

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, November 30, 2005
2:30 – 4:30
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Richard McCormick (chair), William Bart, Vernon Cardwell, LeAnn Dean, Gail Dubrow, Josh Feneis, James Leger, Eric Ling, Claudia Neuhauser, Christopher Pappas, Mary Ellen Shaw, Paul Siliciano, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Craig Swan, Douglas Wangensteen, Joel Weinsheimer

Absent: Shawn Curley, Sara Tuttle

Guests: Barbara Brandt (Academic Health Center), Judith Buchanan (School of Dentistry); Tina Falkner (Office of the Registrar),

[In these minutes: (1) teaching evaluations in the Academic Health Center; (2) Graduate School fellowships; (3) Dental Hygiene calendar; (4) charge to the science and engineering task force

1. Teaching Evaluations and the Academic Health Center

Professor McCormick convened the meeting at 1:35 and welcomed Assistant Vice President Brandt and Associate Dean Buchanan to discuss the proposed teaching evaluation policy being discussed later in the week by the Faculty Senate.

Dr. Brandt began by commending the Committee for its effort to improve the teaching evaluation system at the University. The draft policy was provided by Vice Provost Swan; she circulated it to the associate deans in the Academic Health Center (AHC). Dean Buchanan, she said, was asked to represent the associate deans on this issue.

Dean Buchanan also thanked the Committee for its efforts and went on to point out elements of the current draft that will cause problems for the School of Dentistry as well as other colleges in the Academic Health Center. First, they are responsible for their students in order to protect the public, to respond to the professions, and they accordingly have strict accreditation requirements. They look closely at both the course and the instructor. Second, most of their faculty are not tenure-track; many are part-time and teach only in a clinical setting; it is very important they have assessment of clinical teaching so they know which of it is of value—but the instruction can be taking place four hours away from the campus. They need to be sure students are learning the right things. Third, their programs are different—they are team-taught, in a lock-step curriculum, individual faculty are not free to choose what courses to offer, and the students who enter are very highly qualified. Fourth, much of the student learning occurs in the lab and in clinical rotation. Curriculum standards are held to a high level by the profession and the School must have a lot of data on courses, faculty, labs, etc. (If the school loses its accreditation, there will be no students because students from unaccredited institutions cannot obtain a license to practice.) So, she concluded, it is a very different environment.

* 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.

As a result, they need to be able to pose different questions about the courses and about each instructor, and for different settings. They also require all students to complete the evaluations (something explicitly not permitted in the current revised draft of the policy). This is common in dental schools and it is in the student's and faculty's best interest, Dean Buchanan explained; when everyone must complete the evaluation, the respondents are not just the outliers. The students support requiring evaluations as part of the course. Dr. Brandt emphasized that the Department of Education mandated outcomes-based education, health education standards were re-written to meet that mandate, and accreditors want to see what is done and the data used to improve the programs.

In response to a question about the authority of the Committee, Dean Buchanan explained that some language in the draft policy suggest it does not apply to the Academic Health Center (e.g., the policy does not apply to team-taught courses, which are widespread in the AHC, and many clinical rotation courses appear not to fit). Professor McCormick recalled that the last time the Committee discussed this it had noted the exemption for team-taught courses and had thought about a provision to allow professional programs in the AHC to vary from the proposed policy, if the variance was approved by this Committee. Dr. Brandt said they understood the spirit of the policy and very much want to meet it.

Dr. Buchanan affirmed, in response to queries from Vice Provost Swan, that they evaluate both the setting and the instructor, because students can work with different faculty each day, varying with the specialty, and some faculty only work with the program half a day a week—and they can be all over the state.

Committee members discussed the AHC software that is used for School of Dentistry and other college evaluation procedures.

The Committee agreed that in general colleges should decide which programs would need an exemption from the policy and should make the request, rather than individual programs, in order to filter the number of requests made to the Committee. Dean Dubrow suggested that one criterion might be programs where a significant portion of the coursework occurs outside the classroom.

The policy does not allow requiring students to complete an evaluation; AHC schools do. Their students are high-quality and homogeneous and the questions are only about the course and instructor, Dr. Buchanan said. Professor McCormick said he was almost inclined—contrary to the current draft policy—to suggest that the policy REQUIRE participation if electronic evaluation is to be used, in order to prevent unacceptably low response rates. Both Drs. Brandt and Buchanan concurred. There are two problems with mandating evaluation, Vice Provost Swan said. One, the instructor becomes the police officer and knows who did and did not complete the form; if the system is run through the dean's office, that problem is solved. Two, if students receive extra credit for completing the evaluation, that could be seen as a bribe. Dr. Brandt said the system they use is completely confidential, the names cannot be tracked, and students like the opportunity. Committee members deliberated for a brief while about whether to recommend a change in the proposed policy to permit—or require—that courses using web evaluation also require students to complete the evaluation before they can receive a grade. Mr. Ling said he believed most students would support mandatory evaluation because they know it would benefit students. (Professor Leger suggested that if evaluation is mandatory, students should be given the opportunity on the web site to register but to decline to

participate; other Committee members agreed, and Professor Wangenstein said that is what is done in pre-clinical courses in the Medical School. Dean Dubrow agreed that students should have the opportunity to decline to participate.

The Committee took no action on whether to make mandatory evaluation for any course when the evaluation is on the web but agreed to take up the issue again. The issue will not go away, Dr. Shaw commented; technology is moving in that direction and the Committee will not be allowed to forget it.

With respect to the case at hand, Dr. Swan suggested that the Committee vote to grant Dentistry interim approval for its evaluation process, with the understanding that a change to the policy will be proposed that will allow exceptions to be granted. Dr. Buchanan asked if it would help if the associate deans of the AHC colleges were to prepare a package of information describing the procedures they use. Professor McCormick said that would help the Committee consider the bigger picture. Dr. Swan noted that although the policy excludes courses with multiple instructors, the Committee still needs to be informed about what evaluation procedures are used in such courses.

The Committee voted unanimously in favor of granting the interim approval suggested by Vice Provost Swan.

2. Graduate School Fellowships

Professor McCormick turned next to Dean Dubrow to provide an overview of Graduate School fellowships.

Dean Dubrow told the Committee that when she came to the University, she was aware of the report about funding deficiencies, and was relieved that the Provost has committed \$5 million more in recurring funds to support graduate fellowships. The question is what to do to induce departments to support graduate students on multi-year stipends and how those stipends relate to time to degree. She reported that she has made three changes to the fellowship and block grant awards. The number of awards has been increased, the size of the awards has been increased, and the Graduate School will reward units that develop plans for multi-year plans for students, using all sources of funds, for nearly all students in their program. This is part of a long-term plan to evaluate the gap in resources for programs. While trying to provide incentives in the award of block grants and fellowships, Dean Dubrow said she sees this as a partnership effort with programs in order to achieve the best practices. It also constitutes truth in advertising: units can communicate to graduate students what they can expect in fellowships, TAships, etc. One size will not fit all; some programs could be more research-oriented while others more teaching-oriented. But until plans are in place, it will not be clear what the funding gap in graduate education is.

The stipends will increase from \$17,500 to \$21,000, which will help units avoid losing students on price. There will be a second-year award, the year to be taken at the student's discretion.

Professor Neuhauser observed that with an increased stipend, they will not know how many students will accept offers. Dean Dubrow observed that if a program successfully recruited all of its number-one choices, there could be a deficit—but that would be a sign of success and the Graduate School would need to restructure the program. Professor Leger said his department had discussed

these issues and was surprised that students would decide on the basis of a \$4000 difference in support. Dean Dubrow said they have heard from students: the funding is a tie-breaker. Support for multiple years is also a factor. Mr. Pappas said the multi-year package would add security for graduate students in an uncertain process.

In terms of years to degree, Professor Weinsheimer said there is not absolute number. If a student is offered support for six years, it will take six. If four years, it will take four. And students do not always try to get out. If the average number of years to degree is eight, a department will have to calculate how to support an appropriate number of students for that long (or do without Graduate School support). This will create an incentive to look at the curriculum; she has not heard any negatives, Dean Dubrow said, but they will need to look again at the plan if it creates unintended consequences.

Professor McCormick said this was exciting news because there has been a lot of concern about support for graduate education.

From everything they know, graduate education must be subsidized, Dean Dubrow said. If the assumption in the new budget model is that colleges must support themselves, how will graduate education be supported? When they identify the gap between what units have or are willing to commit to graduate education, and what they need, that will raise questions about support for graduate students (and whether they should be supported). Professor McCormick commented that the University will not achieve its goal of being among the top three public institutions without adequate support of graduate education. It will be supported, Dean Dubrow replied; the question is how to close the funding gap.

Professor Cardwell said a number of his colleagues with outside support find it more efficacious to hire postdocs rather than graduate students; he said he believed the incentives favor the postdoc. Dean Dubrow said she has heard a lot about this issue and agreed that incentives favor hiring the postdoc. If there were a general requirement for training when hiring postdocs, rather than simply using them as employees, that would level the playing field some. One option she has mused about is raising the floor for postdoc salaries. The question, however, is not fringe benefit rates, it is training. Committee members made additional comments about the fringe rates making it more attractive to hire employees than supporting graduate students; that led Dean Dubrow to inquire rhetorically whether some party other than the department should be responsible for the tuition and health care costs of graduate students. Professor Siliciano said that they are working as students and colleagues and departments should not be treated as employers that must pay health care and tuition. Professor Neuhauser said that postdocs are not cheaper and that she would like to see their salaries increased; it is not fair that graduate student costs approach that of postdocs when first-year graduate students are nowhere near as research-productive as a postdoc. Dean Dubrow concluded that she needed to hear more from those who are making the choices.

Professor Weinsheimer said there is also a limit to the number of graduate students who should be in each field, an issue that is not being addressed. At a certain point, it is inappropriate to keep admitting and training graduate students and it should be stopped because it is not in the interest of the student or the institution. Dean Dubrow commented that enrollment management occurs primarily in undergraduate education; at the graduate level it is vague except in for-profit institutions. There is no real control at the University, but one could look at factors such as development and the

market. It would be a worthwhile discussion to talk about the management of enrollment, which should not be based on teaching needs. Professor McCormick said his department made that decision ten years ago: it would hire teaching specialists and lecturers rather than admit an inappropriate number of graduate students. Such discussions are needed in humanities departments, Professor Weinsheimer maintained.

Dean Dubrow said she was glad to talk to the Committee about these issues and would return in the future to discuss changing practices. Professor McCormick thanked Dean Dubrow for her report.

3. Dental Hygiene Calendar

Professor McCormick noted an email message he had received from Dental Hygiene asking that it be permitted to align its calendar with the School of Dentistry rather than the standard calendar for the Twin Cities campus. Committee members offered several observations.

-- Dental Hygiene is an undergraduate program and there is a common undergraduate calendar for financial aid, grades, scheduling information, drop-add, and so on, that would all have to be changed for Dental Hygiene. There are no exemptions for any other undergraduate program.

-- There are many changes in Dental Hygiene: it will switch to a masters program (so there will be no undergraduate Dental Hygiene program in the state) in order to get in line with the University's research mission.

-- There would be a significant difference in the calendar, about three weeks. If Dental Hygiene students must take courses in other colleges, this change would be a problem; perhaps they only take courses in the program. If it is going to become a masters program, could it not just work with the current calendar until the change is made? Taking courses on two different calendars would be very difficult for undergraduates.

-- Assistant Vice President Brandt did not know about this request, and she is the one trying to coordinate AHC calendars.

Professor McCormick said he would communicate with the Dental Hygiene program about the issue and explain the Committee needed to talk more about it.

4. Comments on the Charge to the Science and Engineering Task Force

Professor McCormick said that Professor Neuhauser, who serves as a co-chair of the strategic positioning task force on science and engineering, wished to hear Committee comments on the charge. A number were offered.

-- Professor Bart said that with respect to the capacity of students to do well, there are three types of students: those of high ability and a lot of background, those who did modestly well in high school but who will flunk out in college science and engineering, and those who did modestly well in high school but who do not have the thinking skills to handle these fields. There are two schools of thought about this: one, students should take more class work, and two, these students need

supplemental experiences to handle the materials. Some students take courses but lack the skills for them, but there are techniques that could help them. Will the task force be open to supplemental activities that would increase the likelihood that students would pass these courses? Some students can achieve in these fields if they have assistance.

-- In terms of integrating engineering and science with biology, the Institute of Technology is already structured differently, Professor Leger said. Most colleges have a college of arts, sciences, and engineering; the University in 1935 chose to do things differently. The question is whether there should be a new structure, to integrate the biological sciences with engineering and the physical sciences. Professor Siliciano said for someone in Biological Sciences, it is difficult to work with IT and that they would be better off with a united administrative structure. The current arrangement also sets up competition between the two colleges (e.g., IT might want to offer its own biology courses) and they spend time contending because of the way tuition dollars flow. He added that he has never seen an academic structure where chemistry and biology were not in the same unit.

-- The same question could be asked about the agricultural sciences, Dr. Shaw said; where would it stop? There is a need for more connections and it makes sense to put people together; what is not clear is where. It does not make sense to have all the sciences except agriculture in one place and they in another. There need to be permeable boundaries.

-- Professor McCormick said he would favor a larger sciences college (which would be a step toward an Arts and Sciences college, which is what many of the top universities have).

-- Vice Provost Swan cautioned that the existing college structure could be indigenous (a given) rather than endogenous (something the University has some control over). Professor Neuhauser said she believed that structure should follow content, but that the task force is early in its discussions.

-- Professor Leger said there are two separate issues which suggest going in opposite directions. One is the way dollars flow and the other is getting people to work together. One can imagine a structure that solves one problem but not the other. Professor Cardwell agreed on the need to provide a system of integration of the physical and life sciences so that most problems would be solved. These also need to include engineering and technology.

-- Mr. Ling suggested that the University institutionalize emphasis areas so that undergraduates can go between colleges more easily. Adding honors sections in some fields could also help promote excellence.

-- Professor Bart said he was concerned about the part of the charge dealing with configuring "the sciences and engineering to best integrate and promote academic synergies, teaching, and research": in teaching, part of the role should be to make complexity understandable to students and make the interactions and synergies clearer to them.

Professor McCormick adjourned the meeting at 4:35.

-- Gary Engstrand