

CLASSROOM ADVISORY SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING
SEPTEMBER 9, 2003

[In these minutes: Call to Order, Future Agenda Item Ideas, Introductions, Review of Committee Charge, Office of Classroom Management (OCM) Update, Non-Standard Class Times]

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate or Twin Cities Assembly; none of the comments, conclusions or actions reported in these minutes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate or Assembly, the Administration or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT: Ken Heller, chair, Steve Fitzgerald, Roberta Juarez, Steve Spohn, Joyce Weinsheimer, Denise Guerin, Jennifer Peters, Jane Phillips, Joel Weinsheimer

REGRETS: Bernard Gulachek, James Perry, William Hanson

OTHER(S): Nancy McGlynn

I). Professor Heller called the meeting to order and welcomed all those present.

II). Professor Heller solicited input from members regarding ideas for future agenda items. A member asked whether a response was ever received from Executive Vice President and Provost Christine Maziar concerning the March 24, 2003 memo on recurring funding for central classrooms. Professor Heller volunteered to follow-up on this and report back to the Subcommittee his findings.

III). Professor Heller asked that introductions be made.

IV). REVIEW OF COMMITTEE CHARGE: Professor Heller noted that in conjunction with the reorganization of the Senate structure, Professor Judith Martin, chair of the SCC, requested that all Senate committees review their charge and make suggestions for changes. Copies of the charge were distributed to the members for their review. Members' ideas and comments included:

- This Subcommittee charge provides for student representation, but there are no current student members - we had difficulty with this last year as well. There are 4 student vacancies on the Subcommittee.
- Modify the third paragraph of the charge to read, CAS's ~~initial~~ continuing focus is expected to be as a consultative resource for the Office of Classroom Management as OCM implements the recommendations that have already been approved by the University Senate ("1998 Classroom Management Recommendations Report").
- If the Twin Cities Campus Assembly disappears under the proposed reorganization of the Senate, the first sentence would need to be changed to "The Classroom Advisory Subcommittee (CAS) shall be a standing joint subcommittee of the ~~Assembly~~ Senate Committee on Educational Policy and the Senate Committee on Finance and Planning.
- Change the first sentence of the 2nd paragraph to "CAS shall be a broadly representative group that can provide faculty, ~~and~~ staff and student consultation and input on the wide range of issues relating to teaching and learning in classrooms.

V). Professor Heller requested Steve Fitzgerald, Director of Classroom Management, provide members with an update on developments within OCM since the Subcommittee last met. Highlights from Mr. Fitzgerald's presentation and members' comments included:

- The Office of Classroom Management (OCM) completed improvement work in 49 classrooms over the summer.
- Due to the unique pedagogical requirements of clinical based teaching in AHC, Fourteen central classrooms in the AHC were turned over to the AHC as departmental classrooms. Currently, OCM has no general-purpose classrooms in the AHC. Approximately 98% of classes that were scheduled into these 14 rooms were AHC related courses. Therefore, there has been no scheduling impact to non-AHC classes by turning over these rooms to the AHC.
- A great amount of progress has been made in the development of the Electronic Course Systems Project (ECSP). This is an effort that will convert much of the paper intensive processing of course submissions into an electronic format. Additionally, ECSP will eliminate the extensive amount of the double, manual data entry that had been necessary in the past due to the current systems' incompatibility with PeopleSoft. It is expected that

ECSP will be on line in November/December 2003 when the production cycle for the fall 2004 scheduling effort ramps up. The new system is more accurate, less error prone and will directly interface into PeopleSoft through the "Transactional Interface" -another in-progress project.

- Improvements are being made to the Electronic Course Authorization System (ECAS). These improvements along with the Electronic Course Systems Project (ECSP), and the ability for ECSP to interface with PeopleSoft will benefit the fall 2004 scheduling efforts tremendously.
- The Office of Classroom Management has been testing a new version of the software they currently use for scheduling, Resource 25. The new version of this software offers a much simpler interface for the operators than previous versions. As a result, OCM plans to pilot with a few departments this fall and give them license for the new software so they can use it to schedule their own departmental rooms. After a successful pilot program effort, OCM will roll the software out to all departments for their potential use in scheduling their own departmental rooms. The intent is to improve and automate the scheduling process and to extend the added values of the central scheduling improvements (easier course entry, improved on-line schedule submission, direct Peoplesoft interface, etc) to departmental rooms.
- Mr. Fitzgerald distributed a handout that provided members with an update on the General Purpose Classroom Tech Upgrade Project. The Tech Upgrade Project provides for a projection capable room standard for all central classrooms. Great strides have been made on the installation portion of this project. It was further noted that wireless networking has been incorporated into the projection capable room standard, thus making all these rooms wireless network rooms as well.
 - As of the start of fall semester, 2003, the TC campus has an overall 64% of 307 general purpose classrooms up to the projection-capable classroom standard (193 upgraded classrooms). On the East Bank, 54% are upgraded; on the West Bank 85% are upgraded: in St. Paul 72% are upgraded. Of note, the TC campus now has 217 general purpose classrooms covered by wireless networking.

There are two funding issues attached to the Tech Upgrade Plan:

- Installation funds to put in the tech upgrades.

- Recurring funding to maintain and perpetuate the technology equipped classrooms. While life cycle equipment, maintenance and support funding requirements were identified at the front end of this project, little recurring funding has been put in place.

It was further noted that faculty have spent a lot of time and energy to convert their courses into a format that uses technology. When the Tech Upgrade Plan was implemented, the University made a commitment to maintain these projection capable classrooms into the future. Additionally, it is inevitable that this equipment will ultimately fail. The University should be setting aside funds on an annual basis to replace equipment when it reaches the end of its life cycle. This recurring funding, however, is not in place.

In order to respond to the urgent need to improve technology in central classrooms, the Provost's Office directed OCM to install projection capable rooms as aggressively as possible (with one-time funds) knowing that the recurring funding requirement is not in place, and acknowledging that it would have to back-fill the recurring funding later.

Later is now. As of summer 2004, the first technology upgrade systems will reach the end of their service life and will attrite from the system unless they are replaced. Currently, OCM is funded at 22% of the overall recurring funding requirement. Central administration has acknowledged this situation and realizes it needs to be addressed and resolved.

- In fall semester 2003, the number of unplaced courses increased dramatically (back to the 800+ level of the first semester after conversion). Unplaced courses are defined as homeless courses before the start of a semester (courses without a classroom to meet in after the scheduling system has made room assignments). before the start of a semester. Fortunately, all courses were eventually assigned classrooms but this was only because of delays in the legislative funding for Nicholson Hall. If Nicholson Hall had been off-line, as it had been projected to be this fall, OCM would not have resolved all the unplaced course problems. It is also important to keep in mind that despite the fact that rooms were ultimately found for these unplaced courses, many of these courses were housed in substandard spaces, some of which were not even proper classrooms. The unplaced course problem reinforces the need to improve utilization and get

scheduling problems under control because Nicholson will definitely go off-line at the end of fall semester 2003. The unplaced course problem is greatest on the East Bank, is a significant but lesser problem on the West Bank and is much less of a problem on the St. Paul campus.

In addition to the historic problem associated with unplaced courses, there are a couple other factors affecting this problem. First, as a result of budget cuts, colleges are increasing their enrollment caps and teaching many more large courses. Also, colleges are adjusting their TA ratios, which has further influenced and increased the size of sections being taught. It was noted that 10,200 sections were being taught under the quarter system, but that number has increased to approximately 14,000 sections under the semester system. Mr. Fitzgerald noted that to some extent the classroom shortage is purely artificial.

- Instructors and students alike want to teach and take courses during the peak time of the day, 9:00 - 2:00 class hours. By policy, a department is not supposed to teach more than 60% of its course load during that time frame. In reality, then, there is not a classroom shortage overall, but there is a classroom shortage between 9:00 - 2:00. If courses could be spread over the hours of the day more effectively and over the days of the week (including Monday mornings and Friday afternoons) this would help the problem significantly.
- Approximately 18% of sections presented for initial scheduling are cancelled for various reasons, but principally because of low demand. These cancellations occur after room assignments have been made. Even though they are later cancelled, each of these sections requires assignment of a classroom and occupies that room at the expense of other valid sections that are on the unplaced list.
- In addition to this high cancellation level, there are a substantial number of courses where enrollment is over-projected by departments when they are submitted for scheduling. This unnecessarily causes assignment of a classroom larger than required, also preventing the room's use for larger sections that may require that larger capacity room. The standard for enrollment projections by departments is that projected versus actual enrollments should be within +/- 10%.

Mr. Fitzgerald noted that the aggregated and synergistic impact of all these issues (non-standard time patterns, excess peak time loading, excessive cancellations, inaccurate enrollment projections, increased demand for classrooms, decreased supply of classrooms, recent trends back toward larger section sizes) all combine to create the problem that we call the "classroom shortage problem". The "Unplaced course problem" is the symptom of this overall problem.

A member noted that the lack of classroom space has exacerbated the exaggerated enrollment problem. From a department's perspective it is much easier to offer a class, get the room assignment months in advance and, if necessary, cancel as opposed to trying to offer a class and secure a classroom 3-4 weeks before the start of a semester. Mr. Fitzgerald noted that if all departments would accurately project their enrollment numbers this would be the best scenario for all parties involved.

A member recommended not only examining the utilization impact on classrooms as a result of non-standard scheduling, but the implications and effects this has on student schedules. Mr. Fitzgerald agreed, noting that the Student Retention Task Force, OCM Utilization Reports and other studies have clearly indicated that non-standard scheduling creates increased course access difficulties for students.

- In closing, Mr. Fitzgerald noted that cooperative efforts between Facilities Management and OCM have become quite extensive over the past several months, including joint participation in the Facilities Condition Assessment program, the Custodial Improvement Initiative, and numerous other projects.

VI). Professor Heller noted that SCEP has asked CAS to discuss the proposal to ban all non-standard class times for centrally scheduled classrooms. Is this a good idea and what does this mean?

Mr. Fitzgerald noted that the SCEP question is one option. We have discussed this issue since semester conversion, and action is now absolutely necessary. The ongoing unplaced course problem is a disaster waiting to happen. We now know with certainty that, unless we improve utilization further, we will not be able to place all

courses after Nicholson Hall goes off line at the end of this semester.

He continued that there are other less stringent options, but *all* require better adherence to existing scheduling policy, a mechanism to rapidly identify courses that deviate from the policy, a mechanism to adjudicate exception situations, active support from departments and colleges and backing of central administration. Mr. Fitzgerald indicated that the TC campus needs to resolve this prior to the November -December 2003 production cycle for the fall 04 schedule.

All agreed that the issue was complex and would require additional discussion (it is the primary subject of the next CAS meeting).

Mr. Fitzgerald, with the aid of a handout, explained the Standard Class Meeting Time Policy to members. The purpose of adhering to the standard schedule is to provide structure and discipline to the University's resources so they can support the pedagogical requirements of all departments, faculty and students across department/college and program boundaries.

Professor Heller noted, however, that the Standard Class Meeting Time Policy does not completely make the most efficient use of classroom space (the 50-minute M - F "A" time versus the Tuesday - Thursday 75-min "B" times). Mr. Fitzgerald noted that the combination of "A" and "B" time schemes does cause some loss of utilization efficiency, but responds to the pedagogical requirement to have both 50 and 75 minute classes. The combined A - B time scheme is provided for in policy and does have structure, however. What causes a problem is non-standard times placed on top of the structure (such as a 75-minute class on days other than listed in the Policy, etc).

Mr. Fitzgerald noted that utilization of departmental classrooms is very low compared to centrally scheduled classrooms. To allow departments to schedule non-standard class times in departmental classrooms does not solve the problem but shifts the problem from one resource to another. A member noted from a student perspective, the continuation of non-standard scheduling negatively impacts students' schedules by occupying two time slots. Professor Heller noted from a classroom perspective, such an approach would off-load courses from central classrooms into an under-utilized resource, departmental classrooms.

Professor Heller asked if having instructors teach on Fridays would solve the non-

standard class time problem. Mr. Fitzgerald noted that it would help - but not solve it (so would having more 8 AM classes, and more Monday classes). Mr. Fitzgerald stated that the Twin Cities campus is the most lax in terms of adhering to the Standard Class Time Meeting Policy. The administration as well as departments and colleges recognize the problem but need to do more to enforce strict adherence to the Policy like the other coordinate campuses.

Mr. Fitzgerald commented that up until now it has been somewhat difficult to identify non-standard courses in the mass of paperwork that flows through OCM's scheduling office until after the fact (in reports). However, with the new ECSP system, non-compliant courses will be flagged at the front end of the scheduling system, and intervention will occur early in the scheduling production process.

A member asked if the standard class time meeting policy were strictly enforced, what impact would this have on faculty morale. According to Mr. Fitzgerald, a positive outcome of greater discipline would be the elimination of uncertainty in terms of being assigned a classroom - this would be good for both faculty and student morale.

A member noted besides the proposal to ban non-standard course times, a lot of behavior change on both the part of faculty and students will have to occur. Additionally, a lot of public relations and marketing will be necessary to explain why such steps are necessary.

Professor Heller asked whether more incentives could be offered to move the elimination of a Non-Standard Course Time Policy forward e.g. non-standard class requests get scheduled last. Mr. Fitzgerald stated that OCM already does this when they notice that a non-standard class time is being requested. Regardless of the kind of restrictions that are put in place, it was noted that mechanisms to deal with exception requests must also be established.

Members were referred to the following URL:

<http://www.classroom.umn.edu/scheduling/utilization/> on the OCM homepage to learn more about meeting patterns of various courses, etc. Mr. Fitzgerald noted the data on the web is approximately 2 semesters behind because the process of manually collecting and manipulating this information is very time consuming. However, once the new Electronic Course Systems Project (ECSP) is operational it will make collecting this information much easier.

Members agreed to continue this discussion at the next meeting. Professor Heller encouraged members to think about creative ways to resolve the non-standard class time problem. Mr. Fitzgerald agreed to bring materials to the next meeting to help set the stage for a meaningful discussion. Professor Heller charged Renee Dempsey with sending members the utilization website which they are encouraged to review before the October 14th meeting.

VII). Hearing no further business, Professor Heller adjourned the meeting.

Renee Dempsey
University Senate