

Minutes \*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy**  
**Wednesday, January 29, 1997**  
**1:00 - 3:00**  
**Room 238 Morrill Hall**

Present: Laura Koch (chair), Anita Cholewa, Elayne Donahue, Corey Donovan, Darwin Hendel, Gordon Hirsch, Robert Leik, Kathleen Newell, Tina Rovick, W. Phillips Shively, William Van Essendelft, Gayle Graham Yates

Regrets: Thomas Johnson, Judith Martin

Absent: Avram Bar-Cohen

Guests: Sam Lewis (Registrar)

[In these minutes: grade inflation; graduate/professional teaching award; grading policy; 1999-2000 calendar; 50-minute class period; Twin Cities Undergraduate Course and Curriculum Committee; policies on transfer of credit, credit by examination; policy on classes, schedules, and final examinations; subcommittee on degrees and credits]

## **1. Grade Inflation**

Professor Koch convened the meeting at 1:00 and began the discussion by noting the material that had been distributed that contained data on grade distributions and GPAs in recent years. A number of comments were made:

- There is no context, so it is hard to know the meaning of the data.
- Students are better prepared than they have been in the past, and if there is a relationship between preparation and performance, one would expect students to perform better. There are data on these changes in student preparation.
- Data from IT and CLA suggest that there has been no grade inflation in the past ten years.
- Any study of grades should include the context in which faculty assign grades, such as course level, to find out what is happening; information on individual faculty grading over time might also be useful.
- From the perspective of one who works with a lot of students, the work students must do in courses has increased, and performance is at a higher level, than earlier.

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The general conclusion, said one Committee member who has studied the issue, without striking evidence, is that grades have changed due to inflation rather than the changing composition of the student body. "Inflation" implies grades increased without increased performance, something difficult to determine from general data.

-- The Committee has looked at this before; the difficult part is identifying remedies, if there is grade inflation. It is not worth the time to learn if there is grade inflation, if there are no remedies.

There must be a look at what goes into the process of awarding grades, said one Committee member, such as testing, assignments, if TAs decide, and so on. If something needs attention, it may get into the realm of what guidance the University gives faculty about student performance and grading. There are courses that grade on a normal distribution, so there is never grade inflation.

-- Some grades are assigned by TAs, which could skew the data. It would be helpful to categorize grades by the status of the instructor awarding them, including by rank.

Asked why the Committee was looking at the issue again, Professor Koch said that FCC had asked it to, and there are a lot of people concerned that students cannot do certain things after being educated at the University. Grades earned imply students can perform at certain levels; if graduates cannot do what is expected, although they receive high grades, then the subject should be examined, said another Committee member.

Professor Koch asked that Committee members volunteer to serve on a subcommittee to look at grade inflation; several did so, and the group will do its work over the next several months.

## **2. Graduate and Professional Teaching Award**

Professor Koch next recalled she had distributed copies of the policy on the Morse-Alumni teaching award and asked that Committee members consider changes to it that would make it appropriate for a graduate/professional teaching award.

Committee members made a number of suggestions, including explicating the roles of the faculty member vis-a-vis the graduate student, the focus should be broader than teaching, that the award should be available only for efforts in post-baccalaureate education, that the committee annually selected to nominate Morse-Alumni winners should also be asked to nominate winners of this proposed new award, that funding will have to await sources but that goal should be that it be equivalent to the Morse-Alumni award, and that there should be a separate small gathering of these award winners.

There was also agreement to make, and report to the Senate, minor changes in the Morse-Alumni operational guidelines (reduce the advisory committee from 20 to 10 and make it clear that holding an event related to the award is optional for the award-winner, not obligatory).

It was agreed that a draft policy would be circulated to the Committee, and that it would be discussed at its next meeting.

### **3. Grading Policy**

Professor Koch reported that the revised grading policy has been approved by all campuses except Duluth, and the question of the necessity for Duluth approval has been raised, since they have a unionized faculty. There could be a problem, in that the Duluth faculty are not under the Senate but the students are.

The consensus was that the policy should be brought to the Senate for action in February. Mr. Lewis assured the Committee that if the Senate acts, his office could implement it Fall Quarter, 1997.

### **4. Calendar**

The Committee next took up the 1999-2000 calendar, the first for semesters, and one which will apply to the entire University (unless the President's office has granted an exception to a unit).

There was brief review of the Wisconsin calendar; it was noted that Minnesota will start fall and spring semesters approximately one week later than Wisconsin, and that break weeks will not correspond, but the intersession and summer terms will be the same. Minnesota cannot start earlier because of the State Fair; the Semester Conversion Standards call for spring semester to start after the MLK holiday (because Fall Semester runs late into December), while Wisconsin starts the week before it. Wisconsin has a rather complex formula for setting spring break, depending on when Passover and Good Friday fall.

It was moved, seconded, and unanimously voted to recommend the proposed calendar to the Senate.

### **5. Fifty-Minute Class Period**

Professor Koch noted that the Committee had not voted on the formal motion to recommend to the Senate a change to the Semester Conversion Standards, changing the class period from 55 minutes to 50 minutes; without ado, the Committee so voted, unanimously.

### **6. Twin Cities Undergraduate Course and Curriculum Committee (TCUCCC)**

Professor Koch recalled the Committee had reviewed changes to the charge to the TCUCCC at its previous meeting.

One Committee member inquired if the TCUCCC covered University College (UC), since it does not report to a provost and is system-wide. Committee members discussed for some while how University College courses would be treated (e.g., those offered solely on one campus versus those offered on more than one). It was suggested that those courses offered exclusively in the Twin Cities should be reviewed by the TCUCCC; it was pointed out that UC has a review process for courses that involves faculty, but it is not the same as the one that would be used by the Senate.

After raising a number of questions, the Committee agreed it would let the language establishing the TCUCCC remain silent on UC for now, but that it should consider the issue in the future.

The Committee voted to forward the proposal to the Assembly again.

**7. Policies on Transfer of Credit, Credit by Examination**

The Committee turned to the policies developed earlier by Professor Graham Yates and Dr. Van Essendelft and reviewed briefly a few questions that had been unanswered. It was agreed that any credits from technical colleges, along with proprietary, military, and certain other schools would AUTOMATICALLY be referred by the Director of Admissions to the appropriate faculty for determination if the credit would be accepted by the University. One problem, Mr. Lewis reported, is that referring credits to departments can take a long time, and students can act on the basis of assurances that subsequently turn out not to be accurate.

With clarifications, the Committee voted to send the policies to the Senate for action.

**8. Policy on Classes, Schedules, and Final Examinations**

This policy will be on the Senate and Assembly dockets, for action. The schedule information presumes a 50-minute class period; if the Senate votes NOT to change the Semester Conversion Standards, so the class period remains at 55 minutes, the policies will be editorially revised to reflect that action.

**9. Subcommittee on Degrees and Credits**

Dr. Hendel reported that the subcommittee on degrees and credits, which he chairs, discovered a Senate policy from 1916 requiring an additional year of academic work for students who wish to receive a second baccalaureate degree. Mr. Lewis reported that there are some instances of people obtaining a second baccalaureate (such as a BS after receiving a BA), but no one is permitted to receive a second BA or BS (although one may subsequently add a second major to a BA already earned).

Dr. Hendel said the subcommittee would take the policy into account in developing its recommendations to the Committee.

Professor Koch adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand