

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, December 13, 2006
1:30 – 3:30
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Richard McCormick (chair), William Bart, Vernon Cardwell, Maureen Cisneros, April Knutson, James Leger, Peh Ng, Paul Siliciano, Craig Swan, Cathrine Wambach, Douglas Wangensteen, Joel Weinsheimer

Absent: Gail Dubrow, Claudia Neuhauser, Donna Spannaus-Martin

Guests: Dean Steven Rosenstone, Professor Laura Gurak (on the Writing Initiative); Vice Provost Gerald Rinehart

Other: none

[In these minutes: (1) Twin Cities campus writing initiative; (2) student success outcomes]

1. Twin Cities Campus Writing Initiative

Professor McCormick convened the meeting at 1:35 and welcomed Professor Gurak and Dean Rosenstone to discuss the writing initiative. He recalled that this agenda item is part of the Committee's work in keeping track of the implementation of the recommendations from the strategic planning task forces that dealt with undergraduate education. He noted that Professor Gurak is the chair of the new Department of Writing Studies in CLA and that Dean Rosenstone is the Dean of CLA.

Vice Provost Swan said the discussion will be both about the recommendations that came out of the task force on writing as well as the larger vision that comes from the task force in terms of behavior change: writing needs to be a greater part of all undergraduate degree programs because it is important as a skill and it can make for better thinking (clear writing reflects clear thinking). The task force noted that responsibility for writing is located in a number of places at the University; it should be in one place. The expertise in writing is also scattered and should be brought together (the whole can be more than the sum of the parts). The new department that Professor Gurak chairs is a regular academic department that will be responsible for the Composition program but also offer majors and minors and a graduate program. Professor Gurak envisions a number of partnerships across the campus.

Dean Rosenstone told the Committee that he and Vice Provost Swan are responsible for overseeing the implementation of the writing initiative. The work has been staged so that the most crucial items have been completed first. The freshman composition program is ready for next fall. The baccalaureate writing program, to infuse writing into every undergraduate major, will take several years to implement. The transition to the new department involves three existing departments, three

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writing centers, and the largest course in the University; it must be done right and engage a set of colleagues in the conversations needed in order to bring things together well.

Professor Gurak provided a progress report on key elements of the work and a review of the first-year composition courses. When they knew the goal was to unroll the composition program in fall, 2007, they had to get things done by February, 2007: identify faculty and staff and bring together expertise from Rhetoric, English, Post-Secondary Teaching and Learning, and Composition. There will be an outstanding department of composition and rhetoric, and putting faculty all together in one place highlights the faculty strength in the area.

There are two "legs" to the undergraduate initiative the Provost approved for the Twin Cities campus: a first-year writing composition program and writing-enriched degrees. The University has been recognized nationally for its writing-across-the-curriculum program, but that is based on research from the 1980s; now they are seeking more writing in the majors (about which there is not a lot to say, yet).

Professor Gurak distributed copies of a one-page handout summarizing the three courses that will make up the first-year composition program. There will be three courses: Writing 1201 (introduction to writing practices and purposes to develop knowledge and skill; does NOT fulfill freshman composition requirement); Writing 1301 (frequent practice and study of writing with a research paper with proper citation); and Writing 1401 (analyze writing in various contexts and develop and present complex researched writing). There will no longer be exemptions for first-year students from the writing requirement. Students will be placed in the appropriate class by algorithm (ACT writing score, grades, etc.). Most students will be in 1301; students who need help will be placed in 1201, in smaller courses, and will then take 1301; 1401 will be more challenging, for students with more highly-developed writing skills. 1301 (or 1401) will be the only writing course students will be required to take, but departments will be asked to develop writing-intensive courses. Students will be required to take 1301 within their first two semesters at the University (details need to be worked out for transfer students)—so that they know what is expected of students at a research university. Dean Rosenstone added that they will continually assess placement in order to increase its validity; there will also be assessment of the first-year writing program to determine if it is accomplishing what is intended.

They have looked at models of writing across universities, Professor Gurak said, and they believe they can do better (including, first of all, no exemptions). The instructors will be a combination of faculty, full-time instructors, and doctoral students, and will include a rigorous training program. Courses will be offered to accommodate students on the St. Paul campus.

Dean Rosenstone said the University will require completion of 1301 or 1401. They estimate about 10% of students will have to take 1201 and about 10% will take 1401—and the program will be flexible so it can increase the number of sections required to meet demand. Professor Gurak said the 1201 class size will be 19, the current practice in Post-Secondary Teaching and Learning, which allows extra attention and more face time with students. Grading writing takes time, she observed. Professor McCormick asked if a student with an AP English course would be placed in 1401; Dr. Swan said it would depend on the student's ACT score and writing sample; that will need to be calibrated, he said. Dean Rosenstone reported that Stanford discovered that students who do well in AP courses do not necessarily know how to write well. Following a brief Committee exchange about

methodology, Dean Rosenstone summarized by saying that the question is how to develop a highly valid and reliable writing-assessment system that is also efficient. There is also national discussion of this issue, Professor Gurak said, which the University is part of and which they will stay on top of.

Professor Leger asked what is different about the new writing courses from what is now available. Professor Gurak said that 1201 will include more on-the-ground work of drafting and redrafting written work. 1301 likewise will require more writing more frequently and higher bar to complete the research paper. They are still thinking about 1401 and how to make it more challenging; it could include topics in majors. 1301 will also include more peer review, more computer labs, and the research paper at the end could be a model for students to use in future classes. Dean Rosenstone said there will be a closer connection with faculty expertise in the new courses as well as better training (than what is done now in CLA or Rhetoric) for those in the classroom. Second, he said, experts will be together to oversee the curriculum and provide the best answers to issues, which has not always been the case up to now.

Professor Weinsheimer said that Dean Rosenstone's point was important for the health of the new department of writing studies. Up to now the efforts have lacked leadership, a core of people with professional training, and a commitment to writing studies and the pedagogy of writing studies. He applauded the new department as moving in the right direction. One point of friction may be 1401 and writing requirements for transfer students: about half of the majors in English are transfer students who have taken a writing course—but not at the University. Will there be a way to say that transfer students must take a University writing course no matter what they have taken before without running afoul of the transfer curriculum? That question offers another suggestion about how the new department can explore writing achievement, which is by taking a leadership role in how writing is taught in higher education in Minnesota, Dr. Swan said.

Dr. Knutson, who reported that she has taught courses in GC and in Composition, asked if 1401 might not be a 3XXX course. That could help for transfer students, especially those from prestigious colleges. She also asked, as a French teacher, if they had consulted at all with composition instructors in foreign languages; there is a lot of expertise in teaching composition. Professor Gurak said the points were interesting and she needed to think about them.

Professor Siliciano asked about 1301: what will be the size of the classes and will they focus on a theme (comedy, poetry, etc.)? Professor Gurak said they will not focus on themes because that gets too complicated, although in the future there could be partnerships with colleges. Class size will be limited to 24 students—so there will be A LOT of sections. Dr. Swan cautioned that even with many sections, it will not be possible for all students to take 1301 fall semester. Will students in each section have roughly the same experience, Professor Siliciano asked? That is why training is important, Professor Gurak asked; that is the goal. They also want to use a common text and common readings.

Professor Wambach pointed out that GC assigned all students to a two-semester course and CLA always had an assigned course; now individuals will have to be placed, which is different from program placement. This creates the need to study the validity and reliability of the placements and research to support these placements will be critical. One wonderful backup would be the opportunity for re-placement in the first week of classes, Professor Weinsheimer suggested.

Professor McCormick asked if the 1401 could be an honors course. Dean Rosenstone replied that students' writing skills are not necessarily correlated with whether they are in honors; not all honors students may be qualified to take 1401. Brilliant students in any college will still need to go into the appropriate writing class. They intend to stay with individual tracking, not programmatic placement. The question is whether it could be counted as an honors course, Professor McCormick said. Dean Rosenstone said this is a very large and complicated project and at present they are focusing on content and tracking; it may be possible to add nuances later. First, however, they want to get the core part of the writing program right.

Dean Rosenstone commented that since last spring he has interacted with a number of new colleagues who will be joining the new department and said he is impressed with the extraordinary faculty in Rhetoric and Post-Secondary Teaching and Learning. While he and Vice Provost Swan are coordinating the writing initiative, the substance is coming from tremendous faculty leadership, not from the dean and the vice provost.

Vice Provost Swan affirmed that the current writing-intensive program will remain in place until the baccalaureate writing program is developed. Dean Rosenstone said the University will not be able to throw the switch for all majors at once; some majors will be ready for the transition before others.

Professor Bart said there are faculty throughout the University who are interested in issues of reading and writing. It would be helpful if there were an interdisciplinary effort to involve faculty interested in the issues. Dr. Swan said the core faculty in the new department will draw on faculty in other units and will be involved in a wide range of activities.

Professor McCormick thanked Professor Gurak and Dean Rosenstone for joining the Committee.

2. Student Success Outcomes

Professor McCormick now welcomed Vice Provost Gerald Rinehart to the meeting to lead a discussion of student success outcomes.

Mr. Rinehart explained that in the discussions about citizenship and lifelong learning that accompanied the development of the student learning outcomes, there was also reference to student developmental outcomes. These are non-academic outcomes being proposed; he wished the Committee's advice on whether they make sense and should be embedded in University activities.

Mr. Rinehart recalled that he had been in the Carlson School for 20 years working in student affairs; during that time, he talked with many pre-business students about what they should do in addition to excelling in the classroom. When he moved into student affairs in Morrill Hall, he discovered that there was no vision about the dimensions or parameters of student success. He brought suggestions to department directors and undergraduate deans; he said it is most important to have a set of expectations for students, characteristics they can talk about and experiences they can demonstrate.

Another side of this is the expectations of units: the kinds of activities they offer contribute to student development and are not just fun and games. These success outcomes are the other side of academic development: personal development. The University has left this to chance up to now; if it is more intentional, students can reflect on them and be more successful. Mr. Rinehart said it is difficult to believe a student can achieve the curricular outcomes without also demonstrating the student success outcomes. The link between them, in fact, is that one could demonstrate the student success outcomes without curricular mastery, but not vice-versa.

Mr. Rinehart distributed copies of matrices listing the student success outcomes, experiences that students can use to demonstrate them, and both co-curricular and academic/classroom examples of how they can be demonstrated. A second matrix mapped the student success outcomes to the student learning outcomes identified by the Council to Enhance Student Learning. The student success outcomes are:

- responsibility and accountability (makes appropriate decisions regarding his/her own behavior; accepts consequences of actions; gains trust of others; meets agreed upon expectations)
- independence and interdependence (appropriately determines when to act alone and when to work or consult with others; demonstrates ability to initiate action and effectively engage others to enhance outcomes)
- goal orientation (manages energy and behavior to accomplish specific outcomes; achievement oriented; demonstrates effective planning and purposeful behavior)
- self-confidence/humility (maintains and projects optimistic perspective on experiences; expects the best from self and others; accurately assesses and can talk comfortably about personal strengths and weaknesses; shows interest in learning about others and acknowledges their accomplishments; patient; demonstrates ability to help others gain comfort in new situations)
- resilience (able to recover from disappointment or bad experience; able to assess causes of bad experiences to determine if they could be avoided in the future)
- appreciation of differences (works effectively with others; seeks out others with different backgrounds and/or perspectives to improve decision making; recognizes advantages of moving outside existing "comfort zone")
- tolerance of ambiguity (demonstrates ability to perform in complicated environments and the absence of standard operating procedures; recognizes the authenticity of attitudes or beliefs which may be in direct conflict with one's own).

This is a set of robust characteristics that work in a variety of ways to provide students the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, Mr. Rinehart said. They seem integral to the educational experience but different from the curricular experience.

One question is about the extent to which people at the University should talk with students about these outcomes as part of their experience here and the extent to which they should be integrated with curricular outcomes. Mr. Rinehart said he does not assume the faculty could or should be asked to teach these outcomes, but the University would like to see them. They rise to the level of a set of University-sponsored norms; these are characteristics one would like to see in a spouse/roommate/significant other, Mr. Rinehart observed, but they do not have the imprimatur of the governance system. He said there are two questions: Should the Committee endorse them? Is this the right set of characteristics?

Professor Cardwell said he tells students that education is one-half their course; the rest is what goes on outside. The more he works with employers who hire students, the more he sees that they are looking for these traits. He endorsed making them a more overt part of what is done at the University; it should be an integral part of the college experience to tell students what will help them become successful. Professor Bart said that tolerance of ambiguity and appreciation of differences are very important, and students who can think critically should be able to demonstrate both. Professor Leger also endorsed them, noting that the engineering accrediting body has similar expected outcomes; it would be helpful in present material for accreditation if the University had such a set of outcomes.

Professor Wambach said a lot of what the University wants to do is part of young adult cognitive development (e.g., listening to others, not being self-centered). The research suggests that cognitive development can take until age 23-24-25; the University can present opportunities but a lot of students may not be where we want them to be. The University must stimulate the growth of these characteristics, but she warned that there will be graduates who do not behave as the University might want them to.

Dr. Knutson observed that faculty model behavior in the way they conduct their classrooms and listen to students. This is badly needed, she said. Professor Siliciano said many of these instructions could be put in syllabi. It would help, Professor Wambach said, if these outcomes were widely available on campus and reinforced over successive experiences.

Professor McCormick concluded that it appeared everyone believed these are good traits connected to good values. The goal of the learning outcomes is that students can demonstrate they can do or have learned certain things. They cannot do the same with the student success outcomes. The Committee can endorse them; then what? How will they be implemented? Not all of them are related to the curriculum; some are concerned with the broader experience of college.

The student unions have tried a pilot with student employees, Mr. Rinehart said; both the student and the supervisor evaluated the program at the start, middle, and end. Supervisors played a developmental role and liked working with the students this way. The outcomes could be used with all student employees, although it is not clear how many supervisors are ready to use them. But student employment is a learning environment and the University should provide opportunity to acquire some of these outcomes while students are employed.

Instructors and faculty should also know about them, Professor McCormick said. Adding it to syllabi would just increase the amount of boilerplate language that no one looks at, he said, but faculty should know about these outcomes and talk about them when there is a problem in the classroom. Faculty can announce expectations, which sets a tone, Mr. Rinehart said, and it would be useful to remind faculty they are empowered to comment on interpersonal interactions (e.g., appreciation of differences, tolerance of ambiguity).

The outcomes can be recorded as part of a student portfolio, Professor Cardwell said; there is also self-assessment. Getting students to think about whole-person development and building a portfolio around it is important.

How does one know these things were accomplished in college or came along elsewhere, Ms. Cisneros asked? A number of students she deals with show resilience and other characteristics. If the University wants students to think about these outcomes, it should podcast them; if there are speakers who could be brought in, they should be. Many students demonstrate these characteristics regularly, Mr. Rinehart agreed, and they should be able to talk about the experiences they have had which helped develop them. One goal of identifying the developmental outcomes is to provide students with a vocabulary for talking about the impact of their experiences.

Professor Wambach said it would be helpful for students if faculty could say something positive about a student, something that would go in a portfolio, without having to write an entire letter of recommendation. Comments in a portfolio could help the student later.

The Committee voted unanimously in favor of the outcomes; Mr. Rinehart said he would return at a later point with a more refined version.

Professor McCormick thanked Mr. Rinehart for his presentation, made a few comments about how the Committee would take up Bok's book *Our Underachieving Colleges*, and adjourned the meeting at 3:15.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota