

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy**  
**Wednesday, December 16, 2009**  
**2:00 – 4:00**  
**238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Cathrine Wambach (chair), LeAnn Alstadt, Megan Evans, Kaleb Kalinowski, James Leger, Richard McCormick, Robert McMaster, Cody Mikl, Peh Ng, Jane Phillips, Michael Wade

Absent: Joseph Bartolotta, Norman Chervany, Kristen Nelson, Peggy Root, Paul Siliciano, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Elaine Tarone

Guests: Susan VanVoorhis (Academic Support Resources)

Other: Suzanne Bardouche (Office of the Vice Provost and Dean for Undergraduate Education); Kathy Julik-Heine (Student Senate Consultative Committee)

[In these minutes: (1) transfer students; (2) student academic work per credit; (3) Grading and Transcripts Policy: W counts against registration limit; (4) changes to grading policy; (5) pop quizzes]

## **1. Transfer Students**

Professor Wambach convened the meeting at 2:05 and turned to Vice Provost McMaster to share with the Committee a presentation on transfer students that he had given to the Faculty, Staff & Student Affairs Committee of the Board of Regents on November 12, 2009.

Vice Provost McMaster distributed copies of a set of PowerPoint slides and used them as the basis for the presentation. He said there is growing interest in and concern about transfer students because they constitute a large percentage of the student body (about 31% of the University's graduates do not start at the University). Some of the information presented to the Committee was as follows.

-- For the Twin Cities campus, the number of undergraduate students is at an all-time high, driven in part by very high numbers of new high-school students (5400, 150 more than planned) and in part by the highest number of transfer students ever (2780). The system enrollment trends are running in the same direction, with a high number of new high-school students and a record number of transfer students. The numbers by individual colleges vary, especially given the reorganization of a number of them.

-- The largest source of transfer students to the Twin Cities campus is the MnSCU community colleges (36% of transfers); others come from within the University (10%), from the U of Wisconsin system (10%), from Minnesota private colleges (9%), from MnSCU 4-year colleges (7%), and other places (31%). The top "feeder" schools are Normandale, UM-Duluth, and Minneapolis Community

---

\* 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.

and Technical College. Professor Wambach asked how many who transfer from these feeder schools originally applied to the University but were not accepted or did not come. When General College was dissolved, students were encouraged to begin elsewhere and then apply to the University. Do these numbers reflect such a pattern? Dr. McMaster said he did not know but that it is a good question for further study.

-- Most transfer students come with about 60 credits (72% have between 30 and 89 credits); 44% come in as upper division students and 56% in lower division.

-- In terms of other characteristics of transfer students compared to new freshmen, slightly more are white (77% v. 73%) and fewer are Asian (6% v. 11%); slightly fewer are women (51% v. 55%), many more are over 25, as one might expect (27% v. 0.1%), and more are part-time (12% v. 1%).

-- University students with transfer credits receive a Transfer Credit Report, which provides information on total credit transfer to the University as well as fulfillment of Liberal Education Requirements; the Office of Admissions sends the initial Transfer Credit Reports as well as updates to admitted and current students. This is all done electronically so students know where they stand and they can see the information as soon as they have been accepted at the University (so a student has full information about how credits will or will not transfer and can decide to enroll or not).

-- The online orientation, about two hours, serves as a good introduction into the University. Transfer Student Orientation provides students with the knowledge base to be successful, the interactions with advisors at orientation are overwhelmingly positive, and the transfer credit evaluation process is increasingly efficient and effective. It was suggested that the University should ask students about the quality of the online and in-person orientation. Students do not have to complete both the online and in-person orientation. 82% strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: "I appreciated having the option to participate in Online Orientation" and 88% agreed that "Online Orientation was a good introduction to the University." While there are differences between colleges in orientation for transfer students, for a student with a good record, the online version is probably sufficient. There has been discussion about a Welcome Week for transfer students, but it is not clear these students would want to commit to a week of activities. Dean Green suggested it is a big loss for transfer students if they do not live on campus; most of them, Dr. McMaster reported, do not, and there is no room in the residence halls for them.

-- About a month after the semester started, transfer students were asked to reflect on their experience. For each item, the first percentage is for transfer students and the second is for new high-school students. The numbers below indicate the percent of students who agreed with the statement.

Understanding what your professors expect of you academically	90%	83%
Developing effective study skills	77%	66%
Adjusting to the academic demands of the University	79%	76%
Managing your time effectively	70%	70%
Getting to know faculty	49%	36%
Developing close friendships with other students	50%	74%
Feeling part of the University community	57%	68%

It appears that transfer students respond adequately to the academic demands of the University but have different co-curricular experiences, which is probably to be expected because they do not live on campus and come to the University with other networks in place.

-- Graduation rates for transfer students are increasing; about 70% are finishing within six years of first entering college somewhere. Retention rates for transfer students are also climbing (in 2008, the retention rate for new freshmen was 90.6% and 87.5% for transfers). The original goal for new high-school students was 90%, so now it is 92%, but there has never been a goal for transfer students.

-- From the 2008 NSSE survey results: As compared with new high-school students, transfer students report significantly lower levels of participation in on-campus employment, co-curricular involvement, community service/volunteer work, study abroad, and a culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, etc.). In a nutshell, Dr. McMaster said, transfer students are not quite as engaged in the University as are new freshmen.

-- The Office of Undergraduate Education's recommendations for improving the experience for transfer students are: improved course access, more time with advisers, moving orientation to earlier in the summer, and providing additional ongoing information about campus resources. Ms. VanVoorhis suggested the Committee may wish to look at the structure of the registration queue; at present, transfer students are near the end of the line. The timing of orientation was also discussed.

With increasing numbers of transfer students, how is it decided how many there will be, Professor Wambach asked? The answer is important to college planning; is there a strategic process for deciding? There is a very thoughtful process around the process for deciding the number of new high-school students who should be accepted, Dr. McMaster said, but transfer decisions are more flexible and largely up to the colleges; they decide the number they want. It is a very imprecise calculation, Professor McCormick added; Dr. McMaster agreed and said that the "yield rate" for new high-school students is well-refined but more like guesswork in the case of transfers.

As there is increased retention for new freshmen, and greater demand for upper-division courses, Professor Wambach said, how will transfer students be accommodated in upper-division courses? This is a complex problem for faculty who teach upper-division courses.

Professor Wambach thanked Vice Provost McMaster for the presentation.

## **2. Student Academic Work Per Credit**

Professor Wambach asked the Committee to review suggestions from the Faculty Consultative Committee for further amendments to the Expected Student Academic Work Per Credit policy; the Committee approved the changes unanimously (new language in CAPS):

**1. Student workload expectations per undergraduate credit.** The Faculty Senate affirms the standard (first adopted by the Senate on February 16, 1922) that, for fall and spring semester, one credit represents, for the average University of Minnesota undergraduate student, three hours of academic work per week (including lectures, laboratories, recitations, discussion groups, field work, study, and so on), averaged over the semester, in order to complete the work of the course to achieve an average grade. ONE CREDIT EQUALS 42-45 HOURS OF WORK OVER THE COURSE OF

THE SEMESTER (1 CREDIT X 3 HOURS OF WORK PER WEEK X 14/15 WEEKS IN A SEMESTER = 42-45 HOURS OF ACADEMIC WORK). Thus, enrollment for 15 credits in a semester represents approximately 45 hours of work per week, on average, over the course of the semester. All online courses and all SHORT COURSES (WHETHER OFFERED DURING FALL OR SPRING SEMESTER, THE MAY SESSION, JANUARY, SUMMER SESSION, OR ANY OTHER TIME) MUST HAVE THE SAME EXPECTATION OF ACADEMIC WORK PER CREDIT, 42-45 HOURS.

Ms. Evans inquired what recourse is available to students if they feel the workload is significantly more than established by this policy. She said she has heard of a few cases where a credit required 12-15 hours of work per week. The professor argued that it is necessary given the nature of the course. Students could drop the course, Ms. Phillips observed, but Ms. Evans said that is not a good option for many students. Professor Ng pointed out that these are averages, in order to earn an average grade. What might be excessive for one student will not be for another. Dean Green suggested that a petition signed by the majority of the students in a class will more likely get a department response than will a complaint by one student. If he were department head and received such a petition, he would talk with the instructor. Ms. Altstadt expressed doubt that students would organize such a petition when bogged down in a course. Professor Wade said he would ask the instructor to reduce the workload, not remove him or her from the course. Ms. Evans said she did not believe this is a big problem and occurs in perhaps only a few courses. Professor Wambach also recalled data suggesting that students do not spend anywhere near the time on course work that this standard would suggest they should, which means that many classes have low expectations—and students are surprised when they run into one that has higher expectations.

### **3. Grading and Transcripts Policy: W Counts Against Registration Limit**

Professor Wambach brought back the revised policy that calls for a W in a course to count against the limit of two registrations for any one course. Ms. VanVoorhis objected because her office has no way to enforce the policy.

The Committee and Ms. VanVoorhis discussed the proposal at some length. Ms. VanVoorhis asked that advisors be invited to join the Committee. Professor Wambach said the Committee can start with problems it is trying to solve, including giving advisors authority to enforce the rules. Should it wait until business practices catch up to policy or should it blaze the trail? This gives advisors a point of intervention after a student registers for a course a third time (counting, with this proposed change, any case when a student took a W in a course). The policy also gives instructors the authority to intervene, she said, not just advisors. Ms. VanVoorhis said that instructors can always withdraw a student from a course; Professor Wambach expressed doubt they could do so without policy justification. The original justification for the proposal, Ms. Phillips recalled, was that it would give advisors policy authority to refuse to permit students to register for a course for a third and subsequent time, and to prevent problems with course access.

Ms. VanVoorhis asked if this is a big problem and said she would like to run the data. Professor Wambach said the Committee has already seen the data; the numbers are small but the problem occurs in courses with access problems. Professor Wade surmised that except for students who feel they must have an A in a course in order to get into graduate or professional school, the number of instances of repeated repetition of a course would be small. Ms. VanVoorhis said advisors

felt the policy would be a burden and were worried about it. She said she was not sure it gets to the problem the Committee is trying to solve. Professor Wambach said that good advisors will monitor student decisions, and the new ETS software can alert them, so that they can put a hold on student records for those who violate the rule. Dean Green commented that policies that are rarely needed can be used with discretion; this one can be used by advisors as a lever to get students to talk to them. Even if it is only enforced through advisor intervention, rather than in a statistical fashion, does not mean it is not useful to have as a tool to stop behavior. In the case of truly extenuating circumstances, the student can talk with an advisor, to the college director of student services, or to an associate dean.

Professor Wambach agreed to delay the policy for one more meeting and to hear from advisors, but expressed dismay and surprise that the Committee is suddenly hearing new concerns now after it has discussed this issue for over two years.

#### **4. Changes to Grading Policy**

Professor Wambach noted two minor changes in the Grading and Transcripts policy that were primarily clerical; the Committee approved them unanimously.

#### **5. Pop Quizzes**

Professor Wambach turned next to Ms. Phillips for a discussion of recent concerns that had come up in her college related to "pop quizzes."

Ms. Phillips related that her department (the biology program) gives pop quizzes during the semester in a number of courses in order to determine if students are making progress and engaging in the class. The department has been doing so since 2005. The rule is that a student may drop two of the scores from the ten pop quizzes for the semester. This term a student-athlete challenged the practice because she was forced to use the "drop" rule for quizzes he could not take because he was absent from class for athletic competition (and the absences were legitimate absences, following University policy). The policy on makeup work for legitimate absences provides that students may not be penalized for missing work if the absence was legitimate, which in these cases they were.

The department had asked Ms. Bardouche, in Vice Provost McMaster's office, for her interpretation; she concluded the student could not be penalized because of a legitimate excused absence. She noted that the policy requires students not be penalized for missing activities that affect their grade, so the department could respond in one of two ways: either allow make-up quizzes or allow the student to drop two scores from the quizzes she was able to take, even if that means dropping two out of eight rather than two out of ten. The remaining score would be prorated as 6 of 8 instead of 8 of 10. The same would be true for any "participation points" students receive.

If the department is forced to give make-up quizzes, they will abandon the practice of giving pop quizzes, because it would be far too cumbersome to be worth the work involved, Ms. Phillips said. Each quiz is only 1.5% of the grade. They started the practice because they were provided with data demonstrating that students who attend the classes receive As and Bs and those who do not attend fail in much larger numbers. With the quizzes, attendance has increased from about 50% to about 85%. They see the quizzes as a tool to encourage attendance and get better educational outcomes.

The bigger pedagogical-practice question, Professor Wambach said, is whether it is reasonable to require students who had a legitimate planned absence and missed two of the quizzes to use those for the drop option and avoid having to deal with a lot of excuses. She said she believes it is reasonable. Ms. Bardouche said the other option is to reduce the denominator for students who must miss class for University-sanction or excused events; that would fall within the language of the policy. She added, however, that a change in the denominator (the number of quizzes taken) should only be permitted when a student makes it known he or she will be gone. Why would a student-athlete's legitimate absence be different from any other legitimate absence, Professor Wambach inquired? Dean Green suggested simply changing the denominator. That means a student can miss two and then drop two more, Professor Wambach responded, so it is changing the denominator "because you're special." Would they allow a student who was ill to miss two and drop two, Dean Green inquired? They would not, Ms. Phillips said. In that case, they would not know ahead of time, Ms. Bardouche observed. What difference does that make, Dean Green asked?

Professor Wambach asked if it is a reasonable principle to allow students to drop a low score instead of offering make-up quizzes. A lot of departments use the practice in order to avoid a lot of work in developing make-ups and avoiding the need to make judgments about absences. Committee members did not dissent from the proposition that this is a reasonable practice. Ms. Evans suggested units make the rationale clear: it is not so students can get the best grade, it is to accommodate absences. If a student-athlete is forced to miss three quizzes, drop the denominator; if forced to miss two, those are the two that should be dropped. But students do care about a slightly-better grade, Professor Leger observed. Dean Green said he did not believe the department should be coerced into giving make-up quizzes. If students can be accommodated by dropping the denominator, that is reasonable—and can be done whether the absence is caused by athletics or illness or anything else. Compelling units to offer make-ups would be a nightmare.

It was agreed the Committee would not consider amending the make-up policy. Following the meeting, Ms. Bardouche reported on an FAQ that is included with the policy:

What if course requirements that have an impact on the course grade (such as participation in classroom discussions) cannot be made up?

If a student has a legitimate absence and has missed a component of the course (e.g., small group discussion, in-class participation) that cannot be made up in exactly the same manner, the instructor may substitute another activity or assignment for the missed components. For example, some instructors have substituted participation in a blog or on-line discussion for class participation, or assigned a reflective essay. It would be up to the instructor to determine an appropriate substitution, based upon the nature of the course. If no substitution can be devised for a student who has a legitimate absence, the missing component(s) cannot be factored into determining that student's final grade for the course.

Professor Wambach adjourned the meeting at 4:00 and wished everyone a good holiday season.

-- Gary Engstrand