

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs
Tuesday, December 6, 2005
2:30 – 4:15
238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Morris Kleiner (chair), Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, Dann Chapman, Vladimir Cherkassky A. Saari Csallany, Will Durfee, Janet Ericksen, Darwin Hendel, Theodor Litman, Steven McLoon, Kelly Risbey, Oriol Valls, Larry Wallace, Timothy Wiedmann, Lori-Anne Williams, Aks Zaheer, Virginia Zuiker

Absent: Arlene Carney, Carol Carrier, John Fossum, Patricia Frazier, Eric Gupta, Jane Miller, Geoffrey Sirc

Guests: Senior Vice President Robert Jones; Jackie Singer (Director of Retirement Benefits)

[In these minutes: (1) health care reimbursement accounts; (2) retirement plan fiduciary committee and this year's health care selection process; (3) policy on endowed chairs; (4) evaluation of teaching; (5) discussion with Senior Vice President Jones]

1. Health Care Reimbursement Accounts

Professor Kleiner convened the meeting at 2:30 and turned to Professor McLoon for a question.

Professor McLoon asked Mr. Chapman if it is true that the federal government has increased the time period during which one can spend health care reimbursement funds, and if so, has the University embraced the additional time—and if not, why not? Mr. Chapman said the University is looking at the issue; to accommodate the change will require a significant modification to PeopleSoft. He agreed, however, that every institution that uses PeopleSoft no doubt faces the same issue.

This is about employees losing their money, Professor McLoon commented. Mr. Chapman said that is really not true for the University; it has a very low forfeiture rate. His department counsels employees, and expenses can be submitted into the next calendar year. Professor McLoon said that making the change seems like the right thing to do, although spending a million dollars to fix PeopleSoft would not be. Mr. Chapman said that PeopleSoft is addressing the issue; it came up suddenly in the federal government and the rules are not clear, and organizations are scrambling to accommodate the change.

Professor Wiedmann asked if the contributions to the reimbursement accounts can be changed during the year. They cannot, Mr. Chapman said.

* 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.

2. Retirement Plan Fiduciary Committee

Professor Kleiner next asked Ms. Singer to present information about the Retirement Plan Fiduciary Committee.

Ms. Singer explained that in discussing the investment policy in the Faculty Retirement Subcommittee, they realized there was no good reporting structure on fiduciary issues. There was such reporting but it was not formal. She distributed copies of bylaws presented to the Regents and adopted by the President creating the Retirement Plan Fiduciary Committee.

The members include the Chair of the Retirement Plan Subcommittee and the University's Chief Investment Officer as well as three at-large members, one from each employee group (who will be required to have a background in finance or investments). Voting rights for employee representatives will extend only to the plans in which they are a member.

Anything administrative will continue to go through the Retirement Subcommittee; this subcommittee will focus on things such as plan expenses, investment returns, investment fund choices, and so on.

Professor Hendel commended the inclusion of the criterion for members that they have a finance or investment background, something often not included in the selection of committee members. He encouraged the University to do the same with other committees when appropriate.

Discussion turned to health care coverage. Professor Hendel commented that it appeared there were a substantial number of employees who had not selected health care providers by the November 30 deadline. Mr. Chapman demurred; he said the number was very small and that there remains a window for AFSCME employees to choose until Friday. He said he was not surprised that many had not made their choices earlier; past experience suggests that 80% make their choices in the last week—and 80% of those people make their choices in the last two days. There were only about 500 (some non-AFSCME) employees who did not make a choice; his office will follow up with those people to make sure they do not default to "no coverage."

Professor Cherkassky speculated that one reason many people made choices at the last moment was because there was a lot of material to read. Most people probably wanted to stay with their current provider, but names change. Is there any way to simplify the process for those who only want to stay with what they have? Mr. Chapman said that most people feel that way. This is the first year since 2002 that employees were required to make elections; before they have been able to continue with their current provider. It was a difficult decision but they decided to do so because there were a number of changes that people needed to pay attention to: different plan administrations, the change in the least-costly plan, and the change from a 2-tier to a 4-tier rate structure. They could not assume people wanted to stay in the base plan when it was a new provider. Mr. Chapman said he hoped the University would never again require positive enrollment; it was not their first choice and they know it creates work for people.

Committee members offered other opinions.

-- The process was more cumbersome and unfriendly than in the past and the web site was difficult.

- In the last version, when a couple includes two University employees, it was cheaper for one not to take coverage and the other to take family coverage; in the new version, it is cheaper for one member of a couple to take family coverage and the other to take single coverage.
- It was very difficult to find clinic numbers.
- It was cheaper to keep life insurance coverage for children than to go to the work to get them removed.

Mr. Chapman said he appreciated the feedback because they always want to identify ways to better serve the University community. He said he is both hopeful and skeptical about the on-line system. It is functional but not user-friendly; it is delivered by PeopleSoft, and they made the decision to go with the "vanilla" PeopleSoft system and not make modifications because any modification has to be installed on all future upgrades. They have been told that the next version of PeopleSoft will include significant upgrades to the administrative module (which includes health care). It is that possibility about which he is skeptical but hopeful. The University can revisit the decision to use "vanilla" PeopleSoft for this purpose in the future or whether to make modifications, if the site does not become more user-friendly.

Professor Kleiner thanked Ms. Singer and Mr. Chapman for their reports.

3. Policy on Endowed Chairs

Professor Kleiner said that Professor Wiedmann had taken the lead on developing a draft policy on endowed chairs.

Professor Wiedmann distributed a one-page handout summarizing the distribution of endowed chairs and professorships across the colleges, proposed principles, issues, and information needed. The University is spending about \$31 million per year on these positions (2002-03), so it is worthwhile for the Committee to pursue this issue. He said he had concluded, in discussions with others, that post-tenure review was too complicated to use for these positions.

Proposed Principles:

- Faculty with titles should be evaluated. (Professor Kleiner said there should be a requirement that the review is by faculty.)
- Goals and expectations should be set regarding teaching, scholarly productivity and contributions to service and outreach that take into account the unique expectations associated with the title.
- For titles of limited terms, there should be limited or no reviews, whereas faculty with titles without term limits should receive periodic reviews.
- Details of the review process should be left to the reviewing unit. (As is the case with post-tenure review.)

Issues:

- Differences in the level of appointing and reviewing: Teaching, scholarly activities, and contributions of titled faculty would be best evaluated by faculty within the same academic unit. However, appointments may occur at collegiate, provost or university level. (Should the faculty be drawn from a wider unit if the position is collegiate or provostal? Professor Wiedmann said he believed the academic unit should do the evaluation, since it best knows expectations and goals.)
- What should be the time threshold for initiating a review?
- What should the process for/nature of sanctions? (Removal of the chair? The post-tenure review process is formative rather than summative; should there be provision for allowing the person holding the chair to improve his or her performance?)

Information sought:

- Do units currently review titled faculty and if so, what is the process? (Is there a clever way this is being done that could be implemented across the University? Or are there parts of a number of procedures used that could be put together to create a "best practice"?)
- What is the opinion of the U's Deans, Provost, President, etc., in carrying out review of titled faculty in regards to process and sanctions? (The views of administrators must be considered.)

One issue that Vice President Carrier raised, Professor Kleiner reported, is that there are no data on what is being done. He asked that each Committee member learn how their units deal with endowed/named chairs and professorships and return at the first meeting of spring semester with a short report.

4. Teaching Evaluation

Professor Kleiner next reported on the debate at the Faculty Senate about the draft teaching evaluation policy. There were two sets of comments, he said: those about the general use of student evaluations of teaching (the questions are dated and there is research on how to do it better), and those about the two alternatives for the disposition of written comments by students (decided by the instructor or decided by the college or campus). This Committee took the position that the disposition of the written comments should be at the discretion of the instructor but the Faculty Senate was much more supportive of the position taken by the Educational Policy Committee (that each campus or college should decide).

Professor Zaheer asked about the differences between the two positions. Professor Durfee, who chaired the ad hoc subcommittee that produced the original report that led to the drafting of a new policy on evaluation of instruction, said that it was their view that because different units do things differently, it would be better to leave those variations in place. One important change, however, recommended by the subcommittee is that whatever the policy is (e.g., on the disposition of written student comments), it be made known. They discovered that some faculty did not know who was seeing the comments.

Professor Hendel said there was a clear sentiment in favor of the SCEP position; he said he also thought the more general comments were on the mark. The Durfee subcommittee had parameters, but in the discussions at this and the other committee, there has been sentiment that more basic changes are needed. Many of the Faculty Senate comments were thoughtful: if there is to be a policy on the evaluation of teaching, now is the time to start over. The system now in place is one that many do not like but it is the one we have—but it is not a forward-thinking policy. The University is putting a lot of money into instructional technology; the policy includes nothing about it. It is time to take a more basic look at the policy, he concluded. Professor Kleiner agreed that there was considerable sentiment along this line at the Faculty Senate meeting.

Professor McLoon said the current system will drive this place into being a more mediocre university. He said he could change his teaching, and get more approval, but believes he must teach the subject as it needs to be taught, not to reviews.

The University has a system to process data, Professor Hendel observed, but not to help understand how the evaluations improve teaching. If there are numbers involved, Professor Bribitzer-Stull said, it will always be a temptation for administrators to look at those numbers during promotion and tenure and merit reviews—it will not matter if the course was large or small, major or non-major, or what the personality of the instructor is. No faculty member wants to be evaluated solely on numbers.

Professor Durfee explained, in response to a question, that the subcommittee had been asked to look at peer and student evaluation, but it felt that student evaluation was a sufficiently large topic that it could not also do peer evaluation. They did not believe their charge was a broad mandate, although they did make some statements about validity. Professor Wiedmann said a comprehensive review was what was needed.

Professor Hendel said one must always keep in mind that there are three processes related to student evaluations of instruction: (1) how they contribute to decisions about faculty (an appropriate concern of this Committee); (2) how they affect the improvement of teaching (the appropriate concern of SCEP); and (3) how they are useful to students in making course selections. His concern, he said, is that all the data are processed and end up in faculty personnel files but the University knows nothing about how the system is working. It is irresponsible to have all that data out there but with no idea whether it is improving the University. Professor Cherkassky said that while the talk is about improvement of teaching, the focus should be the quality of learning—do students know anything six months after the final exam?

Professor Kleiner inquired if the Committee wished to ask the Committee on Educational Policy to look at the issue in a more comprehensive way. There was a motion; it received many seconds. Professor Ericksen said that if SCEP looks at the policy, it needs to pay attention to what the coordinate campuses are doing. Professor Wiedmann suggested this Committee retain responsibility for the first item Professor Hendel mentioned; Ms. Williams suggested this Committee identify one of its members to work with SCEP.

Professor Valls said that comprehensive means comprehensive; it would be a mistake to look only at student evaluation. Evaluation has two pieces, one of which is faculty/peer evaluation. It does not matter if the University must live with a mediocre system for another couple of years if it takes that long

to complete a comprehensive review. The Committee should not just tinker with the existing system. A comprehensive study should look at how the three goals Professor Hendel outlined are being accomplished and which parts of the process work and which do not. Professor McLoon said that the objection should also be made that student-based surveys are a poor method of evaluating faculty and course content. Professor Kleiner suggested there should be a value-added approach; Professor McLoon agreed.

Professor Zaheer responded to Professor McLoon: he said the Committee could not possibly say that the University cannot rely on student evaluations. It is totally appropriate that students evaluate faculty; the students are the client. The University has both a research and a teaching mission. But the evaluation system in place now is not a good one.

Professor Valls said he urged a comprehensive review because evaluation has two legs—and the problem is with peer evaluation. Student evaluations have numbers and comments; peer evaluation is a disaster. Some do a good job of it, others do not. There are no standards, no rules about what should be weighed.

The Committee voted to table until the next meeting action on the motion because it was not clear what precisely it wished to ask SCEP to do.

5. Discussion with Senior Vice President Jones

Professor Kleiner welcomed Senior Vice President Jones to the meeting and accepted a motion to close the meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

The Committee and Senior Vice President Jones discussed issues related to the University's activities in Rochester. It was agreed that Dr. Jones would return to the Committee in February.

Professor Kleiner thanked Dr. Jones for joining the meeting at adjourned it at 4:10.

-- Gary Engstrand