

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, April 25, 2007
1:30 – 3:30
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Richard McCormick (chair), LeAnn Alstadt, (George Green for) Gail Dubrow, April Knutson, Guy Merolle, Claudia Neuhauser, Peh Ng, Paul Siliciano, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Craig Swan, Molly Tolzmann, Cathrine Wambach, Douglas Wangenstein

Absent: William Bart, Vernon Cardwell, Megan Cummings, James Leger, Joel Weinsheimer

Guests: Susan Van Voorhis, Tina Falkner (Office of the Registrar); Associate Dean George Green, Kasi Williamson

Other: none

[In these minutes:

1. Strategic Positioning Recommendations and the Dean's Vision for the Graduate School

Professor McCormick convened the meeting at 1:35 and welcomed Dean Gail Dubrow to speak to the Committee about her view of strategic positioning and the Graduate School.

Dean Dubrow thanked the Committee and said she hoped to make this an annual report on how the Graduate School is moving forward in strategic positioning. [An FAQ on financing graduate education is appended to these minutes.]

She noted that she is coming up on the end of her second year in office. At the end of her first year, she benefited from a wide round of consultation with the deans and experienced Directors of Graduate Study (DGSs) about the governance of the Graduate School. She also met with representatives of graduate students. All of this occurred during a year dominated by strategic positioning. These discussions helped her understand the needs of the institution and helped her formulate her vision for the future and the engines necessary to get where the Graduate School needs to go.

Dean Dubrow said she would begin with the recommendations of the Task Force on Graduate Reform: Student Support and then talk more reflectively about what the task force focused on and where it did not have important conversations about what the Graduate School needs to do. She said she wanted also to review with the Committee her ambitions when she came here.

The mission of the task force was _____.

* 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.

The focus, however, was narrower; it addressed graduate student financial support and the need for increased investment in graduate education (i.e., graduate student financial support). This report followed by a year or so the report on financing graduate education, which presented a number of recommendations, including best practices in non-financial areas, aggressive pursuit of timely degree completion (especially the Ph.D., where the time taken can be problematic in some fields), improved attention to graduate education in the college compacts, and there was a concern about the effects of the new budget model, especially in CLA (which is really feeling the pinch in terms of the need for larger classes and the costs of small seminars; Dean Dubrow said she is hearing a lot about the effects of the budget model). The earlier report also called for making the criteria for allocating block grants more transparent and extend them to departments to make them more reliable over time, a more flexible allocation of Graduate School fellowships, and called for addressing the needs of working adults with family responsibilities (the expectations that graduate students will be full-time and will go fast through their programs conflict with reality; only a few fields have the expectation that they will be dealing with working adults). Many of the themes were reflected in Graduate School initiatives that existed at the time of the report.

Dean Dubrow turned to her own reflections, from a distance, on issues that she would have included in the report and that need to be dealt with.

-- The magnitude of the financing problem and expectations about what will be provided: graduate education is a private benefit because it enhances one's own human capital; it is also a public good because it serves a public need. Both depend on the number of students enrolled and the promises made to students. She said this is a vexing issue because she wants to be an advocate on financing issues but there has been little discussion of assumptions, which makes it difficult to know the extent of the need. Those will be identified soon.

-- The expected relationship between graduate and undergraduate education: are they different buckets or are they related? She has tried to connect them. Many TAs are on the front line of undergraduate education, but the conversation thus far has been a non-starter and much remains to be done. What has been done is to move some pieces around so there is more alignment (e.g., UROP has been moved from the Graduate School to Vice Provost Swan's office, which is responsible for undergraduate education, even though the point of UROP is to introduce undergraduates to research in order to encourage them to think about graduate education). TA instructional quality has not been addressed well. There is a need to think about fast-tracking degree progress (e.g., an undergraduate degree plus one year leads to a Master's degree), an option that is attractive to talented undergraduates, even though the Graduate School usually recommends that a student not go to the same school for both undergraduate and graduate work. Her conclusion, not meant harshly, is that thinking has followed bureaucratic relationships rather than about the intertwining of graduate and undergraduate education.

-- How to organize things to promote interdisciplinarity when the organizational and financial structure is oriented to colleges and departments: this issue has arisen hundreds of times. There were bold recommendations but nothing has been done about them.

-- These issues are not unique to Minnesota; the task force identified the problems correctly but not the tools to deal with them. Working with other institutions makes sense because these are

national issues; a lot of the problems arise because of graduate education is financed at public universities (that is, legislatures tend not to like to support it).

-- Progress in increasing the diversity of the graduate student body has not been addressed: she and the administration are focused on the goal.

Dean Dubrow turned next to the topic of where investments have been made.

-- She has an absolute commitment to increase the funding for graduate education and it has been assumed the legislative request would include funding for it. \$5 million has been invested in new block grants and fellowships, with more in block grants to increase departmental flexibility in providing funding FOR??. The fellowships are competitive and departments can nominate candidates and make an offer; if they do not succeed, the Graduate School will go to the next person on the University's list, not the department's list. That is controversial but the bulk of the money is in block grants (as opposed to fellowships) so departments have more flexibility. But the \$5 million will not solve the problem: there are not enough funds for departments to compete with their peers. To address that shortfall, she has initiated a planning process for departments that receive funds from the Graduate School: if they receive funds, they must plan to provide developmentally-appropriate support for graduate students (which will vary by department). She said she recognizes that funding sources vary, but the Graduate School will now require departments to have a plan to support all students in an equitable way and then the Graduate School will know where there are gaps in graduate education (in teaching? research? time for dissertation work?). For example, a department could perhaps take three fewer students, provide better support to the remaining students, and reduce the time to degree for them. She has told the Provost that when the plans are completed she will have a grasp of the problem and will ask then for the funding needed to address it. Some students may need increased research support; about others they may ask if the undergraduate education program is driving graduate student recruitment for TAs. There will be a reckoning and then it can be determined whether the incentives are right.

-- They are also seeing many more students turn the University down because it cannot compete financially. They have raised fellowships from \$17,500 to \$21,000, worth about \$35,000 with fringe benefits. They have increased the number of two-year fellowships for outstanding students. The goal is to be able to offer five-year fellowships with various phases TA, RA, dissertation time, etc.

-- She believes it makes sense for departments to support the fellowships, but they worry about the risk of long-term commitments and want a risk pool.

-- The Graduate School has started to develop best practices (e.g., in recruiting) and will provide funding to departments that follow them.

-- She has received support for the Graduate School's first-ever development office because private funding will play a more important role in the future. The 21st Century funds are nearly exhausted so they are now looking at the next generation of funding.

-- New interdisciplinary units have advanced quickly in the University. The Provost initiated an interdisciplinary team to cut across administrative barriers and they have jointly established offices with the Vice President for Research to support these units and have bridge funding for projects.

-- She is actively working with the Council of Graduate Schools on time-to-degree issues; they have also launched a writing initiative in the Graduate School (linked with the undergraduate writing initiative). If the University needs undergraduates to write well, the same is true for graduate students and the dissertation is the whopper at the end of graduate work, so that is the stage at which the support will be provided.

-- They have taken two important steps with respect to diversity: they have increased the number of diversity fellowships and are using McKnight funding to launch a diversity postdoc program.

-- The most popular step they have taken is to get away from paper and into digital technology.

In her view, the Graduate School must move away from a regulatory function and keeper of the standards to being a leading organization and engine of transformation. They are moving away from being a measurer of margins to foster best practices for recruiting to graduate school and beyond, they are becoming an advocate for units across departments and colleges (they support disciplines, but others tend to those). They intend to promote high-quality programs (through academic program reviews), will try to shift funding to the highest priorities, follow best practices, and consider where to merge programs where there is no energy to educate students.

What she is doing that is different, Dean Dubrow said, is asking new questions without indulging in a blind rejection of tradition. She is asking critical questions about, for example, admissions and benchmarks. What are the more neglected elements of programs that create high-quality graduate education? Sometimes the wrong things get measured and they will try to do the right ones. They will address how to recruit the best students and retain the best faculty. Research, quality of faculty, and graduate education are central to national competitiveness.

Professor Neuhauser agreed with Dean Dubrow's thoughts about more advanced graduate students and said a number of programs will benefit from the writing initiative.

Professor Wambach said it is her sense that the size of the graduate student enrollment seems larger at Minnesota than at institutions with a similar number of undergraduates but Minnesota does not have more faculty. Is the University the right size? How does one figure that out? Right-sizing programs is difficult, Dean Dubrow said, and impossible to do as an institution. The fundamental question is whether the University can do it well. And what does the budget model push the institution toward? The University has a huge graduate program 10,000 graduate students, 5,000 professional students; the scale leads to richness and also to disadvantages. Professor Wambach wondered how the faculty of the size of Minnesota's can ramp up undergraduate education (with better-prepared students who want a more interactive education) and also provide better graduate education plus pursue research intensively. This is all staggering from a faculty point of view. Dean Dubrow agreed. For professional schools, that have never had undergraduate programs, the budget model is pushing to undergraduate education when that has never been a part of their mission. That is

a challenge. The Committee should look at the impact of the budget model and its consequences on the purposes of graduate and undergraduate education. Professor McCormick observed that a number of people have said that the budget model and strategic positioning do not go together.

Professor McCormick thanked Dean Dubrow for her comments.

2. Policy on Exams for Credit and Proficiency

Professor McCormick turned next to Ms. VanVoorhis to introduce a proposal to change the Senate policy on exams for credit and proficiency.

Ms. VanVoorhis explained that the current policy provides that fee for exams will not assessed if the exam is taken during the student's first term at the University or if the student returns after an absence of a year or more. The recommendation is that a fee be charged (which is the current practice, and the current policy has never been followed); the fee next year will be \$50 per credit. All of the undergraduate deans agree with this recommendation.

Professor Cardwell said he has had students (returning from the military or who have other experiences outside the University) who had short courses with no transcript and the only way they could get credit was by examination—and it was attractive for them to be able to do so without a fee. Colleges can waive the fee, Ms. VanVoorhis said; the proposal simply eliminates the language about the first-term and returning students. The "free" option has never been offered.

Professor McCormick commented that it is a bad idea to have something in a policy that is not followed. The Committee voted unanimously in favor of the change.

3. "F" Grades and Financial Aid

The Committee voted to go off the record to discuss issues around students who receive an F in courses and the impact it has on financial aid. It was agreed there would be an ad hoc subcommittee to address the issues raised; Professors Cardwell and Wambach agreed to serve.

4. Graduation Planner

Professor McCormick next welcomed Kasi Williamson to discuss the Graduation Planner.

Ms. Williamson distributed copies of slides that described the new Grad Planner and the functions it will serve for students. She said they have talked with advisors about the launch of the program and they will have on-line training materials.

In summary, "Graduation Planner is a dynamic, web-based planning tool for undergraduates on all University of Minnesota campuses. It simplifies the degree-planning process for students, pulling course and program information into one user-friendly tool. Graduation Planner is also an advising and communications tool; advisers can view and comments on their advisees' plans to help students stay on track." Students select from the list of majors, minors, and certificate programs and can generate a "what do I need?" list for each program, which shows their unfulfilled requirements. They can select a requirement from the list, which then provides the course description, prerequisites,

liberal education indications, terms offered and recommended terms. Advisers can view student plans but only the student can create or change them.

Will the information be saved in a safe location in case of a disaster, Professor Bart asked? Ms. VanVoorhis said the information is not stored on the web and it is backed up daily and stored at a number of sites, including off-campus. They are also using a lot of spyware; OIT keeps the information and maintains the confidentiality of the data.

When will the grad planner be launched, Professor Bart asked? Vice Provost Swan commented that implementing the grad planner is like putting granite countertops in your kitchen: once you start to do the work, you realize the plumbing and wiring all need to be updated first. Ms. VanVoorhis agreed and said they need to build the databases in order to create the system.

Committee members discussed with Ms. Williamson various elements of the grad planner.

-- It will not provide class/course information except for term (not time and day).

-- It can send a message to a student linked to the student's plan.

-- They intend to try to provide department chairs a report on the number of students who have indicated they plan to major in that department.

-- It will be available to graduate students (all students). It is not certain that the information for graduate students will be complete, but they can work with their advisors on courses to be selected. (Dean Green surmised that most Ph.D. programs would not be able to use the grad planner, although the lock-step M.A. programs probably can.)

-- Anyone listed as an adviser of record will have access to a student's plan. Undergraduate advising offices can search for a student in order to look at his or her plan.

Professor McCormick thanked Ms. Williamson for the information and adjourned the meeting at 3:30.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota

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FAQ on Financing Graduate Education

1. How do Minnesota offers compare with those of our competitors, in years offered, salary/stipend levels?

In fields funding mainly with RAships (i.e., mostly science and engineering) each department sets its stipends to try to keep close to their competitors. Most offers are 12 months of support. Anecdotally they may often be about \$1,000 to \$1,500 below their top competitors, struggling to keep close. In

engineering fields they have not previously made multi-year guaranteed offers but typically say that all students are funded to degree completion; they tell us that other engineering departments elsewhere do the same. The Graduate School has been encouraging all programs to compete with multi-year packages, and some of the engineering programs have done so recently and also have put more recruiting focus onto Ph.D. recruiting of the very top prospects; it's tough competition, but they report being pleased with the caliber of students they are sometimes landing.

In the humanities, social sciences and professional fields, offers are more typically TA funding, and often set at the University's minimum TA salary level. That salary floor (currently \$12,254 for a 9-month 50% appointment) has fallen far behind other public universities and is also embarrassingly below our own published "cost of attendance" for international students (the level of funding required for their I-20 documents), which is \$17,116 for 2006-07. Departments really trying to compete for top students must find supplemental funds to "top off" the low TA salary, either from departmental endowed fellowships or block grant funds or other sources. Some departments have expressed fear to make 5-year TA commitments in recruiting, even though they report that students are consistently supported for that long or longer; the Graduate School has been encouraging them to make those multi-year offers, knowing from experience that they will be able to support them when the time comes.

2. How do we compare on fellowship support as part of the funding mix?

The elite private schools are frequently offering 5-6 years of all-fellowship funding, something none of the public universities can match. Those privates and a few lead publics (Berkeley) have been announcing dramatic infusions of funding into graduate student support, potentially widening the gap. But most of our public competitors are still offering a mix of fellowship and assistantship support in a multi-year package. Two years ago our responses from prospects who turned down our GSF offers began more often to report that lower financial support influenced their decision to go elsewhere. Using much of the added fellowship funding provided by the provost over the past two years, we raised our fellowship stipend from \$17,000 to \$21,500 (9 months), and also increased the proportion of 2-year fellowship offers to top candidates. While our acceptance rates have not increased dramatically, we are hearing fewer people report that the stipend was a main reason for turning us down. That much higher GSF award has, however, created a wider gap vs. the level of TA support that would apply in post-fellowship years, posing major funding challenges for programs in CLA and the professional fields.

3. Does Minnesota provide competitive benefits to graduate assistants?

Our guarantee of full tuition support with 50% assistantships is fully competitive; the half-tuition benefit with 25% assistantships we offer is lower than at some competitor CIC schools, but in most fields that 25% salary level is too low to compete anyway. Where we fall a little short is in not covering all the related student activity and technology fees. New students don't always discover those differences in fee subsidy during the recruiting process, but complain bitterly after discovering them on arrival at Minnesota.

Five years ago Minnesota's GA health insurance coverage was ahead of most other schools, both public and private, in dollar value of benefits (it's very hard to get comparable data), in flexibility of access to many providers (not just the campus health service), and in provision and level of subsidy for

dependent coverage. Some schools were not even offering health insurance coverage and many others did not cover dependents. In the last few years, however, other competitor schools have rushed to cover this gap. Meanwhile we imposed in fall 2004 a 5% share of premiums on all our GAs (only \$120 per year, but it does raise some complaints from students and puts us a bit behind our top competitors). Thus our very good health insurance program is no longer such a competitive edge.

Recently Stanford and Princeton have made headlines by providing medical and family leave programs for graduate students. Minnesota has had similar programs for many years; we are working to fine-tune them and to make them more visible to both students and their faculty advisers/employers.

4. How are Minnesota programs doing toward the Graduate School's objective of full funding to Ph.D. degree completion, and in offering such multi-year packages at initial recruitment?

Since the Graduate School began emphasizing multi-year recruiting offers as a major condition for Block Grant funding, a number of programs have moved strongly in that direction. It is too soon to judge the impact on recruiting success, and many programs report still struggling to meet the competitors' salary levels.

Data from the NRC survey of 73 of our 98 Ph.D. programs indicate that about 95% report full support for all their students through the first five-six years of Ph.D. study. In the sciences that should be sufficient for degree completion; in the humanities and most social sciences, it takes more years. We lack full information on how students support those added years of study (perhaps often from teaching jobs elsewhere). The funding gap will probably only be closed by reforms to shorten the longest times to degree completion, and perhaps by obtaining added fellowship and traineeship funding from external sources.

In Ph.D. programs outside the scope of the NRC study (Education, Business, Social Work, etc.) and in many professionally oriented masters programs, not all students are fully funded to degree completion. In science and engineering fields the masters degree is financially rewarding enough that students are willing to self-finance and the college can rely on retaining most of the tuition income (discounting some of the tuition to compete for outstanding students of color or students from distant states or other countries). Some Ph.D. students in professional fields (e.g. Education, Nursing) have high-earning jobs, attend school part time and could never afford to come full-time on University GA stipend levels; the same is true for our competitor schools in these fields.

5. Does Minnesota have special recruitment and funding programs to improve the diversity of our graduate student population and their success in degree completion?

The DOVE (Diversity of Views and Experiences) Fellowship program, run through the Graduate School's Diversity Office, provides 1-2 year fellowships for recruiting new students. In partnership with the graduate programs the office sponsors a summer orientation and academic skills program for new DOVE graduate students and a Community of Scholars program that supports their continuing academic progress and preparation for professional opportunities after graduation. The provost's office provided expanded funding for the DOVE program over the past two years.

6. Does Block Grant funding give Ph.D. programs flexible resources under their own control to recruit and finance excellent students?

Programs are encouraged to combine Block Grant funds with assistantships, endowed fellowships and other available resources to gain the most strategic advantages in recruiting outstanding students and to encourage their timely completion of their doctoral degrees. Although Block Grant dollars average only \$400 per student, programs report that they provide critical flexible dollars to support graduate students through top-off fellowships, summer grants, semester dissertation grants, etc. All Block Grant funds must be paid out directly to students as stipends, not used to finance working assistantships.