

Minutes*

**Senate Consultative Committee
Thursday, November 2, 1995
12:30 - 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall**

- Present: Carl Adams (chair), John Adams, Joel Bergstrom, Bruce Bromberek, Mike Davey, Virginia Gray, James Gremmels, Roberta Humphreys, Paul Kluge, Corey Kopacek, Laura Coffin Koch, Geoffrey Maruyama, Fred Morrison, Harvey Peterson, Helen Phin, Michael Steffes
- Regrets: Benjamin Duranske, Lester Drewes, Robert Jones, Malik Shabazz, Amber Strack
- Absent: Chad Tvedt
- Guests: none
- Others: Martha Kvanbeck (University Senate), Maureen Smith (University Relations)

[In these minutes: Search protocol; revised grading policy; semester conversion standards, including nature and timing of discussion]

1. Search Protocol

Professor Adams convened the meeting at 12:20 and reviewed the agenda. He turned first to the question of attendance at interviews, raised when students had difficulty attending the interviews with the candidates for Senior Vice President for Finance and Operations scheduled for them. There were three solutions, he suggested: continue to have separate student and faculty interviews and try to make better arrangements for students; merge the faculty and student interviews; conclude that students did not, for some positions, need to be involved in the interviews.

It was agreed, following short discussion, that the presumption would be that in most cases, faculty and students would share interview time, that in some cases the faculty and students would NOT interview candidates simultaneously, and that recommendations on candidates would continue to be made separately by faculty and by students. It was moved, seconded, and unanimously voted to amend the protocol on Senate Committee involvement in searches for senior officers to this effect.

2. Grading Policy

Professor Adams next turned to Professor Koch for a discussion of the proposed revisions of the grading policy. She recalled that SCC had earlier seen a draft of the policy; SCEP has revised it since that

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discussion. The biggest change, on the issue that raised the greatest number of comments, was removal of the A+ grade. SCEP is recommending that this policy be brought to the Senate for discussion in November.

Several comments and suggestions were made.

- The document needs a preamble, on why the policy is being changed. It should identify the fact that there are a lot of grading systems that are expensive to maintain and that create difficulties in transfer, and that the present system does not allow fine enough gradations of academic performance.
- What was the strength of the SCEP vote on the policy? (All but one faculty member voted in favor of it; the one dissenting vote was the Morris faculty member, whose vote was on procedural grounds.)
- If the policy is adopted, EVERYONE will be on a plus/minus system, although it will be up to individual faculty to decide whether or not they will give pluses and minuses.
- Serious transcript evaluation includes attention to the kind and number of courses, grades in them, and so on; the GPA is simply an aggregate measure. Was consideration given to possibly including pluses and minuses on the transcript but leaving the grade point values at 4.0, 3.0, etc.? One Committee member inquired why one would put them on but ignore them in computing the GPA.
- The Morris campus objects to being included in the proposed system and will ask to be exempted. They have a strong objection to the process, not on the specifics of the policy: that the system could be changed without discussion at Morris. They use the ABCDN system at Morris, after long study and practice, and it is unacceptable to them to alter it without discussion by all constituents. That is why, Professor Koch pointed out, the policy was put out on email and why it is being brought to the Senate for discussion.

This raises the general question of exceptions, which are granted in the policy to the Law School and the two medical schools. Why them? Morris can argue that if there are three exemptions, why not four? There have to be criteria on why exemptions are granted.

Law and Medicine have grading systems recognized in their professions; there are legitimate reasons for exempting them that should be spelled out. Any exemption for Morris would have to be similarly justified.

The purpose of the proposed system is to bring uniformity as well as allow increased gradations; if units are permitted to opt out, it defeats the purpose of uniformity. Morris might be interested in the increased gradations, but it awards the N, which is not counted in the transcript, and is comfortable with that practice. If the difference, in the future, were to penalize Morris students, then the scholastic committee would have to argue the issues out.

- If one takes a course S-N now and earns a C-, the student receives an S. Under this policy, a C- would be an N. What was the discussion in SCEP on this point? It was based on the definition of

the 2.00 and what was acceptable performance; anything below the 2.00 was not seen as fully meeting course requirements, so should not be an S.

Why make it harder for a student to obtain an S? Just because this is a change does not mean it is bad; if the current S is given for a 1.67, it SHOULD be changed so that a C is required.

- Would the introduction of pluses and minuses affect grade inflation? In the case of the Carlson School, which has used the plus/minus grading system experimentally for several years, it affected GPAs by 1/100th of a point.
- One Committee member said there should be no argument about uniformity, but that in going through grade books, students would have received more minuses than pluses in his particular case.
- What about students who are on the border between an A and a B; are there more arguments about pushing the grade up? The experience of the Carlson School has been the opposite; the argument for changing a B+ to an A- does not have the same vigor as the argument for changing a B to an A; the latter is a much bigger issue.

It was agreed that the policy would be put on the November docket for discussion.

3. Semester Conversion Standards

Professor Adams reported on discussions with the administration about the mechanism to be used for overseeing the semester conversion process. Both administrators, down to department heads, and the Senate have a lot of responsibilities; he is trying to ensure there is legitimate recognition of both executive and legislative prerogatives while at the same time avoiding gridlock. There will be an oversight/guiding committee, with one student and several faculty and administrators, to be chaired by Provost Shively; it is intended to guide and lead and coordinate timing as well as coordinate presentations to the Board of Regents. The process is intended to be collegial, with the oversight committee managing the process. In the meantime, both administrative and legislative groups will do the work.

One issue he has been discussed with Provost Shively is whether to bring general questions as the opening salvo in the discussions rather than specific proposals; this is an important style issue. Professor (John) Adams is bringing specific proposals to the tenure oversight committee, and Professor Koch appears to be taking the same track on semesters. Dr. Shively's concern is that there can be misunderstandings because specific proposals might be seen as putting the stake in the sand more than intended, and discussion could get stuck on those proposals. The Committee needs to think about this issue.

Professor Adams said he does believe, however, that the discussions must begin quickly and that people should be given the CURRENT parameters, even if those parameters may change as the discussion evolves. There could be a set of Senate meetings scheduled, with approximately six-week intervals (beginning with the November 16 meeting), to address questions and specifics. Those would then be taken up again at the next meeting, with revisions considered; done over a period of 18-24 weeks, presumably the discussions will converge on a set of standards that address the issues. At the second

Senate meeting to discuss them, in January, it would be said that these are the standards of the moment, and they could change, but they can be used for planning now. The department chairs, he reported, are VERY concerned about receiving guidance quickly, even if the guidance changes; units are having a hard time dealing with the issues in the abstract.

Professor Koch said she has the same sense, that people want something in the way of guidelines as a starting point. SCEP has talked about semesters already a great deal this fall.

The proposal before the Committee, she said, includes a calendar; if there is to be a 15-week semester, people need one to look at, including the holidays and exam period. This is only an example, she emphasized, and there is a lot of give and take possible. There has also been talk of a year-round calendar, so summer session also needs to be considered.

SCEP identified certain principles to be considered, and raised questions about them to begin the discussions. Departments, colleges, and students must talk about them.

One Committee member expressed support for the SCEP proposals, saying it represented a good balance. One does not want to put the flag in the sand now, but raising a lot of questions with no answers is not a good way to proceed. It is better to start with proposed answers to stimulate debate; the last answers to the questions will not come until the Senate adopts them. It may also be necessary to have one Senate meeting devoted to a discussion of all the oddities; it should be made clear what a solid undergraduate curriculum will be, then the Senate can deal with the oddities. The Senate cannot handle the oddities while trying to deal with the basic principles.

There are a lot of issues that SCEP has not discussed, Professor Koch pointed out, such as graduate education and how to deal with students who are at the University during the transition from quarters to semesters. SCEP will also not deal with such things as salaries and leaves; others will take those up. SCEP will take up educational policy issues, but those could affect a number of other policies.

To be a constructive discussion, said one Committee member, there must be a recognition of the student demand side and the faculty teaching--the supply side. This issue has been dropped on the University as the way to do things, and has been approached as a set of technical questions. It is not on the table because it has been thought through. There needs to be a rationale on the demand side and a discussion of how institutional and U2000 goals will be met. The Board of Regents is on record that this is an institution providing undergraduate education, among a lot of other things, so the semester system must be organized to meet the needs of undergraduate education.

Faculty appointments, the need to pay people, and an understanding of how this connects with workload policy must also be considered, even though the details have not been worked out.

Instead of a neat four-quarter system, with B appointments from September 15 to June 15, things will be different. The year could be divided into three parts, with people obligated to work one, two, or all three of them.

The discussion should start with a set of principles that opens the door to other discussions that must be held; it should NOT start with a discussion of whether the semester should be 14 or 15 weeks or

if it should start after Labor Day. What is it that is to be accomplished with respect to the instructional mission? These kinds of issues must also be dealt with at the same time specific proposals are being considered.

One Committee member maintained that these structural issues, such as the calendar, are fundamental for planning purposes and must be resolved early. It was said in response that one should start with the goals and what it is that is to be accomplished.

Some like decisions to be made by specific goals and objectives, with decisions moving toward them; others prefer specific criteria or values that are being sought. In either case, they should be included in a preamble, as should a general sense of the process that will be used.

Several other comments were made in the course of discussion.

- This is an opportunity to redesign programs to improve education.
- One senses that all institutions in Minnesota will be on semesters; do they all need to be on the same calendar? That is a less critical issue.
- Breadth is important to the baccalaureate degree and should be maintained. Generally, breadth is conceived of as 1/3 of the credits for general education, 1/3 for the major, and 1/3 for electives. With fewer courses under the semester system, there will be pressure to expand the major and have fewer electives; have there been thoughts on limits to the major?

One part of the SCEP proposal calls for 40 courses and a three-credit module as the norm. There has been a lot of discussion about what to do in certain areas that have special needs, such as the languages, math, and the sciences.

- Why require a set number of courses, rather than the number of credits required for a degree? Because if students took all 5-credit courses, they would only have 24 courses for a degree.

There has to be flexibility in the course credit module or this will be a disaster for the sciences. SCEP has been trying to deal with this issue; it does not want a situation where students have accumulated 140 credits and still don't have a degree; they do not want departments to play games with the requirements.

SCEP has posed the question of whether there should be a minimum number of courses required, and if so, what the number should be. If there should not be a minimum, how will the University keep the number of electives and major courses in balance?

Some department chairs are very concerned about electives and the possibility that the four-credit module will be standard. Some programs will be squeezed out if the four-credit module is standard.

If one reviews the liberal education goals, translating them into semesters argues for more courses, not fewer, in the undergraduate curriculum. If one thinks of the many things to be accomplished,

40 is a floor. For departments that offer a lot of service courses, they can continue to provide the service and let students in other majors have access to them. There is a difference between the B.A./B.S. and the bachelor's degree in professional fields; the former implies breadth, a major, and liberal education, goals that are well met by a 40-course minimum. There may be different answers to this question in different colleges.

The reality is that students would have to average five 3-credit courses per semester. Even if there are variable credits, four-credit courses would probably continue to meet three times per week. The goal is that each credit equals one hour of instruction; currently, it is considerably lower than that. Moving toward the goal will be a burden on students and faculty. And many students must also work.

What has been described has led to "cheap credits and cheap degrees"--in the last twenty years, it has become progressively easier to get a degree, and some believe students are getting cheated--they are not getting the education that they're paying for. The goal is proper; it is trying to fix something that has gone wrong. One can get four credits for less than three hours of work per week in some units; that is a serious pedagogical problem that needs to be addressed.

The other side, apropos 120 credits, the question is how to reduce the credit requirements, keep professional standards, and retain accreditation?

The proposed requirement of 40 courses and 120 credits says the standard course will be three credits (it is improbable there will be many 1- or 2-credit courses), which means that for any 5-credit course, three credits will be "real" and two will be throwaways. There will also be problems with student financial aid and the state funding formula, if there are a lot of students who have a large number of credits but who have not graduated. It may be necessary to recognize that French and calculus are taught on a five-day week and that the number 40 may need to be smaller.

-- It is to be hoped that half-semester courses can be considered.

-- The draft suggests that a full summer session may not work, and that students do not want to attend in the summer. One hears two things: that students do not take summer courses because what is offered is not what they want, and that the faculty do not offer courses because there are no students. This is a metropolitan university with a significant number of part-time students who take a long time to graduate because they cannot get the courses they need. Richer summer offerings would help students get through. They would also increase relationships with other schools who want to spend time in school here during the summer.

A lot of students take a quarter off; if there are only two semesters, they will take the summer off.

The Berkeley experience, it was recalled, was that most students did not want to go year-round, and did not take advantage of the option when it was available. Most students here would not want to go in the summer.

When there are discussions of internships, companies say that summer is the worst time; they tell students to do an internship during the year and go to school in the summer.

One college of the University has made a serious attempt to offer courses during the summer and they are well attended.

Given that this is no longer predominantly an agrarian society, what is the real reason to take summers off? Are there more jobs in the summer? The reason is that students have had summers off all through K-12 and college is not the time to try to change that.

If there were three equal terms, it would give students an opportunity to work and take a lighter load, but attend all three terms.

Does a 10-week summer session relate to the fact that a lot of students come from other institutions, and it cannot be too early for those students? That is why the 14-week semester had a lot of appeal, and it has not been rejected. Three terms of 14 weeks has a lot of appeal because it solves a lot of problems.

The Committee then spent time discussing how to present the issues to the Senate. It was agreed that Professor Koch would make an informational presentation, with the remaining time to be used to start through the questions.

4. Docket Approval

Without discussion, the Committees unanimously approved the dockets of the Twin Cities Campus Assembly, the Faculty Senate, and the University Senate.

5. Report of the Committee on Teaching and Learning

Professor Koch reported that the report, to the President and the Senate Consultative Committee, came from a committee jointly appointed by the SCC chair and the President. SCEP reviewed the report and recommended approval; the President has "accepted" it.

Professor Adams inquired what action SCEP wished and what it means to say that the President "accepted" the report? Committee members discussed what disposition to make of the report. One Committee member noted that the report recommends recognizing faculty teaching success. Teaching recognition always seems to be directed to undergraduate teaching; it is to be hoped that as the report is implemented, public recognition will be given to other levels of teaching as well. Another Committee member pointed out that there are a lot of mandates in the report, and many of the recommendations undergird the critical measures. It is one thing to exhort people to do things, another to find out later what happened. These are very specific recommendations--deans should do this, provosts should do that, departments should do this. It is up to the administration to get the job done; one item on the agenda should be to ask what has happened.

It was agreed that SCEP would consider what action it wished SCC to take and that Professors Adams and Gray would inquire of the President the status of the report in his office.

One Committee member expressed regret that the report was focused on the Twin Cities; it would

be helpful if the chancellors were given the same kind of directives that the deans and provosts on the Twin Cities campus are given in the report. This is what the University is all about, not pluses and minuses in grading.

5. Responsibility Center Management

Before adjourning the meeting, Professor Adams noted that he had asked that a report on RCM be distributed to Committee members. There are activities with respect to RCM going forward, he said, and the President wants comments on the report. It will be taken up by Finance and Planning on November 28, and comments should be directed to Professor Morrison. SCC will rely on Finance and Planning to play the lead role in dealing with RCM, but there are significant issues that are worthy of attention.

Professor Adams adjourned the meeting at 2:20.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota