

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy  
Wednesday, February 25, 2009  
2:00 – 4:00  
238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Cathrine Wambach (chair), LeAnn Alstadt, (George Green for) Gail Dubrow, Megan Evans, Shawn Friedland, April Knutson, James Leger, Peh Ng, Jane Phillips, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Erin Sperling, Elaine Tarone, Molly Tolzmann, Michael Wade

Absent: Joseph Bartolotta, Norman Chervany, Robert McMaster, Kristen Nelson, Emily Ronning, Paul Siliciano

Guests: Jeremy Hernandez (Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost); Associate Vice Provost Laura Koch (Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost); Professor Carol Chomsky (Law School Learning Improvements Committee); Tina Falkner (Academic Support Resources)

Other: none

[In these minutes: (1) teaching awards; (2) credits for lab hours; (3) Welcome Week; (4) Law School rating of teaching; (5) 2013-2014 calendars]

**1. Teaching Awards**

Professor Wambach convened the meeting at 2:05 and welcomed Jeremy Hernandez from the Provost's office to bring the nominees for the Morse-Alumni and Graduate-Professional awards. She turned first to Professor Siliciano, who chaired the Morse-Alumni nominating committee.

Professor Siliciano reported that they had considered 20 files and that the committee did a great job. He suggested that Ms. Tolzmann should not be allowed to graduate from the University because she was too valuable on the nominating committee. He also said it was a humbling experience to read about the accomplishments of these 20 faculty members. They selected eight winners from the 20. The Committee approved the nominations unanimously.

Professor Siliciano observed that the nominees won the awards on the basis of records that cover many years of work, not just teaching and program development. The nominating committee felt that several of the candidates were put up too early (perhaps by a decade). They are very good teachers but were unable to match the record of achievement of those who won the award. Departments should be informed about the need for a significant record of accomplishment. Professor Wambach said that the nature of the credentials that merit an award can vary from year to year, and that some years a candidate need not have so many years of contributions. Dean Green agreed that the message should not be that one must be at the University for ten years or more to win the award. Professor Siliciano said the system works now but that he does not want to see people

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spend time assembling a nomination for a candidate who will not stack up well against other candidates.

Ms. Phillips wondered if it would be worthwhile to create the equivalent of a "young investigator's award" for teaching so that people can be recognized earlier in their career. Professor Siliciano noted that colleges have awards as well and that a number of the nominees had already won such awards. Professor Siliciano said again that what wins the award in addition to outstanding teaching is also program development, advising, and so on, the total contribution to undergraduate education. Dean Green suggested that departments be advised that scoring high in one area alone will not win the award. Professor Siliciano agreed and said that successful candidates have outstanding accomplishments in a number of areas.

Dr. Hernandez noted that this year saw the most Morse-Alumni nominees since 2001. The Committee has been concerned in the past that departments are not putting up candidates, Dean Green said. The recognition a candidate receives just by being a nominee is important encouragement itself.

Dr. Hernandez reported that there were 23 nominations for the Graduate-Professional Award, down from 24 last year. The Committee approved the nominations unanimously.

## **2. Credits for Lab Hours**

Professor Wambach reported that she had received a question from Laurel Carroll, who works with the Council on Liberal Education. A faculty member requested that her 2-hour lab be counted for 2 credits. There is nothing explicit in policy stipulating the number of credits for time in a lab, Professor Wambach said, but the tradition has been that 2-3 lab hours are to equal 1 credit.

The question is how this lab is different from others, Professor Chervany said. It may be acceptable if the lab is substantially different.

Ms. Phillips said it is not just a University of Minnesota standard that 2-3 lab hours equal 1 credit; that is a pretty standard understanding across universities. To grant 2 credits for a 2-hour lab would be a culture change. Professor Siliciano pointed out that if this general understanding is to change, so that there is a 1:1 ratio between credits and lab hours, a number of biology classes would suddenly go from 5 to 7 credits, merely adding a lot of empty credits to a transcript. Biology 2002 would go from 5 to 9 credits, Ms. Phillips added.

The argument in the appeal is based on how hard the instructor works, Dean Green observed, but not how hard the students work. Professor Chervany said the department could give extra credit to the faculty member for teaching a difficult course; he suggested the faculty member take up the issue with her chair because it appears to be a workload issue. But perhaps a policy is necessary.

The course could be 3 credits, or it could be 4 credits if students are required to do a lot more work outside class, Professor Wambach said. If the faculty member can document that students are spending a lot more time, it is up to the department to evaluate the appropriate number of credits for the course. Ms. Alstadt asked if anyone knew how much homework went with the lab; she pointed out that she spends one hour in a lab doing work but has to spend six hours for one credit reading philosophy. The work required in a lab varies a lot with the field, Ms. Evans said. And with the

course, Ms. Phillips added. It could be difficult to legislate. She said one can argue that not all lab time is intellectually challenging because sometimes one is learning a protocol or techniques, which is not the same as reading Kant.

Mr. Bartolotta said that perhaps the Committee would reconsider its view if there is evidence a lot of student work required for the lab. Dean Green demurred and said a request should not be invited because such a change would throw off comparisons with other lab courses—and students will shop around for the most credits for a lab. There are three elements to be considered, Mr. Bartolotta contended: student work, instructor work, and the discipline norms. Professor Chervany said there is a fourth: institutional culture. In this case, the question is individual faculty workload; if a DEPARTMENT were to make the argument about a course, that would be different.

Dean Green said that he would say "no" to the request because it is mostly about workload, which is irrelevant to the number of credits for a course. The Committee concurred.

### **3. Welcome Week**

Professor Wambach welcomed Associate Vice Provost Laura Coffin Koch to the meeting to report on Welcome Week 2008.

Dr. Koch distributed copies of handouts and began by explaining the extensive assessment plan they are using for the first-year experience. They look at the first-year student experience, including those who left the University, and also evaluate the Welcome Week program in considerable depth. They will also draw on the NSSE data (National Survey of Student Engagement) for University of Minnesota students. They noticed that for students who left, many did so for financial reasons.

They learned quite a bit about the Class of 2011. 178 students had left by January of 2008, of whom 34% were from out of state, 28% had GPAs of 3.1 or higher but 36% had GPAs of 1.0 or lower. New students leave for a variety of reasons, including financial, academic, medical, personal, or family. 70% of students who left did not have their parents at orientation; about half of those who left enrolled somewhere else. Professor Chervany asked if they look also at what happens to students from greater Minnesota; they do, Dr. Koch said, and added that acculturation into campus life is key. Dean Green asked about the number of freshmen who live at home; Dr. Koch said that about 18% are commuters (including those who live near the campus including Greek housing or residences such as Melrose Place), and the 82% live in the residence halls. She agreed that the University should keep an eye on the number who live at home because it could rise with the current state of the economy.

Dr. Koch outlined the data on 2008 Welcome Week. The total incoming class was 5106 students, of whom 4966 attended Welcome Week (97.3%). A few students were exempt—some student-athletes, band members, etc. They had 336 Welcome Week leaders, advanced students who each volunteered (i.e., were not paid, but were provided meals) over 100 hours to support the program. Ms. Alstadt commented that if only 172 of 4966 did not register for the following semester, that is not a very large percentage, and if in many cases the parents were not there, they may have known the students didn't want to be there, either. Or it could have been cost or first-generation students with parents who were uninvolved, Dr. Koch said. They offered activities for both residential and commuter students; 93% of residential and 75% of commuter students attended their first small-group

meeting and 73% of students attended all six small-group meetings. The biggest complaint from students participating in Welcome Week was that they were over-scheduled. Dr. Koch said they were worried that drinking could be a problem; it wasn't, she said, it was sleep deprivation.

Their general findings were that students' main concerns before Welcome Week were doing well in class, making friends, financial issues, developing skills, and deciding on a major. 1975 students completed surveys after Welcome Week; majorities indicated (1) they had a greater sense of community and identification with their class, (2) were more prepared to transition to the University; (3) said Welcome Week helped them acknowledge their individual responsibility to the campus community; and (4) they had a greater sense of institutional pride and respect.

About 90% of Welcome Week students attended convocation. They enjoyed the marching band, being with new friends, and receiving a Class of 2012 tassel from the President. Unfortunately, the faculty did not make a good showing and their participation has declined each year.

Dr. Koch reviewed briefly the programs of the various days of Welcome Week—College Day, University Day, Community Day, and Day of Service and Engagement—and other first-year programs. She reviewed the student concerns and the changes that will be made for Welcome Week 2009 (including more time for students to settle into the residence halls, more structured free time, a more intentional first meeting to set the tone and expectations, and moving convocation).

Dr. Koch also reported on how they, and the colleges, are mapping the content of Welcome Week activities to the Student Development Outcomes and Student Learning Outcomes adopted by the Senate. They are trying to make sure that the program activities meet institutional objectives and help students understand what the University expects will happen during their career as students. The colleges discovered that some of the activities they initially planned met none of the learning or development outcomes or that they all met the same ones. The planned activities were modified to address the outcomes. Students are informed about the learning and development outcomes and how they match up with Welcome Week activities so they can start to think about what the experience meant. They will ask students to reflect more on the experiences.

Ms. Phillips asked if students are ready to reflect on the learning and development outcomes. Some are and some are not, Dr. Koch said; not all are at the same place. Welcome Week is intended to provide an introduction. The ability to reflect does not come naturally so some students must be taught. The results of the reflections are not collected. But they want to introduce students to them because they are so important. After four years at the University, all students will know about the learning and development outcomes and be thinking about them as they apply to their lives.

Professor Wade asked if Welcome Week is seen as a way to help retain students (it is). Have retention rates gone up? They don't know yet, Dr. Koch said. They do know that slightly fewer students left this year than last year but they are also seeing more students with financial difficulties this year. It is difficult to identify Welcome Week as the cause of retention, Dean Green said; Dr. Koch agreed and said that is why they are looking at a lot of data related to the first-year experience, not just Welcome Week.

Professor Wade asked about the cost of Welcome Week. It was \$1.4 – 1.5 million, Dr. Koch said, and students are not charged for it. The biggest expenses are housing and food.

After a track record of six years, what outcomes are they looking for, Ms. Phillips asked. The biggest is retention above 90%, Dr. Koch said, and a 4-year graduation rate above 60%. It would be difficult to attribute either to Welcome Week, but it surely will help. They will also track the experiences of this cohort with the responses to NSSE surveys and their study of students who leave. Dean Green suggested that they not let the small number of students who leave be the dominant measure of success because many students leave for reasons the University cannot control; it is more important that they focus on the success of the vast majority and the impact of Welcome Week. Professor Wade agreed and said it is more important to assess the students who do not leave. Dr. Koch agreed but said retention is important. Finances for students are important; sometimes the University can help and sometimes it cannot. A number of students have come to the campus with no intention of staying (e.g., they intend to go home to Wisconsin or wherever). That is why they are collecting the data, to identify what is important.

Professor Chervany asked what the colleges are doing differently and said that he imagines that most students leave because of what happens in their college. It is right to do Welcome Week; how it feeds into the colleges is also important. They have put the colleges around a table to share what they do with students, Dr. Koch reported, and in some cases colleges have drastically changed what they do. Some colleges also use Welcome Week as part of their required first-year courses.

Professor Wambach thanked Dr. Koch for her presentation.

#### **4. Law School Rating of Teaching**

Professor Wambach turned now to Professor Carol Chomsky, who had earlier provided the Committee a memorandum requesting a variance for the Law School in use of student-rating-of-teaching forms.

Professor Chomsky explained that the Law School has had an exemption from the requirement to use the standard rating form; with the new standard form, they have worked on revising their own form and now request that the exemption be continued. They wish to adapt the standard questions for use in the Law School. Three questions would be the same as that used on the standard form; one would be modified (from "the instructor treated me with respect" to "the instructor treated students with respect"), and two would be omitted ("the instructor provided feedback intended to improve my course performance" and "my interest in the subject matter was stimulated by this course"). They are also considering some version of the item on the previous form, "the instructor demonstrated knowledge of the subject matter," but have not agreed on specific wording. They would use the same scale that has been approved for the new rating form (from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree").

They wish to change "me" to "students" in the question about respect because they do not want students to focus on their own situation but to consider the atmosphere in the class and the treatment of all students. The students on their committee suggested dropping the two questions because they would not provide useful information for law students, because mid-semester feedback through tests, quizzes, papers, etc., is not a Law School tradition so students would have no guidance on how to answer the question (they only have final exams at the end of the course) and because students take at least some of their courses not from interest but because they need them to pass the bar exam, so asking about interest in the course would skew the results.

They have never had student-release questions before, but worked with those on the new form. Law students have proposed modifications of the student-release questions on the standard form to adapt them for the Law School setting.

They also have a tradition of asking more open-ended questions than are provided on the standard form, from which they receive a great deal of useful information. They have six questions rather than just two. They are asking that they be granted the flexibility to change the open-ended questions without seeking Committee approval each time and to allow their clinic courses to use their own (much longer) version of supplemental questions tailored for that setting.

Professor Chomsky assured the Committee that the Law School uses the results of the rating forms the same way the results from the standard form are used around the rest of the University, in promotion-and-tenure and merit decisions, and the instructors do not receive the results of the rating forms until they have turned in their grades.

Professor Chervany asked if all colleges have the right to request an exemption. They do, Professor Wambach said, and the Academic Health Center has been granted a blanket exemption, subject to a report back to this Committee, and the Law School has had an exemption for some time.

Professor Chervany said he had a problem with deletion of the question about feedback to students on their performance. It is a good educational philosophy to provide feedback, and if they do not offer exams as a way to respond to student questions, they need to find some other way to do so. Removing that question gets Law School faculty off the hook when they should not be. Professor Chomsky said she was surprised when the objection to the question came from students, not from faculty. They need to educate students about what feedback means when there are no papers or exams during the semester. They need to educate students about how to get feedback, Professor Chervany responded, because students are short-changed if they do not get it.

How do law students know if they are not doing well, Professor Siliciano asked? Although some courses do provide more feedback, especially clinical courses, Professor Chomsky said, in many other classes the feedback is from student perception about how well they understand the dialogue in the classroom and how well they answer questions when called on in class. They also have an academic support program for first year students in which students participate in active problem-solving that provides additional feedback. Faculty, however, only know a student is having trouble if he or she asks for help, or if faculty engage a student in discussion and realize the student does not know what is going on in a course. Professor Siliciano commented that the Law School is a different culture but there should still be some feedback to students.

Professor Chomsky said that this is an institutional issue but these forms rate individual teachers. Law teaching traditionally relied almost exclusively on the Socratic method and all students were assumed to figure out their understanding based on either participating in the dialog in class or listening to it and comparing their own understanding, but students don't necessarily understand that as a "feedback" mechanism. There is more variety now, but still an overall dependence (in most doctrinal courses) on a dialog in the classroom and a single evaluative exam at the end. In that context, the question on feedback would not provide useful information on individual faculty. As the Law School works towards more ways of providing feedback, it can consider revisiting this question

on the form, but for now would prefer not to ask a question when the answer would reflect institutional rather than individual issues. Professor Wade suggested there are a number of places around the University that use the Socratic method.

Dean Green said that it is not the Committee's role to force the Law School to change its instruction but he suggested that Professor Chomsky could report that SCEP had a lively discussion and that the Law School should work on providing feedback to students. This is not a problem unique to the Law School, although it presents an exaggerated version of the problem; all units have some degree of problem with timely feedback.

Ms. Evans asked if they proposed to eliminate the question about what students could have done to be better learners. If the point is that students must be part of the process, they know that in spades in the Law School, Professor Chomsky said. They especially provide information and help for students in the first year so the students can better understand how to actively engage and become better learners.

Ms. Phillips said, about the "treated me with respect" versus "treated students with respect," minority students could respond "agree" but not believe it true for themselves. Professor Chomsky said that the comments they receive suggest students are not slow to talk about their own concerns. Their concern is that an instructor was disrespectful; this is not about gender or race, but about students who feel hurt because their answer was criticized. There was a strong faculty feeling that they wanted the latter wording ("treated students"). Have they asked minority students how they feel about changing the question, Ms. Phillips asked? They have not, but because the rating numbers are not reported by race or gender, that issue would not be visible in the answers anyway. The old version of the question (using "treated students with respect") has worked effectively, and any particular issues will appear in the narrative answers, which also ask about interactions between instructor and students.

Professor Wambach asked for a vote on granting the Law School an exemption from the policy. Professor Chervany said that because of the omission of the one question about feedback, he would vote no, but could support the proposal if the Committee could recommend the Law School change its question. Dean Green said he supported granting the exemption but asked that Professor Chomsky take back to the Law School the strong sense of the Committee that there needs to be attention to that issue and consideration later of adding the question back. The Committee voted unanimously to grant the exemption. Professor Chomsky said she would be glad to report back to the Committee.

## **5. 2013-2014 Calendars**

Professor Wambach turned last to Dr. Falkner to present the 2013-14 calendars. Dr. Falkner noted that she is provided the UMC and UMD calendars (they are not voted on by the Senate); the UMM and UMTC calendars must be adopted by this Committee and the Faculty Senate.

Ms. Phillips asked about the fall break on the Morris campus. Professor Ng reported that the administration brought the issue to the Faculty Assembly; several faculty said the semester should start on Monday (rather than Wednesday, as proposed) because they lose too many Mondays to holidays (and, at Morris, to the fall break) and the unpredictability of the weather. Their dean has suggested that the campus discuss the possibility of returning to the older schedule in the future.

The Committee voted unanimously in favor of the proposed UMM calendar.

For the Twin Cities, Dr. Falkner said, there are two options. One includes a Study Day on December 12 (Thursday) and on December 15 (Sunday), with exams December 13-14 and December 16-19; the other has the first day of finals on December 12, with no Study Day immediately after classes end but includes the December 15 (Sunday) Study Day, with exams December 12-14 and December 16-18 (thus ending exams a day earlier than the other option). The first option, with two Study Days, has been in place a number of years, and students seem to appreciate having the Study Day. The Committee promised the Minnesota Student Association that it would try to include a non-weekend Study Day in the calendar when possible. The calendar would not change when grades are due, which is always three working days after final examinations end.

The students on the Committee spoke in favor of the additional Study Day. The Committee voted unanimously in favor of the first option, with a Study Day on December 12 and on December 15.

Professor Wambach adjourned the meeting at 3:55.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota