

MINUTES*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
 Thursday, February 25, 1993
 1:15 - 3:00
 Room 626 Campus Club

Present: James Tracy (chair), Thomas Clayton, James Cotter, Susan Donaldson, Darwin Hendel, Robert Johnson, Lois Regnier, Tim Swierczek, Susan Wick

Absent: Victor Bloomfield, Megan Gunnar, Michael Handberg, Kenneth Heller, Andy Kuehnel, Andrea Mack, Clark Starr

Guests: Associate Dean Marjorie Cowmeadow, Professor Gary Thomas

[In these minutes: curriculum recommendation of the Select Committee on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Concerns; implementation protocols, teaching evaluation policy; plus/minus grading; the Crookston "polytechnic" curriculum proposal and implications]

1. Report of the Select Committee on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Concerns

Professor Tracy convened the meeting at 1:25 and welcomed Drs. Cowmeadow and Thomas to the meeting to discuss the recommendations of the Select Committee on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Concerns, and specifically the curricular recommendation of the Interim Report calling for a program in gay and lesbian studies. Professor Tracy also circulated a letter from President Hasselmo to Provost Infante asking that he--Provost Infante--work with the College of Human Ecology and the College of Liberal Arts to pursue the possibility of establishing a center for gay and lesbian studies recommended by the Select Committee. He also reported that the administration of CLA has strong feelings about the appropriate forum to make decisions about curriculum--the collegiate curriculum committee, NOT a Senate body.

Dean Cowmeadow said had been made aware of the SCEP agenda and volunteered to be available to answer questions, but that the President has indeed recognized that the Select Committee recommendation should be referred to the appropriate colleges on this issue. When the Select Committee, a subcommittee of the Social Concerns Committee, prepared its Interim Report, decisions had to be made about referring the recommendations to the appropriate bodies for consideration, and all agreed that the curricular issue should naturally come to Educational Policy. In retrospect, that appears to have been an error.

Asked if the goal was the creation of a major in gay/lesbian studies, Dean Cowmeadow said she expected the discussion to proceed in stages; at this point, all that is being talked about is courses--inclusion of gay/lesbian issues in existing courses (e.g., family law), contributions of gays/lesbians to society and civilization, and courses which have a significant gay/lesbian content. Conversations thus far have centered more on the possibility of creating a center for gay/lesbian studies rather than a program--a step which would also reflect the trend elsewhere in higher education. Currently "center" discussions are underway at Penn State, Wisconsin, and Texas A&M, and there has been a center at CUNY since 1991; the latter recently received a \$250,000 Rockefeller grant to promote gay/lesbian scholarship. There could be no proposal for a major, she observed, until there is a comprehensive core of courses, faculty, and scholarship in the area. They are not far enough along, Dean Cowmeadow commented in response to a query, to learn of the extent of faculty interest in the area.

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Asked about whether or not gay/lesbian issues could be introduced at orientation, Dean Cowmeadow said that there is a brochure on gay/lesbian issues distributed to students at orientation. (It was also noted that any recommendation along this line was also probably outside the purview of SCEP.) Her recommendation, she said, was to use existing training programs to build awareness of the issues.

One Committee member inquired what the role of the program or center might be. Would it identify courses, the content of which deal with gay/lesbian issues? Would it develop new courses? Centers, at Minnesota and elsewhere in higher education, tend to be a catalyst for research and scholarship in an area, Dean Cowmeadow responded, so would presumably foster gay/lesbian studies. Moreover, the faculty who teach existing courses have never been brought together, and the center would facilitate doing so--and that, in turn, would presumably foster research, collaboration on papers, grant-writing, fora, and so on. One byproduct could be course development. It is unclear where all of this will lead, Dean Cowmeadow cautioned; the level of faculty interest must first be assessed.

Discussion next turned to the role of SCEP in the discussions. Historically--but perhaps more a matter of principle--SCEP does not become involved in decisions properly within the jurisdiction of college curriculum committees and the faculty. It deals, instead, with University-wide issues such as grading and evaluation of teaching. The University has guidelines for the development and approval of new academic programs, one Committee member pointed out, and such proposals and approvals are now being moved into the planning and budgeting cycle of the colleges, so such proposals are made only once per year. In this case, where proposals may come from both CLA and Human Ecology, the matter still properly rests with the two colleges, not with SCEP, it was said; there are many academic programs which cross college boundaries, and this one would be no different, in that respect.

It was agreed without dissent that Professor Tracy would report to the Senate Consultative Committee that the curriculum recommendation of the Select Committee is not a proper subject for action by the Senate, since all proposals for new programs should go through the appropriate college curriculum committees. Professor Tracy then solicited Committee members for their views on the proposal, for the record. Several points were made.

- The Select Committee made no statement on whether any program of study should be at the graduate or undergraduate level; the Select Committee consciously chose not to prescribe, preferring to leave such a decision up to the ensuing discussion.
- One Committee member offered the opinion that justification for any academic program must rest on a distinct intellectual approach, and there is no evidence of such an approach in this proposal. Rather, there appears to be a group of people, or an interest, that is not represented in the curriculum, and the argument is that they should be. This, it was said, is a pernicious principle that balkanizes the curriculum. Second, to the extent that there is an academic program focussed on sexual orientation, would there be a prescribed stance--some, for example, in their work have concluded that homosexuality is an aberration; would such a position be tolerated in the proposed new program? Third, for those who have had experience in the budget process recently, when departments have been collapsed/merged/eliminated, any argument for a new program must be compelling.

Dean Cowmeadow said she expected any good curriculum committee would deal with these issues, and that there are different perspectives, not one voice--as is true in all curricula. Diversity of opinion would have to be respected, as it should be in all of higher education. The Interim Report, Dr. Thomas added, does not substitute for the coherent and compelling justification that is needed. This is only the beginning of the conversation, he said, and it may or may not end in the establishment of a center. The recommendation is not, however, the result of a politically-driven interest group seeking

recognition.

Later, in response to the question about bringing in those of different views, Professor Thomas noted that, for example, that women's studies will not bring in anti-feminists and Judaic studies will not bring in anti-Semites. He agreed, however, that discussion of WHAT is anti-feminist is a matter for discussion.

-- The recommendations include training programs about gay/lesbian concerns, presumably directed to service individuals who deal with gay/lesbian people. In the case of academic units, would that also include the students? Dean Cowmeadow affirmed that the training would primarily be directed to faculty, staff, and administrators, although students need it also--the report documents that the gay/lesbian/bisexual community is largely invisible on campus, and with good reason: fear. The only way to address that problem is through education. One Committee member expressed reservations about "training" students; one would expect understanding to come from their education, especially for professional students--where many of them need to know the information to perform adequately. But training is not the right approach for students, it was argued--they need information, not training on the sins of the past.

-- Following on the point about training, another Committee expressed profound reservations about training as indoctrination in the treatment of selected groups--something that has become a "mania." It is dangerous for the country, it was argued, and serves to fill in the vacuum created by the failure to teach CIVILITY--something no one speaks for. Individual indoctrination leads to the likelihood of LESS civility, not more, and creates alien groups as a result. Such training, moreover, often appears to be motivated by revenge, as a means to get their own back. The entire effort is unhealthy, but nonetheless is countenanced and propagated by the administration.

Issue was taken, later in the meeting, with the assertion that training programs focussed on selected groups are motivated by revenge. When the time comes, Professor Thomas said, the case will be made for gay/lesbian/bisexual studies as a discipline, but much discussion will be required. While there is no way that gay/lesbian studies can be divorced from the reality of ignorance, discrimination, and gay-bashing, the Interim Report does not try to make the case for the curriculum recommendation; that will occur at the curriculum committees.

In terms of a program, there are historical precedents at this University, which establishes any program if there is sufficient interest. The various "studies" of the 1970s had no more or no fewer credentials than the present proposal, but they absorbed a lot of money that were badly needed by academic departments that are essential if the University is to remain viable. It is impossible to sever the link between content and funding, and no matter how good the program may be, it will consume money. Perhaps it would be a good idea to join the various "studies" into a program or center for race/gender/ethnicity studies, which might at least have shared administrative support. It could, agreed another Committee member, be elevated to the level of cultural diversity for the well-educated scholar--one must have this knowledge to live and function today.

Yet another Committee member supported the notion of civility--that ALL people are worthy of respect--as a better way to approach this matter than trying to remember to respect someone in a particular group or class. Dean Cowmeadow concurred that the assertion is valid, and one way to deal with it is to put the University's equal opportunity statement on syllabi and encourage faculty to take time in their classes to talk about respect for everyone.

- It might be useful to separate the curriculum recommendation from the other four recommendations of the Select Committee and to emphasize that the former recommendation is NOT part of a political action group's agenda. Any curriculum proposal will need to stand on its own merits, not because of the political activities of a group. If separated, any program or center would probably be more academically sound; if not, it will be perceived as part of a political agenda.

Professor Tracy thanked Dean Cowmeadow and Professor Thomas for joining the Committee; their style and grace in presentation, he commented, will do much to further the discussion.

2. Report of the Chair

Professor Tracy outlined the schedule to which the Committee will need to adhere in order to complete its recommendations on implementation protocols for the Senate Policy on Evaluation of Teaching Contributions. There will be three open meetings for discussion of the proposals, as follows:

Monday, March 8, 1:00 - 2:00, 202 St. Paul Student Center
Tuesday, March 9, 2:00 - 3:00, 15 Law Building
Wednesday, March 10, 1:00 - 2:00, 238 Morrill Hall

The Monday and Wednesday sessions will include telephone hook-ups with the Crookston and Morris campuses. Professor Tracy sought, and received, volunteers from the Committee to participate in the open meetings.

Three points were briefly discussed by the Committee as a result of reactions that have already been received:

- To what uses will the results of the evaluations be put? The view of Vice President Hopkins, shared by the authors of the proposals to SCEP, is that--administratively--they will be used exclusively for promotion and tenure and merit salary increases. Improvement of teaching is not specifically dealt with in the policy, but the results of the evaluation--peer and student--could be also be used for this purpose as well.
- Must the specific questions set out in the Senate policy be used? There appears to be some confusion about this, but the policy requires--and it was the intent of SCEP--that EXACTLY those questions MUST be used. Any unit, of course, could add whatever additional questions it wished (although Vice President Hopkins has explicitly not promised that analysis of data for additional questions will be funded centrally).
- Psychologists who have reacted dispute the validity of using student evaluations in identifying good teaching, and suggest that some material be prepared to inform those who will be using student evaluations for this purpose about the current state of research.

3. Plus/Minus Grading

Professor Tracy next turned to the two students present and asked them about the results of their inquiry about student views on plus/minus grading. One student had surveyed over 50 students; the other had talked informally with about 40. The student reaction was overwhelmingly negative, for a variety of reasons reported:

- There would be too many increments, permitting greater subjectivity on the part of the faculty doing the grading; plus/minus grading would be appropriate in math and the

sciences, which are seen as more objective, but not in other subject areas, where the difference between an A- and a B+ would be less clear.

- One faculty member was cited as saying he would never give an A; the highest grade achievable, in many instances, might be an A-. This appeared to be especially true among IT students.
- The plus/minus scale might be more accurate, but over all students it would even out.
- There is no compelling reason to make a change.

After brief additional discussion, the Committee concluded without dissent it would be pointless to develop a proposal that would almost certainly be voted down by the Senate and agreed to drop the issue from further consideration.

4. Initial Reactions to the Crookston Campus Curriculum Changes

After reviewing the various approvals that were needed to effect the plans, Professor Tracy asked Committee members what their first reactions to the Crookston plans were.

Committee members offered a number of criticisms and concerns:

- The administrative interest in video communications is disturbing; if video could be used effectively for teaching, it would have been used years ago much more widely. It is alarming to think a big part of the educational program can be delivered by video monitors. This is a way to limit costs and has nothing to do with education.

Another Committee member agreed that interactive video is NOT the same as looking at people in the eye. It is ironic, it was said, that there is a move to interactive video at the same time the University wants to emphasize student involvement in their education.

- The emphasis on job orientation is of concern, especially if the University sees that as a big part of its future. This economy is not growing on jobs, and it is not a good idea to overtrain people for jobs that will not be there. Such training, moreover, does not train for the civility mentioned earlier in the meeting, nor does it train them to be thinking people.
- While agreeing with the previous point, another Committee member noted that it has been said the University needs representation in the northwest corner of the state, and in the case of Crookston, it was either change the program or close the campus. But there are not enough faculty to deliver four-year education, so there must be reliance on interactive video. This is not a bad way to meet the educational needs of that part of the state.
- Students do not want to watch TV; "I'd rather join the Peace Corps." One student maintained that the University should not be a place to train for jobs, but a place where students can learn what they want, whether or not it has any practical application. If the University is to remain a university, all campuses should reflect its mission and not train for careers.
- Another Committee member expressed distress at the language of the planning for planning document, the role of the University in broadening career-oriented education, education different from liberal arts education. Any program labelled "training," it was

said, should be closed. This isn't a case of training a professional person; the critical distinction between the University and other institutions is the generation of knowledge, not just its transmission.

- Another student argued that there are practical reasons for retaining the outstate campuses, as well as ideological reasons, and they need to be able to have different curricula. There needs to be diversity in teaching because students learn different ways; the University cannot become an elite institution. It would be "tragic" to think about closing Crookston, it was said; the campus must be permitted to change. Insofar as the problems with TV are concerned, if strengthening the curriculum requires additional funding, then the University should provide it.

The history of the Crookston campus was then reviewed. It has been a two-year technical institution with an emphasis on critical thinking and socialization that differentiated it from the Technical Colleges. They have not just trained technicians; they have tried to give students the tools and techniques but also the principles so the students can expand their thinking.

The new plan will consist of large clusters of occupations that are not likely to disappear. One concern is that there are too many people with a liberal education who are selling shoes, who cannot find a job because they don't have the skills they need.

Interactive television, it was said, is not a panacea, but it works when towns are 60 - 80 miles apart and there are 3 - 4 people in each town who won't travel the long distances frequently but who will join with others at different sites on television. The University serves those people well. Interactive television does work better, in some cases, because the student can insist on the instructor's attention or get help with a paper, something that might be difficult in a classroom setting. Classes using interactive TV, another Committee member pointed out, do not predominate in any of the 11 programs, but are a feature of all of them.

This program does an attractive job of balancing necessity with vision, said one Committee member, and good administration makes a virtue of necessity.

One concern is the extent of the liberal education requirements in the eleven programs. There is a large variance in the number of electives among the programs; could there not be more structure? The general education courses in all programs consist of composition, psychology, and speech, plus ethics and cultural pluralism in American history. And what about language--is that not important in an age of increasing international trade? The proposed general education courses, the Committee was told, are the ones the advisory committees from business said they needed; others are possible.

- It is not clear that a 4-year degree from Crookston would allow entry to the Graduate School of the University; it appears that many graduates would NOT be admissible. It is a concern that the University would offer a baccalaureate degree, the holders of which could not get into graduate programs at the same institution--which says this degree is second-rate. This, if true, would be a disservice to students, who might think they are getting a bona fide degree. As a taxpayer, said one Committee member, one can ask why the University, which is much more expensive, is offering this kind of program.

The test will be experience, said another Committee member; in theory the graduates are admissible, although it is questionable whether the graduates could do what is necessary for graduate work--but that is not the intent of the program. It is not appropriate, it was responded, to wait on experience; students could select Crookston because it is cheaper and closer, only to learn they could not get into the Graduate School.

There was also some discussion about the pertinence of the Crookston program to possible future developments in the Twin Cities in light of comments on page seven of "planning for planning." In any event, observed another Committee member, one must NOT assume that the Crookston plan is envisioned for the whole of the University. But questions can be asked, when there has been experience with the Crookston program, how it might inform future new programs on the Twin Cities campus.

The Committee adjourned at 3:15.

-- Gary Engstrand