

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy  
Wednesday, November 13, 2002  
1:00 – 3:00  
238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Martin Sampson (chair), Wilbert Ahern, Victor Bloomfield, Vernon Cardwell, Shawn Curley, Scott Ferguson, Steve Fitzgerald, Gretchen Haas, Frank Kulacki, Sheryl Lazarus, Carol Miller, Marsha Odom, Mary Ellen Shaw, Mary Sue Simmons, Craig Swan, Douglas Wangenstein

Absent: Dale Branton, Karen Seashore

Guests: none

[In these minutes: (1) action on Senate items; (2) make-up exams before finals week; (3) policy on contact hours/credits for a course; (4) privacy and WebCT; (5) additional 75-minute class periods; (6) number of exams per day during finals week; (7) registering for overlapping classes; (8) quality undergraduate education in four years; (9) approvals for grade changes]

**1. Senate Items**

Professor Sampson convened the meeting at 1:05 and announced that all of the items from SCEP had been approved by the Senate at its last meeting. One Senate member afterwards said he thought the approval of the 70-day fall semesters had only been for one year and would have voted against it as a matter of policy. Professor Sampson said he had to assume people read materials they receive for Senate meetings; the recommendation was clearly identified and mentioned during the floor discussion. Professor Ahern agreed that one could not assume Senators do not read what is before them or do not listen to presentations.

**2. Make-up Examinations Before Finals Week**

The Committee was asked if it is permissible for an instructor to provide a make-up final examination the week before finals to students who will be unable to take the final exam at the scheduled time. The Committee agreed that an instructor should be permitted this option but only on the condition that the "pre-emptive make-up" be scheduled at a time so a student would not miss his or her other classes; it will be up to the student and instructor to make appropriate arrangements. The current policy regarding exams does not bar the option; the Committee had no inclination to change the policy.

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### **3. Policy on Instructional Contact Hours/Credit Hours**

Professor Sampson reported that one of the deans asked a question about the relationship between instructional contact hours and credit hours for a course. Originally (starting in 1922) the policy was that each credit for a course was to equal 3 hours of work per week, in and out of class. During the 1990s the policy was revised to require one contact hour per week for each credit (with certain categories of classes exempted), but the Senate later adopted policy that reverted to the 1922 policy. The current policy on the books, however, includes BOTH provisions. It is not clear which controls, or if one was repealed.

The Committee agreed to return to this topic at its next meeting, once the legislative history of the policy provisions can be made clear. The issue is of consequence when more and more courses are using web-assisted learning. Professor Miller asked that the Committee look once again at the length of the class period; does the Committee want to retain the 50-minute hour?

### **4. Report on WebCT**

Professor Ahern reported that the University will soon have a new version of WebCT for courses. At present there are a number of tools on WebCT to which only the instructor has access; the new version will also provide access to the department head, the dean, and presumably the Executive Vice President and Provost. This is a corporate/hierarchical model that assumes the faculty member must be supervised; it is a strikingly different model of the educational process but driven by the way WebCT is structured. If built into the system, many will not use WebCT even though such course management software is very useful. One of the elements of academic freedom is autonomy in the classroom, he noted. Professor Kulacki said this part of the program may have been designed for WebCT's corporate clients, not for universities; he said it was unworkable and unpalatable.

Dr. Swan said he believed there are some elements of such programs that can be turned off at the individual or institutional level. This one should be turned off at the institutional level. He suggested the Committee speak with Mr. Cawley or Ms. Jorn. It agreed to do so.

Professor Odom recalled that the Committee had agreed a department can insist on receiving a copy of course syllabi, electronically or on paper, and that issue should not be mixed up with this one. The Committee agreed; Professor Sampson said the department should also have access to the gradebook.

### **5. Classroom Scheduling Change**

Mr. Fitzgerald reported that his office receives requests for additional 75-minute/3-credit class periods. As a pilot program, three additional such periods will be added in Fall, 2003. The new periods will be scheduled during lower-demand times; he will return to the Committee with data and information on the pilot program.

### **6. Number of Exams Per Day During Finals**

Mr. Fitzgerald reported that Professor Sampson had asked if it would be possible to have five final examinations per day during exam week. There are now, he said. The question is if they could

do six. They could be by running later at night but the impact on students might be profound (e.g., end a final at 10:00 at night and have another one at 8:00 the following morning). He said he was not sure the Committee wished to pursue that option.

#### **7. Registering for Overlapping Classes**

At present PeopleSoft will not allow students to register for classes that actually overlap, Mr. Fitzgerald reported, but it will not prevent them from registering for courses that are literally back to back (e.g., one ending at 10:15 and another beginning at 10:15). There is a request to change PeopleSoft to bar registering in courses that are not at least 15 minutes apart but the change has been deferred to the next version.

Could there be an override for students taking classes in the same building, Dr. Shaw asked? Mr. Fitzgerald doubted there could be that level of specificity in the program. He noted that this would not be a problem if there were better compliance with the class schedule.

#### **8. Quality Education in Four Years**

Professor Sampson said that two issues up in the air at the beginning of the year are now settled: the report of the Pawlenty Commission and the presidential search. The Committee needs to react to the report, which is both an affirmation of what the University has been doing as well as a challenge to do better. The challenge is to make drastic improvements to the 4-year graduation rate; concerns include not cutting off access to students the University should be serving and not cutting corners on quality. The Committee needs to ask where there are inefficiencies and what it can do that will have an effect in acceptable ways.

The current 4-year graduation rate is about 27%, but that number will increase. The University is beginning to see the pay-off in increased investment in undergraduate education that began under President Hasselmo and that was continued under President Yudof, Dr. Swan said. Those investments will continue under President Bruininks. But changes will not occur overnight.

Professor Ahern noted that the report was explicitly confined to the Twin Cities campus, which was appropriate when the focus was on nationally-ranked programs, but not all undergraduates are on the Twin Cities campus and when discussing excellence all campuses must be considered.

In order to achieve a graduation rate of 50%, the University must retain 85% of the students each year--and those 85% must be on track to graduation, Professor Sampson said. Dr. Swan agreed and said the 13-credit rule is about graduation and University expectations. He has reviewed ACT data files for AAU public institutions; Minnesota's graduation rate is below what would be expected for cohorts of students who enter with the ACT scores Minnesota students have. The ACT scores for Minnesota students predict a graduation rate of 43%; the six-year rate would be 70%, not the current 50%. These data have been shared on a college-by-college basis with the deans. Only the Carlson School graduation rate exceeds what would be predicted; the others fall significantly below. At the same time, the number of degrees granted has been increasing on all campuses, which should be reflected in the data.

Last year several items were targeted to improve the 4-year graduation rate, Professor Curley recalled; is it time for a second round of action items? Dr. Swan said there are issues that need to be evaluated (e.g., the policy on withdrawals, the impact of mid-term alerts). He suggested the Committee look at a handout he provided that summarizes the withdrawal policies at the other Big Ten schools. He said there is also a group working on a graduation planner that would allow students to plan how to graduate in four years; it will allow students to ask questions (what effect if they change major?) and to be more in control, able to develop their own four-year plan.

One issue is the extent to which departments have (realistic) four-year graduation plans--do the plans require taking an excessive number of credits per term, are the courses offered frequently enough, and the like. Dr. Swan said that to the extent departments have required courses in the major, he believes they should be obligated to offer them on a regular basis--and if they change the courses, they are obligated to assist students. If the department requires electives, it must offer a sufficient number of them so students can graduate in a timely way and students must be flexible as to particular electives. One of the strengths of the University is the intellectual breadth of the faculty and, as a result, the courses they offer. As faculty are on leave and retire and as new faculty come to the University, there will be corresponding changes in electives that departments offer.

Another question raised has been about the percentage of credits that are required, Dr. Swan said. The Hirsch subcommittee recognized a hierarchy of requirements: the BA is the most flexible degree (which is part of its definition); the BS is more technical and has more requirements; the professional and specialty degrees have even more requirements. There have been discussions with colleges and departments about reducing requirements; some have done so and departments are taking seriously the concern that they have degree programs students can complete in four years. In some, students may have to take 17 credits for one or two semesters. There is a related concern about flexibility: There is a problem if a degree program is so lock-step that one mistake means a student must delay graduate for a year.

In some cases, if one changes major there is no chance to graduate in four years, Mr. Ferguson pointed out. That varies, Dr. Swan said; one can, for example, probably change from Political Science to Sociology in the first two years and still graduate in four years; doing so after changing from Chemical Engineering to Piano might be more difficult. While the University should celebrate EVERY student who graduates, he added; it needs to continue the emphasis on the importance of timely graduation.

Professor Sampson said Committee members should think about what constructive role the Committee can play in adopting or endorsing a second round of efforts to improve the graduation rates. Dr. Swan said it is helpful to be able to invoke the Committee's name because it signals an interest on the part of the Senate on major policy issues. In some cases there may be a need for legislation; in other cases, Committee involvement or concern will be sufficient.

Dr. Shaw suggested the Committee could play a helpful role in development of the graduation planner and in updating department four-year graduation plans. Professor Sampson commented that departments map how a student can obtain a degree in four years; the students are helped by knowing any redundancies and when courses will be offered (or not). It is fundamental, Dr. Swan said, that the faculty in a department have a collective responsibility to see that the needed courses are offered on a regular basis. For more specialized courses, if someone is on leave, they may not be offered for a

period, but students benefit from the richness of the curriculum because of the diverse intellectual interests of the faculty. Students must also be flexible (e.g., not insist they must take a course in the fall rather than the spring).

**9. Grade Changes**

Committee members expressed concern about an apparent policy change such that department head signatures are no longer required on grade changes. Dr. Swan said he would look into the issue. Professor Odom said that such a policy change should have been brought to the Committee because it is a significant change. The potential for scandal is considerable, Dr. Shaw observed.

It was agreed this would be discussed again at a future meeting.

Professor Sampson adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota