

Minutes*

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

Present: Emily Hoover (chair), Victor Bloomfield, Dale Branton, Vernon Cardwell, Shawn Curley, LeAnn Dean, Gretchen Haas, James Leger, Christopher Pappas, Karen Seashore, Mary Ellen Shaw, Craig Swan, Douglas Wangensteen, Joel Weinsheimer

Absent: Alexander Valen

Guests: Susan Van Voorhis (Office of the Registrar)

Other: A Daily reporter

[In these minutes: (1) change in ex officio members; (2) enforcement of the grade submission rule (within 72 hours after the last final); (3) issues pending; (4) student issues and trends for the Provost]

1. Rules Change on Ex Officio Members

Professor Hoover convened the meeting at 1:00 and asked Committee members for approval of a change in the Senate Rules establishing ex officio members of the Committee. Vice Provost Swan had indicated that the Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost did not need three ex officio representatives; he and Dean Bloomfield were sufficient.

It was also reported that the Committee on Committees was inquiring whether the Senior Vice President for the Health Sciences wished to have an ex officio representative on the Committee. Dean Bloomfield said it would be helpful to hear from Senior Vice President Cerra what purpose a representative from his office would serve; does this Committee have a role in professional health sciences education? Should Law have a representative? If departments engage in both graduate and undergraduate instruction, they are represented by Vice Provost Swan and him. Professor Hoover agreed that Dr. Cerra should be asked his views about having a representative on the Committee.

2. Enforcement of the Grade Submission Rule

Professor Hoover told the Committee that she put the issue of the grade submission rule on the agenda because the Committee makes a lot of policies and she is interested in learning if they are followed. Ms. Van Voorhis has talked in the past about the percentage of instructors who get their grades in on time (72 hours after the last final examination of the term).

Ms. Van Voorhis distributed copies of reports on percentages of grades turned in before, by, and after the due date. The data covered only the period since the new system was put in place; in Fall, 2003,

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90.5% of the grades for undergraduates were turned in on time on the Twin Cities campus. Before the new system was put in place, the number was about 81%--the worst in the Big Ten. She said she was pleased by the increase in the percentage of grades turned in on time and noted that the deadline on the Twin Cities campus in Fall, 2003, was Christmas Eve. (The corresponding figures at UMM and UMD were 98.5% and 96.2%; the figure was lower at UMC because they work with high schools; UMC is actually doing very well.) She said she would like the Committee to keep watching these numbers. There was a big increase in CLA, perhaps because one of the associate deans sent out a reminder. It may be that strong reminders would increase the number of grades turned in on time. While the percentage is better than before, they are still missing a significant number of grades by the due date; anything the Committee could do to help would be appreciated, she said.

Is the Twin Cities campus still at the bottom of the Big Ten, Professor Hoover asked? It is, Ms. Van Voorhis said. It is the culture of the campus. The Graduate School percentages are not very good, Dean Bloomfield observed; does she have same concern about those numbers as she does about undergraduates, he asked? Or are there different issues? Most graduate students do not receive financial aid, Ms. Van Voorhis said; they are on loans. Undergraduates can lose their financial aid if grades are not turned in.

What is done to delinquent faculty, Professor Weinsheimer asked? Nothing, Ms. Van Voorhis said. They have created reports that are on the web that people can look at. An officer of the University could send out a general reminder, Professor Weinsheimer said, and could also target the frequent offenders. Professor Hoover noted that she and Vice Provost Swan send out memos on other subjects; they could send one on this matter as well. But that may not be as effective as a memo from a collegiate associate dean. Ms. Van Voorhis said her office does provide specific information for each college.

This is not a trivial matter for undergraduates, Professor Cardwell maintained. If one thinks about faculty responsibilities, a failure to turn in grades on time is a dereliction of duty by faculty members. This needs to be called to the attention of the faculty and a policy developed so that offenders are tracked and sent a warning letter. After three times, there should be a letter placed in the personnel file indicating the person is derelict in his/her responsibility to submit grades. This is important for students and the institution, he said. Professor Leger agreed and commented that email messages get diluted, and deleted, because there are so many. Perhaps the responsibility for enforcement should be moved to departments, where it might have more teeth. Professor Wangensteen concurred, saying the department heads should be in the loop and include this issue in their reviews of faculty. That may require a special procedure, Professor Weinsheimer said, because with the electronic system of submitting grades the department heads are NOT in the loop; how are they informed? Ms. Van Voorhis said her office has created a report they can run, and many do so.

Dr. Swan said the record is better than it was before; the question is if the situation has improved enough and if the University has gone far enough. If it is possible to identify individual instructors who turn in grades late, the chronic offenders, then he agreed with Professor Cardwell that the administration could work with colleges and department chairs.

Professor Hoover said that the Committee should be on record as interested in helping getting the number as close to 100% as possible. She asked Dr. Swan to tell the Council of Undergraduate Deans that the Committee would be glad to work with it. She thanked Ms. Van Voorhis for her report.

3. List of Issues Pending

Professor Hoover distributed copies of the list of issues pending. Some of them are very large, she observed, and a number are in process. She said the Committee would try to get to the priority items during the year.

4. Student Issues and Trends

Professor Hoover explained that the Committee would next take up the issues and trends affecting students, in response to the request from the Provost. In order that the Committee could speak freely, she asked for a motion to close the meeting; it was so moved, seconded, and unanimously voted. The Committee broke into small groups to discuss a handout itemizing issues and trends affecting students, and then reported back after a 20-minute discussion period.

- The ways in which students are diverse, and will be increasingly diverse: in experience and the variable quality of their preparation; in economic background, including more first-generation college students; and in students knowing what they want to do versus floundering freshmen and sophomores. All of this is interwoven with cost.
- Affordability for graduate students; many have their tuition paid, but there are hidden costs as well as housing, health care, and for international students, VISA issues. The discussion tends to focus on TAs/RAs/Fellows, but those total only about 5,000 out of 16,000 graduate/professional students, so there are about 11,000 graduate/professional students who do not receive financial aid. Hidden fees affect undergraduates as well; the University should help students understand the real cost of attendance. (Fees vary across colleges; there needs to be "truth in labeling.")

Is the amount of time students perceive they must work for their education a lifestyle matter or what is really needed to pay for the cost of education? There is a sense that many students cannot earn enough money during the summer to pay their tuition, so many work 20+ hours per week during the academic year. (It was said that students on the Twin Cities campus work more as the age of students increased, but the data do not support the contentions, the Committee was told.) The average age of students on the Twin Cities campus has declined the last four years from 21.9 to 21.5 years, held steady at Morris at about 20.4, increased slightly at UMC from 22.4 to 23.7, and remained steady at Duluth at about 20.6. The average number of hours students work has actually declined (at a glacial pace) the last couple of years, and it is not clear if that trend will continue. The concern is the increased debt load.

According to the results from the University of Minnesota, from the University's participation in the annual UCLA study of the attitudes of freshmen, Minnesota students expect to work more than do students at other large public research universities and they also expect to receive less financial aid from their parents. One higher education researcher has published an article about why students cannot pay for school just by working in the summer. The problem is exacerbated for graduate/professional students who do not receive financial aid.

On the subject of affordability, there is anecdotal evidence that students do not understand the economics of when to borrow and when to earn. They would be better off if, instead of earning

\$6 per hour at a fast food restaurant, they borrowed money to complete their degree more quickly and then begin earning a lot more money sooner.

- The cost of access to programs in the University at different levels; there is reciprocity, but that is more geared to MNSCU because the University is priced out of the market in comparison to border schools. Aid has not kept up with tuition, which factor has the biggest effect on middle income families.
- The quality of instruction: is there a real problem or is it only perceived? The University needs to know if it is real. Student surveys suggest the quality of instruction has gone up, but the University must be sure it does not take quality for granted because students will be more demanding as they are paying more; if the University does not keep up instructional quality, the failure will come back to bite it.
- There are issues related to courses: access, training of TAs, the quality of instruction with TAs, and the liberal education requirements.
- Who the University serves in age: as the campuses focus on retention and graduation, it could become harder for non-traditional students who are working full time to be at the University. There is a need to define what the University is but also to leave open the door to students who can only get the education they need at the University (e.g., in the health sciences). This is not just a financial aid issue with respect to non-traditional students; the question is the role of life-long learning at the University. In some areas (e.g., biology), the field is very different from what it was five years ago, and for professionals/teachers who want to get caught up on developments, the University is almost the only place they can go. This is an educational mission question, not a financial one.
- In terms of retention and graduation rates, the University needs to investigate why it is losing students; if it could retain more students, it would have to recruit fewer students for freshmen classes and it would have a higher graduation rate. (The Committee will be provided data on average number of credits at time of graduation for both transfer and new high school students, and by major, and a new program will allow the Committee to have data concerning the size of majors.)

If one talks about satisfaction rather than survival, one study has suggested that the two things that matter most to undergraduates are contact with faculty members in the freshman year and an undergraduate research experience.

The Twin Cities campus is low in terms of the connection between freshman retention and the six-year graduation rate. Attention needs be paid to 1-xxx courses, the entry point for most students; the University must be sure students are getting the attention and education that will contribute to retention and graduation.

There has been little talk of transfer students; in some programs, they are a significant percentage of the student body. The University has made progress, but there are still a lot of problems with these students, especially with respect to graduation in four years. The problem is more curricular than course access. There may not be comparable courses at community or other

colleges, so transfer students have to take all their professional/major courses as juniors and seniors; the sequencing of courses may mean such students cannot graduate in two years after they transfer to the University. (The University will do a survey of transfer students this fall and the survey data will be brought to the Committee.)

- Classrooms are an issue.
- Students talk about inconsistencies in advising across colleges and across departments within colleges.
- Support for career development for undergraduate students in their first two years, to help them make decisions that will guide their curricular choices, speeding up their graduation time and enhancing retention. Also, targeted career development resources for graduate students so they know what their options are; career counseling offices need to be empowered to deal with them.

5. Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) Issues and Trends

Professor Hoover distributed a draft outline of TEL issues and trends. Committee members focused on a message she had received from a faculty member in another college:

At 09:06 AM 9/8/2004, "I have no idea how the heck to work with the new VISTA WebCT site. Finally figured out how to use the program last year to upload information for students and this year is just a mess. One of my co-workers helped me to add a better graphic image to the syllabus for example but it seems too difficult to get it loaded on the program. We now have to ask a college technician to help us. My class starts in 30 minutes and it is a problem not to have this site ready to go. I only got access yesterday. Any suggestions would be appreciated."

One item on the list included this: "there should be baseline technology, used without expectation of learning enhancement, that all faculty need to use; then there should be a strategic decision to invest in technology to enhance learning." The discussions do not go far enough into the faculty role. Many faculty are not spring chickens, and in the past there were secretaries who typed letters and made copies. This gets to the question of what is expected of faculty. How much responsibility does the University have to provide a base to permit faculty to do what students and the institution expect? What is expected of the faculty in terms of instruction? There is no articulated model of what is good. It would also be useful to identify what students expect in the classroom and what they see is of value. It was said that students in the Carlson School want to see fewer PowerPoint presentations.

Support in the classroom and student access to technology are also issues. Some departments have technology fellows, hired to help faculty use technology through practical instruction, which also provides jobs to graduate students. It appears, however, that practice is not widespread.

Professor Hoover thanked Committee members and adjourned the meeting at 2:55.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota