Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, November 3, 2010
2:00 – 4:00
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Thomas Brothen (chair), Norman Chervany, Kevin Dorn, Sean Finn, Robert McMaster, Cody Mikl, Kristen Nelson, Alon McCormick, Peh Ng, Jane Phillips, Peggy Root, Paul Siliciano, Alfonso Sintjago, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Elaine Tarone, Michael Wade, Cathrine Wambach

Absent: Barbara Brandt, Joseph Kirchner, Henning Schroeder, Jessica Schroeder

Guests: Vice Provost Billie Wahlstrom (Office of the Provost), Kent Pekel (College Readiness Consortium)

Other: Assistant Vice Provost Suzanne Bardouche (Office of the Vice Provost and Dean for Undergraduate Education)

[In these minutes: (1) high-school preparation standards (mathematics); (2) advanced-placement courses; (3) curriculum analysis; (4) sample degree plans; (5) syllabus statement on academic freedom]

1. High School Preparation Standards (Mathematics)

Professor Brothen convened the meeting at 2:00 and turned to Vice Provost McMaster to discuss a number of items, beginning with a proposal to change the high-school preparation standards in mathematics.

Dr. McMaster noted that this Committee had approved a motion to require four years of math for incoming students and had asked that he return with a plan for students who could have difficulty obtaining the fourth year in their high schools. They have developed a plan and are ready to see the proposed change brought to the Faculty Consultative Committee and the Faculty Senate for action. He distributed handouts with the rationale for the change and data on students who have/have not completed the fourth year of math.

With respect to the latter, Dr. McMaster noted that the first-year retention rate for students (fall, 2007) who have completed the fourth year of high-school math is 90%; for those who have not, it is 68.4%. The numbers were similar for students who entered in fall, 2008. Moreover, the proportion of students who have completed four years of high-school math is increasing; in 2007, nearly 93% of entering students had done so; over 94% had done so in the fall of 2008. So the overwhelming majority of students already take the 4th year of math, Dr. McMaster concluded, so the policy change would not affect a large number of students. Some colleges, he noted, already require the 4th year.

* 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.

What if a student completes all four years in three years, through calculus, on an accelerated program, Professor Siliciano asked? The University would most likely make an exception for such a student, Vice Provost McMaster said, but the intent of the policy is to avoid a gap year in taking math.

The rationale for the change is simple, Dr. McMaster said. Most students have already met the standard, it is consistent with national standards (even Alabama, Arizona, and Texas require the fourth year), ACT research demonstrates a strong relationship between performing well in one advanced math class (beyond algebra II) and workplace success, and any kind of math helps (so a course in physics or other math-intensive science, computer science, or economics often includes enough quantitative reasoning to qualify as a fourth year of mathematical studies; so do courses in some other fields).

Will all high schools be able to offer the fourth year, especially those in economically-depressed or rural areas? Dr. McMaster asked Vice Provost Wahlstrom to discuss her efforts. Dr. Wahlstrom explained that the University received funding to work toward ensuring that math is available at places lacking the faculty to teach advanced math. This effort started with Morris because it has the GenEdWeb program, liberal/general-education and PSEO courses from the Morris campus, including math and statistics. All of the instructors for these courses are Morse-Alumni Award winners and have a lot of credentials.

What is the enrollment in the courses, Professor Siliciano inquired? It varies by course, Dr. Wahlstrom said; about 20 in the writing classes and 25-30 in the others. Could the program handle hundreds of students, Dr. McMaster asked? It could if it decided to, Dr. Wahlstrom said. There is a national repository of online courses that includes many other math courses that meet University standards; they are working with high-school teachers to make them known. The students who took the courses were largely those who could not get the math they needed in high school—largely rural students or from the Dakotas.

Professor Tarone asked if there is interaction between the students and instructors. There is, Dr. Wahlstrom said. Committee members would be amazed at the extent, and it may be more than happens in a regular course. So if the program were larger, it would need more instructors, Professor Tarone observed. Vice Provost Wahlstrom concurred.

When do they take the courses—when they are a senior in high school, Professor Chervany asked? (Yes.) What if a student does not know about the courses or can't take them? Can they take them after high-school graduation but before they come to the University? Dr. McMaster said that if a student only had three years of math but had done well at it, he or she would get into the University anyway—it is not an absolute requirement, and if a student takes the course over the summer prior to entering the University, so much the better. And he affirmed that it is fine for a student to use a course with a lot of mathematical skills in it in lieu a math course per se. The point is for students to keep up the quantitative skills. A student who is allowed to enter the University of Minnesota with a missing high-school preparation requirement must make up that requirement before he/she is allowed to graduate; although one thinks of these requirements as admission requirements, they are also requirements for graduation. In most cases, the student would satisfy the requirement by satisfactorily completing the appropriate University course.

Mr. Pekel, head of the College Readiness Consortium, which focuses on increasing the number and diversity of students who graduate from high school with the knowledge, skills and habits for success in higher education, said that it is the University's credit that it has worried about this problem to a fault. The State requires three years of math for high school graduation, so a student can finish in the junior year of high school—a year and two summers without math is disastrous. History shows that if the University leads the schools, they will accept the requirements; he has asked school principals about the fourth-year math requirement, and they all support it but they want advance notice so they could hire the staff needed. This comes at a time of fiscal constraint for the schools, but they and the University have to address the issue in order to improve college readiness. If the University adopts the requirement, it must be clear with counselors why and must highlight the alternative courses that students may take. The schools wanted guidance and standards; the University's position is that students must maintain academic momentum. As long as the University communicates well and structures the requirement well, the high schools and middle schools will accept it.

It is realistic to think about requiring the additional year of math for students entering in 2014, Dr. McMaster said. What communication will there be beyond high-school counselors? They will rely on networks, Mr. Pekel said—leadership, mathematics education, school counselors, and PTAs. Communication can be accomplished in a streamlined way.

Vice Provost McMaster thanked Mr. Pekel and Dr. Wahlstrom for gathering materials for the Committee.

Professor Ng asked if there remains in place the stipulation that even if a student does not have the fourth year of math, the admissions office has the right to admit the student with the missing requirement. The missing requirement is coded in the student's record, and each college/campus tracks how the requirement is satisfied later. It is, Dr. McMaster affirmed. Professor Ng reported that the Chancellor at Morris wished to see the data for the Morris campus, which is why the Committee initially said that the new requirement would apply only to the Twin Cities campus. They will soon make a decision for Morris.

What about transfer students who have not met the standard, Professor Siliciano asked? The application process for transfer students is different, Dr. McMaster said. In the case of the math requirement, if a student has fulfilled the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum before transferring to the University of Minnesota, that curriculum would have included mathematical thinking. They would not necessarily have had a fourth year of math in high school. When they have students in class who have not met University high school preparation requirements, that can affect how the faculty must teach those students, Professor Siliciano pointed out. Dr. McMaster suggested that this is an issue the Enrollment Management Committee (which he and Vice Provost Schroeder co-chair) could take up: What about high-school standards that transfer students do not meet? The assumption is that transfer students have succeeded in college courses and are prepared to satisfy graduation requirements. He said that Professor Wambach was correct: Admissions offices do not look at high-school transcripts of transfer students in the same way that they do for students coming directly from high school.

The Committee voted unanimously to forward the proposed change in requirements to the Faculty Consultative Committee for placement on the Faculty Senate docket.

2. Advanced Placement Courses

Vice Provost McMaster turned next to the issue of Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The question has arisen—and this Committee has discussed it previously—whether the University is rigorous enough with accepting AP courses and whether it is out of line in comparison with its peers. The University takes AP scores of 3, 4, or 5, so it may pass students through courses when they may not have the required skills for the next courses in the series, especially in math and chemistry.

Dr. McMaster provided Committee members with data on AP credits for students entering the Twin Cities campus fall semesters 2007-2010. There has been an uptick in the average number of AP credits students are bringing and in the number of students who are bringing AP credits:

	# Students	Avg # AP credits
2007	199	15.6
2008	234	17.5
2009	250	17.3
2010	296	18.9

Ms. Phillips pointed out that entrance requirements have increased and students are better-prepared academically, so why not expect the number of AP credits to go up?

Dr. McMaster then presented data demonstrating that in certain courses, the average AP score has increased, although there remain a significant number of students who came with only a 3 on their AP test. It may be necessary to survey faculty about the performance of students with different AP test scores. The math faculty, for example, have indicated that students with a 3 on the AP test for Math 1271 should not be passed into Math 1272. This is anecdotal information, which is why a survey is needed, Dr. McMaster said, to ask faculty if they believe the University is doing students a disservice by putting them in courses for which they are unprepared.

Professor Chervany said it should be possible to look at the grades of students who scored a 3 on AP tests and see how well they did in particular courses thereafter. Dr. McMaster said he would try to obtain the data. They did that analysis in her college, Ms. Phillips reported, and could not find any correlation between AP scores of 3, 4, and 5 and performance in classes. That was ten years ago, however, and she agreed with Professor Chervany that the Committee should see the data on performance. Professor Chervany commented that everyone would like to raise standards, and in the case of the math requirement, the Committee was provided data. It needs the same in this case.

Professor Wambach noted that there is no information about the number of students who had a 3 on the AP test who took Math 1271 anyway. She said she believed that many do so.

Ms. Phillips said the AP data for the one biology course are for a course that is not for the major. It is a liberal-education course. She suggested that any study of AP scores and performance be limited to a few specific courses. Dr. McMaster agreed and said they would also look at Writing Studies, which has data demonstrating that students who have an AP 3 in writing struggle in Writ 1301, unlike students who achieve a 4 or a 5. As a result, they decided to look at all courses and AP scores.

Professor Nelson said the issue gets more complex; are students disadvantaged in the major? Do they never take another math course? Another question is about what happens in AP courses: Are the high schools teaching more to the test? Are students being driven to take the test for economic gain, so this becomes a serious matter for the family?

If students skip writing, and there is a gap in the skills they need, they are being let out too easily, Professor McCormick said. But writing courses are expensive to deliver, Professor Wambach observed, and the department does not want to offer them if they are not needed or if students will get what they need in writing-intensive courses. Students do not enroll for writing-intensive courses until later, Vice Provost McMaster responded, so there would be a gap in the students' skills before they do so. It would help to look at transcripts of students with AP credits to see if they never take another course in the area where they had the AP credit, Professor Wambach suggested. She has seen students who use the AP credit to avoid taking any additional courses in that area.

Vice Provost McMaster said they would dig deeper into the data and will start with math, chemistry, and writing. He said he would get back to the Committee.

Professor Chervany asked if there is a broader issue with respect to AP courses. From his perspective, Dr. McMaster said, they affect student performance in other classes and how faculty teach. They also affect time to degree, Professor Siliciano said, if they allow students to jump ahead. Or fail, Professor Brothen observed.

3 Curriculum Analysis

Vice Provost McMaster now reported on activities in his office related to curriculum analysis and student performance.

1. "Phantom" courses: They have established a process to review and monitor courses every year; departments and colleges will not be allowed to list courses they have not offered in four years.

2. APAS reports have been improved and updated.

3. There are currently some undergraduate majors on the Twin Cities campus that require more than 120 credits for graduation; his office is working with departments to reduce the number. Five programs have revised their programs to bring their requirements to 120 credits. Of the over 150 majors available now, 14 require over 120 credits. They will continue to work with those programs to bring the number of credits down.

4. They are looking at the requirement of four writing-intensive courses (two lower division and two upper division). . There is evidence that some students struggle to complete all four, and he may come back to the Committee to suggest that three courses may be enough, especially for students who take freshman writing.

5. On scheduling and course access, they have a reserved-seat committee that has made recommendations for change. Some departments reserve seats that are never used—but that preclude other students from taking a course. Recommendations were implemented in August and have improved course access for fall 2010 and beyond.

6. They are studying whether there is a backlog in freshman composition so students cannot get the course during their first year, and if so, they will see if there can be additional sections.

7. There is a committee looking at the registration queue and how it affects students getting the courses they need. Some non-degree and PSEO students are earlier in the queue than the University's degree-seeking students. There will be changes recommended to the Provost.

8. They are seeking to achieve more consistency across colleges in how probation and suspension are handled.

9. They have looked at "auto graduation" for students who have met the graduation requirements but who have not graduated. They do not have the systems in place to implement it now but may be able to do so as the technology matures.

Professor McCormick commented that when he encounters a student who could graduate, often the response is that the student does not want to graduate because that means he or she will have to start paying off student loans. But as tuition increases, the student will incur more loans, Ms. Bardouche observed, and the University does not want to be in violation of federal law about financial aid, which restricts aid after students have completed the requirements for a degree. Can the University legally graduate people whether they want to or not, Professor Siliciano asked? It can, Dr. McMaster affirmed; if they stay and study more, they are taking up seats that other students need.

Taking longer than four years may be the result of double majors, Professor Wambach said, so perhaps the University could give the degree with the single major but allow students to complete a second major after graduation without a big hassle. Now it is a hassle to re-enroll if one already has a degree. There should be a path available to complete a second major. And as more and more students have PSEO, AP, and College-in-the Schools credits, Dr. McMaster said, they believe they will find an increasing number of students who have enough credits to graduate. Advisers need to ask students if a second major makes sense for them, given the financial realities and (for the University), given 37,000 applications for admission. Moreover, many students double-major and still finish in four years. Professor McCormick agreed with Professor Wambach that perhaps students could be treated differently in admissions if they are returning to complete a second major.

The committee also discussed when students can add a second major, Ms. Bardouche reported. For example, can they do so after completing all the requirements for the first degree? That seems a little late. They have no firm recommendation on the subject at this time, but have recommended several areas for further study.

Professor Brothen asked about the timeline for these various items. They are part of a big package, Dr. McMaster said, and some items are on the front burner and others are on the back.

4. Sample Plans

Ms. Bardouche distributed copies of sample plans for degrees in various programs. These sample plans are required to be specified for each undergraduate major when the requirements are submitted to PCAS, but they are only examples and there are other ways to complete the degree.

These plans are used by advisers but also by prospective students who are shopping around—there is "stealth shopping" going on. They also provide a reality check for departments when they are considering a change in major requirements—they learn the change may not work.

They have asked all departments to update their sample plans in PCAS, Ms. Bardouche reported, and Academic Support Resources is examining transcripts to show departments how their students are actually getting through and how that matches with the sample plans.

The plans for the future are to enhance the sample plans because some, now, are somewhat skimpy. They will work with colleges and departments to develop better and more options for sample plans—and they send them back to departments when they cannot figure out how a student would get through, Ms. Bardouche said. They are also creating sample plans for transfer students. This is, she commented, a "back door" infrastructure improvement to help student success, and she expressed appreciation for departments that have provided the information needed.

Professor Wade noted that a number of undergraduate programs require students to complete their liberal-education requirements in the lower division, so the student may have only little contact with the major until later. Programs are all over the map in that regard, Ms. Bardouche said. These plans are a huge step forward, Vice Provost McMaster said, and they enable advisers to help students get through in four years. They are easily accessible to students, Ms. Bardouche said. Students must feel they have flexibility and intellectual choice, Professor Nelson said, so it is an advising challenge to make sure students realize these are only examples.

Professor McCormick asked if the samples can spot time conflicts; it is a generic sample, Ms. Bardouche said, and not linked to the course schedule. Professor McCormick said they find in his college that there may be a wonderful course in another college for students, but it is impossible for them to take because it conflicts with required courses. Mr. Mikl said he had that experience as an undergraduate.

Ms. Phillips said that it is difficult to assist students with plans because faculty and staff cannot get into the grad planner program. They need a dummy student account so that they can look at the plans as if they were a student. It would also be helpful to look at the grad planner, Professor Siliciano added. Dr. McMaster said they would look into the possibility for directors of undergraduate studies and others.

Professor Brothen thanked Dr. McMaster and Ms. Bardouche for their reports.

5. Syllabus Statement on Academic Freedom

Professor Brothen asked Committee members to review the draft syllabus statement on academic freedom. The draft has bounced back and forth between this Committee and the Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure for the last year or so, and this version seems to represent all of the changes sought by the two committees. The statement as amended read as follows:

General Syllabus Statement regarding Academic Freedom and Responsibility:

Academic freedom is a cornerstone of the University. Within the scope and content of the course as defined by the instructor, it includes the freedom to discuss relevant matters in the classroom. Along with this freedom comes responsibility. Students are encouraged to develop the capacity for critical judgment and to engage in a sustained and independent search for truth. Students are free to take reasoned exception to the views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled.*

Reports of concerns about academic freedom are taken seriously, and there are individuals and offices available for help. Contact the instructor, the Department Chair, your adviser, the associate dean of the college, or the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs in the Office of the Provost. [Customize with names and contact information as appropriate for the course/college/campus.][* Language adapted from the American Association of University Professors "Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students"]

Syllabus Statement for Courses Involving Students in Research:

Academic freedom is a cornerstone of the University. Within the scope and content of the course as defined by the instructor, it includes the freedom to discuss relevant matters in the classroom and conduct relevant research. Along with this freedom comes responsibility. Students are encouraged to develop the capacity for critical judgment and to engage in a sustained and independent search for truth. Students are free to take reasoned exception to the views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled.* When conducting research, pertinent institutional approvals must be obtained and the research must be consistent with University policies.

Reports of concerns about academic freedom are taken seriously, and there are individuals and offices available for help. Contact the instructor, the Department Chair, your adviser, the associate dean of the college, or the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs in the Office of the Provost. [Customize with names and contact information as appropriate for the course/college/campus.] [* Language adapted from the American Association of University Professors "Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students"]

The question is whether SCEP believes the statement should be mandatory or optional.

Committee members raised several points.

-- The existing syllabus policy [http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/SYLLABUSREQUIREMENTS.html] appears to require information directly related to the class and allow links to policy statements.

-- What is the basis for making students read the statement every time they receive a syllabus versus providing them a means to looking it up?

-- How many pages of materials are required on the syllabus, if one printed it all out? (About seven, when one includes the schedule, grading, etc.)

-- The statement emanates from concerns that students will not speak up because they do not want to argue with a faculty member; this statement makes clear they may do so. It also helps a faculty member confronted with a student who wants to bring into a course unrelated material. This says all are free, within the confines of the class, to express their views, so the statement should be mandatory.

-- In one case, the faculty member hands out no paper—everything is electronic. He may cite areas he believes students should pay attention to, and if this is a requirement, it will use a few more digits somewhere.

-- This is more of an advisory statement, not a mandatory policy. The statement could remain advisory but still be approved by the Faculty Senate. It also provides a template for instructors to use.

The Committee voted unanimously to make the statement optional for syllabi but that it become part of the official syllabus policy.

Professor Brothen adjourned the meeting at 3:40.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota