

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, December 10, 2008
2:00 – 4:00
238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Cathrine Wambach (chair), Joseph Bartolotta, Gail Dubrow, Megan Evans, Shawn Friedland, April Knutson, James Leger, Richard McCormick, Robert McMaster, Kristen Nelson, Peh Ng, Jane Phillips, Emily Ronning, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Molly Tolzmann, Michael Wade

Absent: Shawn Friedland, Paul Siliciano, Erin Sperling, Joel Weinsheimer, David Zeller

Guests: Steve Fitzgerald (Office of Classroom Management), Professor Thomas Michaels (chair, Classroom Advisory Subcommittee)

[In these minutes: policy review: (1) academic calendars; (2) evaluation of teaching; (3) grading and transcripts; (4) holds on records and registration; (5) classroom management; (6) makeup work for legitimate absences; (7) syllabus requirements and guidelines; (8) maintaining course records; (9) classroom scheduling issues]

Professor Wambach convened the meeting at 2:00 and turned to additional policy revisions.

1. Policy Review: Academic Calendars

A member of the Faculty Senate said that Saturday finals in the spring are a problem because students are trying to get away to jobs, internships, and the like. Professor Wambach said she had relayed the question to Dr. Falkner. Dr. Falkner related that it would be possible to back finals up so that they did not extend to Saturday, but only by eliminating a day (or two) of instruction. The Twin Cities campus needs a full six days for finals, and they have never heard a complaint about finals ending on Saturday in spring semester. The complaints come when Labor Day is late so that fall-semester finals run late into December. There would also be a problem with CLA commencement, which is the first Sunday after spring semester ends.

Dean Green said this is the wrong motivation for changing finals and shortening the semester. Dr. Knutson said that students already get out sufficiently early, especially compared to the end of spring quarter before the academic calendar changed. The Committee concurred. Professor Wambach noted that some instructors accommodate students with special problems, which is their right.

Dr. Falkner said the Registrar's Advisory Council recommended an additional clause in the policy barring changes in a campus calendar less than two years ahead of time. She noted that while the Twin Cities calendars stay fixed once adopted, the coordinate campuses seem to tweak theirs almost every year. The idea is to have it set in stone so that undergraduate students know what their

* 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.

schedule will be until they graduate. Professor Ng agreed. The Committee endorsed the additional language.

2. Policy Review: Evaluation of Teaching

Professor Wambach reported that members of the Faculty Senate had made suggestions about the proposal to eliminate the restriction on using the evaluation forms for classes with fewer than five students. One suggestion was to leave it optional, another was that it would be a burden on Ph.D. students (who would be unwilling to make negative comments about faculty whose support and recommendations they would need), and that perhaps a different form could be used. She noted that the Committee on Faculty Affairs had voted unanimously to support the position this Committee has taken (eliminate the restriction).

The concern was for anonymity, Dean Green observed. Ms. Evans pointed out that the instructors do not receive the forms until after grades have been posted; Professor Ng said that even in classes of 10 or many more students, she can still recognize handwriting if students include written comments; Ms. Ronning reported that when candidates for Graduate and Professional teaching award are being considered, they nominating committee looks at teaching scores, so if the forms were optional, some candidates could be at a disadvantage because they would not have scores; Professor Wambach commented that even with online ratings, if a student makes a comment, in a small class the instructor can often tell who the author is.

Professor Ng said that if the new form is the best one around, it should be used for small classes. Professor Leger commented that departments must use the form but they have discretion in how to use the results. The Committee concurred.

Professor Wambach commented that the Office of Measurement Services will not do statistics on data for small courses (mean, median, standard deviation, etc.) but will provide the raw data.

A second point raised at the Senate was about the use of data from the student-release questions. The current policy language provides that these data may NOT be used in reappointment, promotion, salary, or tenure decisions. Can the data be used if the instructor wishes to do so? The Committee agreed to add a phrase so that such data cannot be used "without the permission of the instructor."

3. Policy Review: Grading and Transcripts

One member of the Senate inquired if an instructor's superior can instruct an instructor to change a grade. An additional question was posed: can a department head/chair or dean change a grade without the consent of the instructor? Committee members offered several comments.

-- At another institution one SCEP member served at, the superior could not change the grade but the administrator in charge of undergraduate programs could.

-- Grades have been changed at Minnesota, although it is very rare.

-- It is rare, but there have been cases where a student faced an injustice and a grade was overridden. This is not a recurring infringement of an instructor's academic freedom but comes up when a student makes the case that the instructor has it in for him or her; if there is an injustice, there is need to deal with it.

The Committee concluded it would be best left vague. Grades are not grievable but the policy does provide guidance to students who have questions about a grade. If there is a provision that a dean or the Provost's office can override a grade, that will create traffic to the dean's office, and the Committee would have to develop procedures and criteria on when and how grades could be overridden.

The Committee agreed with another suggestion from the Senate, however, that an instructor is obligated to provide an explanation for a grade, if questioned, even though not obligated to change the grade.

4. Policy Review: Holds on Records and Registration

This is a new policy, Professor Wambach noted, although only in that it is now pulled out from other policies and stands alone.

The Committee had modest editorial suggestions and approved the following language:

Holds may be placed on a student's record, which may mean, among other things, that the student cannot obtain an official copy of his or her transcript and/or cannot register for courses.

1. Advisers may at any stage during a student's undergraduate career impose a hold on the student's record when appropriate for advising purposes.
2. The University may place a hold on a student's record for failure to meet financial obligations to the University.
3. Holds may be placed on a student's record for other reasons determined appropriate by the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost and/or Senior Vice President for Health Sciences.

5. Policy Review: Classroom Management

This is policy drawn from the Classroom Expectations document, Professor Wambach noted.

Professor Wade questioned the use of the word "neaten" in the language identifying instructor and student responsibilities to the classroom, and Ms. Phillips observed that many ignore the rules governing the consumption of food and beverages in designated classrooms.

The Committee agreed that some language creating expectations that instructors and students would leave classrooms orderly was appropriate and left the wording to the subcommittee. It was also agreed that the language about food and beverages should remain in place so it can be enforced, with

the understanding that discreet variations on occasion would occur, but that instructors and students would clean up and that instructors and departments could and should enforce the ban for classrooms with equipment that could be damaged by food or beverage spills.

6. Policy Review: Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences

Professor Wambach reported that the language of this policy had come up in discussion at the Senate Consultative Committee, when students contended that participating in "Support the U Day" at the legislature were covered by the policy (below).

1. Students will not be penalized for absence during the semester due to unavoidable or legitimate circumstances. (This provision does not apply to final examinations.) Such circumstances include, but are not limited to, verified illness, participation in intercollegiate athletic events or other group activities sponsored by the University, subpoenas, jury duty, military service, and religious observances. Such circumstances do not include voting in local, state, or national elections. Instructors are encouraged to accommodate students who wish to participate in party caucuses, pursuant to Board of Regents resolution [See <http://www1.umn.edu/regents/minutes/2005/december/board.pdf> , p. 147] (Note: "sponsored by the University" typically involves institutional funding or staff support; any dispute about whether an activity is sponsored by the University will be resolved by the Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost.)
2. It is the responsibility of the student to notify instructors of such circumstances as soon as possible and to provide documentation to the instructor to verify the reason for the absence.
3. If a student is absent due to circumstances identified in (1) and has complied with the notification requirement, the instructor may not penalize the student and must provide reasonable and timely accommodation or opportunity to make up exams or other course requirements that have an impact on the course grade.

The problem is that it is not clear what "University-sponsored" includes; it is not specific enough, Professor Wambach said. What about University events to which students are invited when they have won an award, Ms. Phillips asked? What about interviews for medical school, which the students do not control? The University sponsors a lot of activities for students, many of which are more important than lobbying. Another problem, Professor Wambach said, is ambiguity about who is to decide.

The Committee agreed the language about "University-sponsored" needed work.

7. Policy Review: Syllabus Requirements and Guidelines

Professor Wambach reported that after discussions in the policy-review subcommittee, she had rewritten this policy to make it clearer and to divide the elements between requirements and expectations. The Committee reviewed the draft and concurred with it after minor editorial revisions were suggested.

Professor Leger commented that the required policy statements make a lot of things mandatory. Ms. Phillips commented that requiring each department to make them available would mean a lot of duplicate work across departments and could also mean that departments would not necessarily have the most recent versions of policies. Dr. McMaster agreed and said that departments and colleges cannot change the policies, there should be standard copy available to all. Professor Wambach said that if the required elements could be collected in one central place, instructors could download them and the obligation to add them by reference or by link on an electronic syllabus would not be burdensome. One argument that has been made, she added, is that first-semester students should be provided paper copies of the policies so they are aware of them; after that, they would know they are available and could be provided a web link. It was agreed that the Provost's office should be asked to provide a single source, on the web, for all of the policy statements. But it was also agreed that the link should be to the set of policies and that they should not all be lumped together.

Professor Nelson inquired if this provision is usual: "Statement on extra credit (If an instructor wishes to offer what is commonly known as extra credit opportunities for students in a class to allow them to improve their grade, those opportunities must be announced and made available to all students. If an instructor does not offer extra credit he or she should say so. This provision does not address the option of increasing the number of credits a student may earn for the course.)" Professor Wambach commented that it was this issue that led to trouble in the men's basketball scandal a few years ago. Ms. Ronning said this was important for students to know as well: if there are to be extra-credit opportunities, they must be available to all. It was noted that some instructors do offer extra credit work to students.

8. Policy Review: Maintaining Course Records

This is another policy that was drawn from the "Classroom Expectations" document, Professor Wambach reported. It provides in essence that student papers/projects must be kept for 30 days after course grades are posted, after which period they may be discarded, and that grade books or equivalents must be kept for at least a year (or, if there is an appeal, until the appeal has been settled). These provisions accord with federal law.

Professor Nelson said the 30-day limit could be a problem for students who must leave after spring semester and do not have a chance to pick up their work. The Committee agreed to include a provision that students can ask that their work be retained until 30 days into the next semester (not including summer).

The Committee also agreed (1) that the appropriate document-destruction procedures should be followed (that is, student papers not simply thrown in a dumpster) and that there should be a reminder to instructors about federal and state privacy laws (that is, one cannot leave graded papers lying in a box in the hallway for students to pick up).

9. Classroom Scheduling Issues

Professor Wambach now welcomed Mr. Fitzgerald (and subsequently Professor Michaels, who arrived a bit later) to the meeting to discuss classroom-scheduling issues.

Mr. Fitzgerald distributed two handouts, one of which itemized urgent scheduling issues and said he wished to provide an update on emerging problems, some of which are significant. He noted that the Office of Classroom Management (OCM) and/or Vice Provost McMaster has been collaborating on solving this issue with the deans, undergraduate deans, the Classroom Advisory Subcommittee, and department schedulers. Based on the trends, he said, (declining classroom inventory, an increased number of courses, and decreased compliance with scheduling policies and procedures, there will not enough classrooms for fall semester 2009. Spring 2009 is borderline, with 220 courses not yet places as of December 5. Mr. Fitzgerald pointed to several worrisome indicators.

PROJECTED ENROLLMENT ERROR BY DEPARTMENTS: Standard is +-10%; spring 2008 it was +26%.

ASEMETRIC COURSE REQUIREMENTS OF DEPARTMENTS: Overuse of peak time has concentrated classroom shortages in peak hours, especially on Thursday and Tuesday. The Twin Cities campus has vacant classrooms on Monday, Friday, and in early mornings. Is this because of a preference for offering 3-credit courses in two 75-minute sessions, Professor Wambach asked? One department has 117 discussion sections on Thursday, Mr. Fitzgerald said, and a number of departments like the 75-minute T-Th sessions because they prefer mid-week classes. Could they allow some 75-minute sessions twice per week on M-W or W-F, she asked? They have tried to allow M-W, W-F and M-F early and late ("C" time) sections Mr. Fitzgerald reported, but they have to watch for vacant areas and must be careful about student schedules.

COURSES SCHEDULED BY DEPTS BUT LATER CANCELLED: Standard is 5%; spring 2008 it was 8% (1264 sections).

NON-CONFORMING COURSES SUBMITTED BY DEPTS: In Spring 2008 it was 8% (1309 sections). Policy is for all courses to conform to standard, but liberal exemptions apply (non-peak graduate/professional courses and all courses after 5:00 PM are exempt), and the 8% figure does NOT include authorized exemptions.

UNDERUTILIZATION OF DEPT CLASSROOMS for rooms with capacity greater than 10: Fall 2007 departmental classroom utilization for courses and events was 36%.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Achieve improved compliance with existing University Senate and Provostal policy and scheduling guidelines
- Departments and colleges spread courses over days of week and time of day
- Make greater use of the 190 departmental classrooms and other meeting space if necessary
- Increase the number of general purpose classrooms (especially 20 -60 capacity).

Professor McCormick noted that he teaches film so needs sessions of two hours. There are enough film courses at the University that they should be treated like labs. The policy recognizes there are legitimate exceptions from the standard schedule, Mr. Fitzgerald responded, including film studies. They want to work with departments that have specific

requirements, and the more they can work with them to make consistent use of space, the better the space will be used.

Minnesota is more flexible than almost every similarly-large school in the country, Mr. Fitzgerald said, and they try to balance between flexibility and efficient use of space. But there is a campus culture issue that has financial implications; the more flexible they have, the more that additional funds are needed for classroom inventory and space. The numbers tell the story, he said; the campus is not as efficient as it should be.

Ms. Phillips said that one reason sections are cancelled is because units are pressured to offer a lot of them so students have ample opportunities, but then some of them have only very small numbers so are cancelled. But they cannot add sections later, to meet demand because students can't fit them in their schedules. Meantime, they have to reserve the classrooms even if they know some sections will be cancelled. Mr. Fitzgerald said he understood but reported that the bulk of the sections roll forward from the previous semester and never open for registration. The data system identifies these sections but cannot stop them from rolling over, and they must rely on departments to know what they teach and do a good job of projecting their schedule. He expressed doubt that units over-project their instructor requirements by the 26% that they over-project enrollment.

Partly the system is broken because of disincentives, Professor Nelson commented. People are doing what they are told: they should not just lecture, they should have interactive sessions, so they need two-hour blocks of time. Maybe there is a need for new pairing. Another disincentive is that if one raises the enrollment limit on a course, the instructor may lose the classroom he or she has been using.

On a related point, Mr. Fitzgerald said his office tracks enrollment carefully and they know the number of students in a course. They add 10% to the number in making projections for the next semester. Often they receive inflated numbers from departments that have no basis in fact. Nancy Peterson in his office tries to provide the numbers to about 120 departments and tell them what she is doing. All departments can view enrollment data and reports but it is difficult to get them to look at them.

Professor Michaels said he wished to emphasize three points:

-- The Committee does have the Classroom Advisory Subcommittee, of which he serves as chair, to provide a forum and advice for the Office of Classroom Management. OCM is data-driven and quantitative but it is aware of academic needs. He encouraged people who have questions about classrooms or equipment or data to ask the subcommittee or Mr. Fitzgerald.

-- There is a serious issue but solutions lie in the procedures that already exist. Departments follow patterns and do not like change. The subcommittee has adopted a

resolution (below) that points out that if departments play by the rules, the campus can deal with the classroom problems.

-- The subcommittee will forward another resolution that asks the University to project the number of classrooms that will be needed as they take buildings out of commission. The campus has not done enough to fund quality space as new space as new buildings are built (not just classrooms, but also out-of-classroom space where learning occurs). Professor Wambach noted the problems that can arise when new buildings are not owned by a single department.

Professor Wade asked if there is a difference between Minneapolis and St. Paul in terms of classroom problems. Minneapolis faces a much more severe demand problem, Mr. Fitzgerald reported. That said, however, there is still a shortage on Thursday afternoons even on the St. Paul campus.

How hard-nosed is he in insisting that departments use their own space before they ask him for classrooms, Professor Wade then inquired. They have data on utilization of department classrooms, Mr. Fitzgerald said, but the policy does not prescribe a particular level of use of department classrooms. Better use of them would help. Some peer institutions have a policy; Wisconsin, for example, requires a department to use department classrooms for at least 22 hours per week for instruction before it may request the use of central classrooms.

What about new buildings such as the Carlson School addition, Professor Wade asked? There are more than 30 centrally-scheduled classrooms in the Carlson School, Mr. Fitzgerald said, that are used mostly by the Carlson School but also others.

His college is trying to tighten the numbers of students in classes, Professor Wade observed, and tries to put sections together, but they often do not know until the first day of classes. Any changes on the first day of classes are fraught with risk, Mr. Fitzgerald commented.

Professor Wade suggested using the skyboxes in the new stadium; perhaps students would be willing to pay a fee to have classes there. They are looking at the stadium, Mr. Fitzgerald said, and asked that anyone who knows of small spaces available in it that could serve a small course let him know. They are working with the Provost to provide a small incentive fund to bring department classrooms under central control by offering new equipment and furniture.

Professor Wambach said the Committee would return at the next meeting to the motion forwarded by Professor Michaels, and adjourned the meeting at 4:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota

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Classroom Advisory Subcommittee

The Classroom Advisory Subcommittee (CAS) recommends that the Senate Committee on Educational Policy (SCEP) support the Office of Classroom Management's (OCM) efforts to enforce existing classroom scheduling policies and to remediate the urgent course scheduling issues affecting classroom availability in Spring 2009 and Fall 2009.

The Office of Classroom Management (OCM) recently advised CAS that they are facing critical problems in reconciling the demand for classrooms with the number, capacity and functionality of the general classroom inventory at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities (UMTC). CAS takes very seriously the prediction by OCM that the UMTC campus will not be able to place in classrooms all courses scheduled for Fall 2009 semester. CAS also expresses alarm that as of December 1, 2008, over 280 UMTC courses scheduled for Spring 2009 semester had not yet been placed in classrooms.

OCM has identified five key problems that CAS contends can be addressed at the department level and monitored by colleges:

- Departments overestimate projected enrolment in courses which results in mis-scheduling of scarce classrooms. The UMTC standard allows for 10% enrolment prediction error, but the aggregate projected over-enrolment in 2007 was 28% for the Fall semester and 23% for the Spring semester.
- Departments over-schedule courses at peak classroom times, especially on Tuesday and Thursdays. UMTC has classroom vacancies on Monday, Friday and early morning.
- Departments request classrooms for courses that are later cancelled. The UMTC standard allows for 5% cancelled courses. 8% of Fall 2007 courses were cancelled as were 11 % of Spring 2008 courses.
- Departments schedule courses at non-standard times, which results in inefficient classroom scheduling as well as course conflicts for students. In Fall 2007 and Spring 2008, 8% of courses did not conform to the standard class time policies, not including those courses with authorized exemptions.
- Departmental classroom resources are underutilized. In Fall 2007 the 190 departmental classrooms at UMTC showed 38% utilization during the peak demand times compared to 71% utilization for general classrooms during peak times.

Departmental accuracy in the submission of classroom requirements continues to worsen. This, coupled with the decline in the classroom inventory, has brought the University to this scheduling crisis.

CAS supports OCM's aggressive stance in rejecting non-conforming course time requests and pegging of enrolments at the last level achieved by each course. CAS requests that SCEP reinforce OCM's efforts to efficiently allocate space through increased accuracy of departmental submissions and request that colleges monitor and enforce departmental compliance with university standards.