

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, February 14, 2007
1:30 – 3:30
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Richard McCormick (chair), LeAnn Alstadt, Vernon Cardwell, Megan Cummings, (George Green for) Gail Dubrow, April Knutson, James Leger, Guy Merolle, Claudia Neuhauser, Peh Ng, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Craig Swan, Molly Tolzmann, Cathrine Wambach, Douglas Wangensteen, Joel Weinsheimer

Absent: William Bart, Maureen Cisneros, Paul Siliciano

Guests: Tina Falkner (Office of the Registrar); Emma Olson (Minnesota Student Association); Robin Matross Helms (Office of the Provost), Professor Amy Lee (Chair, Morse-Alumni award nominating committee), Professor Pat Schlievert (Chair, Graduate-Professional award nominating committee)

Other: none

[In these minutes: (1) calendars and a weekday study day; (2) award winners and discussion of issues related to nominee selection; (3) S/N grading, undergraduate versus graduate; (4) Bok's book, "Building Character"]

1. Calendars

Professor McCormick convened the meeting at 1:35 and asked Committee members to turn their attention to the calendars Dr. Falkner distributed.

The calendars were for 2011-2012 for all four campuses; the professional school calendars will be presented later, for information; the Committee must take action on the Twin Cities and Morris campus calendars. (Because the faculty at Crookston and Duluth are represented through collective bargaining, calendars for those campuses are set through a different process.)

An issue that has been raised by the Minnesota Student Association (MSA, Twin Cities campus) through a resolution is the desirability of having a study day before finals begin. Dr. Falkner explained that she tries to have a study day before finals in fall semester, but her ability to do so depends on when Labor Day falls (spring semester is not a problem). If it is late, it is difficult to get in. She presented the Committee with two options for fall semester 2011: (1) with last day of classes 12/14, a study day on Thursday, 12/15, and Sunday, 12/18, and finals on 12/16-17 and 12/19-22, and (2) with last day of classes 12/15, finals 12/15-17, study day on Sunday 12/18, and finals 12/19-21. The choice will depend on whether to have the Thursday study day and whether it is seen as more desirable to end finals on 12/21 or 12/22.

* These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represents the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

Professor McCormick said he would prefer to see a study day before finals begin. Dr. Falkner said that is sometimes possible, but when Labor Day is late, to follow the MSA resolution would mean finals would end on December 25.

Professor Wambach asked about common exams for large classes. They are worked out around study day, Dr. Falkner said. Vice Provost Swan cautioned that if the traditional evening exams are held, and the second day is used for common finals, that would mean those finals would sometimes be Saturday night. Ms. Cummings said she would not object to a Saturday night final if having it meant that finals were done earlier.

Professor Neuhauser said she would also prefer a study day before exams. Math classes often have early exams, so students could have the last day of classes and the final exam the next day.

Ms. Olson explained that the intent of the MSA resolution was to address the situation when study day falls on weekends, which makes no difference for working students. Full-time students work part-time; a weekday study day is a break and allows students to do better. She said MSA recognizes the problem with a late Labor Day and would like to have the weekday study day when possible. Dr. Falkner observed that there will be weekday study days in 2007 and 2008. She schedules them when possible. It is clear, Dean Green commented, that no one wants finals to go until December 25; Dr. Falkner pointed out that Senate policy requires they be completed no later than December 23.

Professor McCormick observed that the MSA resolution, if adopted by the Senate, would affect the calendars already approved. Professor Ng responded that it would present a problem for the Morris campus; even though they start the week before Labor Day, finals can still get close to December 21-22 and students get edgy because the weather can be a problem for travel. Morris students prefer a Saturday study day if that means getting done earlier. Professor McCormick surmised the resolution would not apply to Morris.

Professor Wambach asked if there are any data indicating student support for the MSA resolution. Most of the questions she receives from students indicate a desire for an earlier finish to final exams. Ms. Olson said that MSA passed the resolution with only 1-2 people opposed and said that most students favor the weekday study day. Ms. Cummings, however, said that if she had the extra day, she was not sure she would study; she would rather get done earlier. Ms. Tolzmann agreed and said the additional day would not be productive.

Professor Leger asked what other institutions do and if the extra day helps. Ms. Olson said she hears from friends at other institutions that they use the day to study together. Professor Leger said it would help the Committee to have data.

Dean Green commented that fall semester on the Twin Cities campus is very constrained in the number of teaching days available. To follow the MSA resolution would mean a more frequent run-up to December 23 (assuming the number of class days is not reduced). Spring semester is not similarly constrained; could an experiment be done in spring? It would not be wise to make policy for fall semester without data (that students want the extra day and that it will improve performance). If the additional day were added in the spring semester, what would happen? Dr. Falkner said the extra day would push spring finals into the following week, and possibly run into the May term. Classes

now end Friday, students have Saturday and Sunday off, and finals run Monday-Saturday. Adding a weekday study day would push finals into the next week. Dean Green expressed doubt that students would want that schedule to be adopted. Dr. Knutson said such a change would also create problems for Global Seminars, which leave two days after spring finals.

Professor Neuhauser said it is necessary to be flexible about the study day during the week. It is already included where possible. Professor McCormick recommended that MSA reconsider its resolution, based on the discussion at this meeting, and return with a revision, or do a survey. The Committee is not ready to amend calendars to ensure there are weekday study days because it is impossible in some fall semesters and would create difficulties in spring semesters. Ms. Cummings suggested an all-student survey; Dean Green said any survey should make clear what the tradeoffs are, including student opinion about the spring semester option. He said it was not clear that the majority of students would choose an extra day, delaying their departure from campus. Professor Leger said any survey should also make clear whether the option adds one or two days. Dr. Falkner said that residence hall rates would also be affected (increased) because they are based on the number of days in the term, including finals.

Professor McCormick said the Committee would not accept the MSA resolution as worded and asked that an alternative be developed. The Committee then voted unanimously to approve the 2011-2012 calendars for Morris and the Twin Cities, with the latter including a weekday study day. Professor McCormick thanked Ms. Olson for coming to the meeting.

2. Award Winners

The Committee voted unanimously to close the meeting to receive the names of the individuals to receive the Morse-Alumni and Graduate-Professional teaching awards. Professor McCormick welcomed Robin Matross Helms, from the Provost's office, and Professors Amy Lee and Pat Schlievert, chairs of the Morse-Alumni and Graduate-Professional nominating committees, respectively. Several points were made in the discussion.

-- There are seven winners of the Morse-Alumni award, out of eight possible (there were 15 nominees).

-- The dossiers are much more uniform now, which has been a help.

-- Last year there were 6 winners of the Graduate-Professional award; this year there are 5. One question is whether they are running out of people being nominated; the committee unanimously agreed on these 5 nominees and unanimously agreed that the other nominees should not receive the award (there were 22 nominees).

-- They do not use the intellectual distinction criterion for the Graduate-Professional award—because all the candidates have it. They use teaching, program development, and interaction with graduate students. There should not be different weights attached to the criteria—but there are. Interaction with graduate students is de-emphasized because there is not a lot written about it; it is easiest to look at teaching and program development. They typically do not count being a Director of Graduate Study because virtually all the candidates have performed that role. Nominators need to know that the candidates should have developed educational materials used by a large number of

students, not simply served as a DGS. (Dean Green commented that a number of award-winners have not been DGSs, and they fully deserved the award, but being a DGS should not count for nothing if the person has done an outstanding job (for example, in a department with 1200 graduate students versus one with 20-30). Efforts to improve the graduate student experience in that role should not be ignored. Professor Schlievert said being a DGS is a plus but that it alone is insufficient; there must be something special or exceptional about the performance.)

-- Letters on behalf of candidates (Graduate-Professional award) sometimes do not lay out clearly, so the committee can judge, the work of the candidate on behalf of graduate students. (Dean Green asked, if non-classroom teaching is important (which it is for Ph.D.s), if the committee thought about how to frame the questions so they receive the fullest possible disclosure of such activities. The questions should signal what the nominators and writers should write about. They did and need to think more about it.)

-- There is not the remotest chance that the University has run out of meritorious candidates for the Graduate-Professional award. What they are running out of is good communication to the nominating committee. (The problem is in the CVs and the letters, not the candidates.) The same is true for the Morse-Alumni award; the nominating committee felt the case was not made well enough for some candidates; in some cases the letter of nomination does not focus on the criteria for the Morse-Alumni award. In other cases, the CVs for the Morse-Alumni candidates emphasized their research, not undergraduate education. Sometimes the nominators said things about the candidates that the CV did not support. The committee needs documentation, and both the nominee and nominator must be sure materials speak to the award criteria.

-- The nominees do receive feedback. It would be helpful to write to the nominators as well.

-- There are problems with nominations from small departments; the nominating process needs work.

-- There should be a requirement that the award winners continue teaching; in some cases, their teaching loads were reduced after they won the award. (Professor McCormick said college workload policies vary and that this Committee could have no role in assignments to faculty; Professor Lee pointed out that faculty responsibilities do shift.)

-- The Provost holds a recognition event for all nominees, before the winners are chosen (an idea borrowed from the Duluth campus). All the candidates receive certificates, and the staff have started working with University Relations and with Admissions; there will be information sessions for nominators on what makes a successful dossier. Dossiers are still provided as examples, and assuming any difficulties with privacy laws can be addressed, they hope to scan them and have them available on-line.

Professor Wambach said this was the first year she had served on the committee (Morse-Alumni) and was amazed by the nominees, even those who did not win the award. She said she hoped there is a way to get information about them out to the public, not buried on some website. Prospective students and their parents should see the information about these people. Professor Cardwell agreed and said there should be something like a monthly highlight, linked to admissions, of outstanding teachers. There could be a one-page synopsis of their work provided to legislators that

could capture the essence of what these people are doing and could dispel a number of the myths about "the big university." There needs to be more continuous visibility, Dean Green commented. A phrase such as "Driven to Educate" or something equally short should be used, Professor Neuhauser suggested. It makes sense to highlight the best teachers as the University seeks to become one of the top three public research universities, Professor McCormick added. Ms. Tolzmann said it is also important to let current students know; right now, they see that someone won an award and think "big deal" because they don't know what it is. Having served on the Morse-Alumni committee, she now knows what it is and will definitely take award-winners into account as she chooses courses. Students need to know more about the award.

The Committee voted unanimously to approve the nominees. Professor McCormick thanked Professors Lee and Schlievert for the work of their committees and commented that this is the best activity this Committee is connected to.

3. S/N Grading

The Committee turned its attention to how to change the grading policy so that the rule that an S must equal a C- or better applies only to undergraduates. The point is not to restrict college, department, and instructor discretion in graduate courses, Dean Green observed.

The problem was originally raised by Vice Provost Swan, Dr. Falkner recalled, who told the Committee of a student who received a better grade, but still an N, because the instructor had set the standard for the S higher than a C-. The Senate adopted the rule that an S must be awarded for any grade of C- or better, but there was no discussion about the impact on graduate courses. Dean Green said that each program should have a free hand, and the Graduate School would not expect to establish policy on this matter, either.

The Committee voted unanimously to recommend to the Senate a change in the grading policy clarifying that the rule concerning C- and S grades applies to undergraduate students only.

Vice Provost Swan reported that the administration took the advice of the Committee and has eliminated "blind" S/N grading; instructors will now know whether students are on the A-F or S-N grading system, beginning fall semester 2007.

4. Chapter 6, Our Underachieving Colleges

Professor McCormick turned now to Professor Cardwell to lead a discussion of Chapter 6 of Derek Bok's book, "Building Character."

Professor Cardwell touched on the salient points in the chapter.

-- The chapter is about whether moral reasoning and ethical development be merely an option or integral part of undergraduate education.

Professional schools—Law, Medicine, Business—have required courses. If one thinks about the news in the last few years, one wonders if the training has failed in both moral reasoning and ethical development.

Do we walk our talk? Survey of 25,000 H.S. students indicated:

- 90% satisfied with their own standards
- 98% felt being a person of good character was important
- 82% admitted to lying to parents
- 62% admitted to lying to teachers
- 62% admitted to cheating
- 22% admitted to stealing from a relative
- 27% admitted to stealing from a store

Bok—“Ethics is needed--since students appear to be much less influenced by parents, churches, or other external sources in developing their own moral beliefs.”

- Faculty should not prescribe what is virtuous, but prepare students to arrive at thoughtful judgment; they should provide students with tools
- Students need help to think more deeply about practical moral issues, reasons to be concerned, responses one might make, arguments for and against and thoughts about consequences. This should be a part of the all courses because content is the basis of the issues, and all teachers have a role to play.
- Careful analysis can clarify issues
- Capable instructors can help students develop their instincts to be more thoughtful, which is part of critical thinking.
- Ethical issues ultimately rest on values not facts

Moral reasoning:

- Greatly impacted by discussions with didactic exposition of ethical theory; students are more likely to embrace moral reasoning with instruction
- Knowing the right thing is different from doing it
- Reflection improves on reasoning
- Requires perceiving situations as ethical problems
- Is improved by clearer understanding of ethical issues and arguments

Non-course approaches to ethical and moral development:

- Witness and experience empathy
 - through Community Service experiences
 - appreciating the rewards of serving others
- Academic leaders and faculty could be doing a great deal more; they need to walk the walk (many faculty do not turn in students for cheating or impose punishment except a reprimand)
- Values and guiding principles modeled in all actions on and off campus
- Academic integrity—cheating in class and how we handle it.
- Establishing regulations with rationale for the benefit of all
- Create a supportive peer environment that affirms honesty and discourages cheating

Professor Cardwell concluded that there is a place for talking about character and moral reasoning and it is important to address the issues in classrooms and to provide an institutional approach to integrity. Faculty need to be reminded of their responsibilities.

Professor Bart noted that at one point Bok maintains that underlying moral reasoning is critical reasoning. There is a difference between knowing and doing. Aristotle argued there is a role for virtues; if one talks about vices, one must also talk about virtues. There must be attention to both. What virtues are appropriate for the academic setting?

About ten years ago the University was placed on "exceptional" status by NIH, Dean Green recalled, and it was not a compliment. One result of that experience has been ethics training for everyone, a practice that has been institutionalized across programs. The Graduate School decided not to do expert lectures and put the decisions at the program level with review by the Policy Review Councils. There has been an enormous benefit from the University's activities; it has become a national leader because it was caught off base and had to move fast. One thing that has become clear is that students want discussions with faculty about ethical dilemmas. Some faculty originally did not want to have these discussions because they believed they modeled the right behavior, but it has become clear students do not learn these things by osmosis. The discussions that have occurred have been very rewarding for faculty and students. They do not take place in a lecture mode and they are not just among students. The question is whether this could be adapted to undergraduate education.

Professor Cardwell said he thought it could be. Many would benefit. Much of this is raising consciousness.

Professor Neuhauser said she was struck by the point in the book about community service: a high percentage of students find it a positive experience. How would students feel about making it a requirement? She said she was leery about adding another requirement, but should all students do it? Ms. Cummings said her program requires 70 volunteer hours; many students in her graduate program had never done such work before. Dr. Falkner noted that there are 285 students in the University's community engagement program for undergraduates. Ms. Alstadt said she has always been involved in community activities so would not have a problem with requiring it. Students in the community service report the same results as those in the Bok book, Dr. Swan reported; they see it as very positive (and it is voluntary, through class). The number of students on the campus, however, gives one pause about making it a requirement; the University should support community engagement but it must be respectful of its community partners. To scale it up to a requirement would be a significant change.

What do students believe is the University's role in moral and ethical development, Dr. Swan asked? Should it have no role? Is it doing a good job? Ms. Cummings said the University environment is conducive to promoting ethical development, but it could be better in encouraging moral reasoning. Ms. Alstadt agreed. She said she did not feel she received any ethics training in her classes; she received more from activism in students. She would like to see discussion sections and more reflective times that integrated current issues. College should prepare people to tackle issues with ethical and moral training.

There is little in the curriculum now that speaks to these issues, Professor McCormick said. There is the liberal education requirement of citizenship and public ethics, but that can be as little as one-third of a course. The University encourages public/community service, but those are at the level of the student success outcomes, not learning outcomes, so there is less inside the classroom. What are the educational policy implications of this discussion, he asked? Is there something the University should be doing that it is not? There is not much confrontation with these issues outside specialized courses and fields.

The Committee did not reach any conclusions in response to Professor McCormick's questions. He adjourned the meeting at 3:35.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota