiasm among CESL members that they believe is spreading to the faculty and they hope to have a more extensive impact in the future.

They are also sending an invitation to 3000 faculty and instructors to obtain information about the techniques people use in the classroom at all levels of instruction. They are also using an inventory developed at Syracuse that others have also used; this request will go out the end of March and they hope for a high response rate in order to set a baseline. This will allow more targeted activities in the future.

Mr. Meisner asked if there has been any thought given to a licensure program so that faculty could receive training and a certificate from the University. Dean Carney said there has not but the Center for Teaching and Learning has a lot of programs; there are also graduate-level courses for future faculty. Most who have participated in these activities seem satisfied. She said she did not know how interested the faculty would be in a certificate program. Professor Weinsheimer reported that he has been surprised to learn that all United Kingdom universities are moving to licensure and will require courses on teaching for all faculty.

Curriculum assessment is very ambitious and very exciting, Professor Seashore said; she expressed hope that the work would be shared with this Committee before it was a polished product because it will stimulate a great deal of discussion. One question she had was this: For those teaching undergraduates, there are a lot of assessment issues related to cheating and dishonesty; are those being addressed in any significant way? Not to her knowledge, Dean Carney said, but it is a good topic. It is an assessment challenge, Professor Seashore said; for faculty who urge students to be more creative, turnitin.com does not work very well. Dr. Bacig, who is a member of the curriculum working group, reported that this issue has not come up but that she will add it to the list. Professor Swan suggested that the CESL group also talk with the Senate Committee on Student Academic Integrity.

Professor Ahern reported that Morris and Crookston have an advantage in looking at assessment because they are smaller campuses, the issues have come at them sooner, and they have been working on assessment for several years. It might be helpful to look at their program assessment plans on the web. Dean Carney said that CESL has done so. Professor Ahern also recalled that the now-defunct Higher Education Coordinating Board called on the higher education systems to come up with assessment plans and provided a small amount of money for the work. The University held conferences that included some exciting ideas; he said he hoped that work could be recaptured.

Professor Ahern next asked if the Office of Measurement Services provided an early-semester evaluation form. There is a form, Dr. Swan said, and there are plans to make it available on the web.

Dr. Simmons said she was excited to hear talk about this because she is a long-term career academic advisory who is privileged to work with students all the way through to graduation. One can think about assessing learning per term or per year, but assessing learning is a mural. She said she hoped there would be a panel on academic advising. Dr. Carney said that people often think only of undergraduate advising, but CESL is also talking about graduate advising, where faculty see their students on a day-to-day basis.

Dr. Ramsay reported that the junior faculty at Carleton (where he is on the faculty) report that the mid-term evaluation is the most help in their teaching. They provide a lot of forms that faculty can cut and paste to tailor to their own courses, which can help them during a course. Dr. Carney said that CESL is working on classroom assessment also and is interested in any formative assessment materials that are helpful. She said she has used quizzes in her own course, and they have affected the pace at which she teaches. Mr. Edlavitch asked if there is any policy about the use of PowerPoint in teaching. Dr. Carney said that was an excellent question but that it was not a focus of the working groups; she agreed that "death by PowerPoint is a hard way to go." Some faculty use it very well, some do not. A major part of learning is writing things down, Mr. Edlavitch said; with PowerPoint, students just print the slides. The point is to learn while writing, not just in reviewing slides.

Professor Jensen, who had joined the meeting for the next agenda item, reported that he had been at the University of Adelaide, where it was learned that PowerPoint is the single biggest factor in changing teaching--typically for the worse. Those who are not interested in teaching use it because it is easy and zip through classes; it is a disaster for education, he said. Professor Seashore agreed that PowerPoint is the "single most devastating instructional technology" around. These are interesting question for the technology working group of CESL, Dean Carney said, and they could be the focus of discussion.

What is the timeline for the accreditation process, Professor Hoover asked? There will be a site visit in 2006, Dr. Carneys said, so there are two years to get ready. This year is focused on increased faculty engagement; next year will be more high-powered student and faculty involvement so they all know about assessment. Colleges are in different places, Dr. Swan reported; if they are driven by other accreditation requirements, they may be ahead of the game at this point.

Professor Hoover thanked Dean Carney for her report.

2. Award Winners

Professor Hoover next accepted a motion to close the meeting; the Committee voted unanimously in favor. The Committee received reports from Professor Jensen, chair of the Morse-Alumni Award nominating committee and from Professor Curley, chair of the Graduate-Professional Award nominating committee.

-- The Morse-Alumni committee received 18 nominations and recommended five candidates receive the award; the Committee unanimously approved the nominees.

-- The Graduate-Professional committee also received 18 nominations and recommended 8 recipients; the Committee unanimously approved the nominees.

Professor Hoover reported that she had spoken with Professor Jensen about the evaluation criteria used to choose the Morse-Alumni award winners and had asked him to chair a committee to consider them. Professor Jensen said, first, that he had been on the nominating committee for three years. The first year he was on it, they had 35 files and struggled to decide who should win the award. Last year they gave the award to eight people and had a lot of dynamic files. This year, they had trouble identifying eight recipients (and did not do so). There has been a change in the last couple of years, he said--there are ebbs and flows--and the files could be improved. Some coaching on preparing the files may be needed. But he said he believes there are good candidates still out there who have not been nominated.

His second point was that when students register for classes, there is an asterisk next to the names of award winners (Morse-Alumni or Graduate-Professional) as distinguished teachers. One can win the award, however, in a number of ways, not just for teaching but also for contributions to undergraduate education. One could be a wonderful textbook writer, develop great programs, and receive the award with only average teaching ability. And in winning, one is also a member of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers--even if one is not a distinguished teacher. The question, he said, is about the fit of the criteria and the title of the Academy.

There was not a consensus on the committee that this was a problem, Professor Ahern responded. He said he had a different view. It is his sense that no one has been selected who is not a fine classroom teacher, but Professor Jensen is correct that some of the winners did not provide evidence that students were "blown away" by the person's teaching. Not all the winners are outstanding teachers. Perhaps, he said, the asterisk should be removed, because all five criteria for winning the award are important, not just teaching.

Professor Curley said this question applies to the Graduate-Professional award as well. He agreed with the view that individuals are mislabeled if the asterisk identifies them as winning a teaching award. None of the individuals they considered were bad teachers, or even just average teachers, but they receive the award for more than just teaching. Professor Ahern agreed; he said that the nominating committees would be reluctant to say that these are THE outstanding teachers at the University. And the Academy defines teaching in the broadest sense, to include programmatic impact on dimensions of an excellent undergraduate education.

Professor Weinsheimer agreed there needed to be discussion but that there is a difference of opinion about this; he said he would be disappointed if there is no University-wide award for which teaching is the main criterion. Once someone is in the Academy, they have the right to describe themselves as a Distinguished Teaching Professor of X. He said he would be sorry to see the asterisk removed and is sorry if any mediocre teachers have received the award--although he does not believe they have--and said that this is one of the primary awards the University gives and it should celebrate high-quality teaching. Professor Odom said she had been on the nominating committee for two years and there was a definite understanding that all those selected were OUTSTANDING teachers. That was the obvious first criterion. She said she had no sense that they were less than outstanding.

Professor Hoover said she has asked Professor Jensen to chair a committee to look over the criteria for the Morse-Alumni award. She noted that the Committee has periodically reviewed the criteria in the past. Professors Ahern and Weinsheimer and Vice Provost Swan agreed to be on the committee, which she asked make a report in about a month.

Professor Curley noted that in the last three years, the Graduate-Professional Award committee has received 22, 20, and 18 nominees. They did not feel they had to stretch to identify eight award-winners, but the numbers appear to be decreasing. Professor Hoover suggested that the work of Professor Jensen's committee be kept separate from the Graduate-Professional award, but she said that any recommendations it might make about mentoring for preparation of files could apply to both awards. Dr. Swan said he has heard rumblings that the application process is cumbersome and a lot of work, which could discourage people from applying. If anyone has thoughts on that issue, they should direct them to Professor Jensen, he said.

Professor Seashore said that she had served on the Graduate-Professional award committee and agreed that the process is cumbersome. But the committee must look at everything submitted in order to identify accomplishments in each category. She said she did not know how one could streamline the process and still have enough evidence for each individual on which to make judgments. There is a lot of variation in what faculty do, and nominations depend on course taught and programs run; she said she hoped that any streamlining would not exclude anyone. The nominating committees need a lot of evidence.

Professor Jensen commented that this Committee thinks about teaching in the broad sense; students, however, think about it in the classroom. The Committee should ask undergraduates if this is a problem and if they are receiving misinformation, Professor Seashore suggested. The odds are that if a teacher is good in the other areas, he or she is good in the classroom as well, Mr. Edlavitch said. If they are outstanding in other areas, the nominating committee needs to make sure they are at least GOOD in the classroom, although they may not necessarily be the best, Professor Jensen said. All of the Morse-Alumni nominees are good, above average, but not all are GREAT. Are there any awards just for teaching, Mr. Edlavitch asked? That varies by college. Professor Ahern repeated that he did not recall anyone winning the award who was not above the norms in teaching--if they had the norms available. One could ask that the teaching norms for the campus/college/department be provided to the nominating committees.

Later in the meeting, Professor Weinsheimer inquired about an event proposed a few years ago for the nominees for the awards, before the winners have been identified. It would have been a breakfast or lunch to celebrate outstanding individuals. The winners receive accolades; the others also deserve recognition, and the event would be appreciated by everyone, winners or not. Dr. Swan said that the Duluth campus does this and it happened once on the Twin Cities campus, but never got on the calendar again. He said he would try to get it on the schedule. Professor Seashore recalled that when she served on the nominating committee, they told some who did not win the award that they should polish their files and that they might win in the future. Professor Ahern said that also happened with some of the nominees this year.

3. Update on Bush Grant

Professor Hoover turned next to an update on one of the Bush grants, "Enhancing Student Learning Through Innovative Teaching and Technology Strategies," a University proposal to the Bush Foundation; the principal investigators are Carol Carrier, W. Andrew Collins, and Robert Jones. The grant was funded 3/1/01 to 6/30/04, and the University is applying for a renewal. The grant applies to all four campuses; she is in charge of the grant on the Twin Cities campus and Professor Ahern is in charge of it on the Morris campus.

The goals will be the same ("to enhance student learning by developing faculty perspectives and skills in integrating innovative teaching strategies with new developments in technology-enhanced learning"); firm directions have not yet been identified. When they are, Professor (Joyce) Weinsheimer will come to talk with the Committee about them, Professor Hoover said.

The model of this grant is ripples from a dropped pebble in water, Professor Ahern said. They started with five and then added others to enhance the use of technology in teaching. It is likely that in the next three years the focus will be more on particular strategies. The Bush Foundation wants a single proposal but they have found that the four campuses almost have different missions. At Crookston, almost all the faculty are involved in technology and teaching and it has a long history of involvement with instructional technology; they have talked more about classroom assessment. The other three campuses are catching up, in a way. Professor Odom agreed that the assessment of student learning has been uppermost in the minds of the Crookston faculty because they have had instructional technology for a long time. Her question, she said, is whether Crookston will be allowed to do something different from instructional technology.

The discussions are ongoing, Professor Hoover said. It is a challenge to work with all four campuses to come to agreement on a goal that all can support with respect to student learning and faculty development. The programs have quite different models on the four campuses. The goal is to get an application done by July 1. The Bush Foundation focuses exclusively on undergraduate education, she noted, and that is what this program is for. It has focused on mid-career faculty who may not be as conversant with technology as younger faculty.

4. Athletic Exception

Professor Hoover next noted that the Committee had received a request for a waiver from the policy barring activities during study day and finals week at which student participation is required. The request came from the Department of Recreational Sports on behalf of the Men's Lacrosse Club.

The Committee concluded it wished to have information about the academic standing and performance of the student members of the team and how teams qualified for the event.

5. Schedule

The Committee approved its meeting schedule for 2004-05.

Professor Hoover adjourned the meeting at 2:55.

-- Gary Engstrand