

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, January 18, 2012
2:00 – 4:00
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Thomas Brothen (chair), Kirsten Barta, Barbara Brandt, Lee-Ann Breuch, Emily Combs, John Cwodzinski, Eva von Dassow, Alon McCormick, Robert McMaster, Cody Mikl, Kristen Nelson, Peh Ng, Jane Phillips, Peggy Root, Elaine Tarone, Cathrine Wambach

Absent: Norman Chervany, Amanda Koonjbeharry, Leslie Schiff, Henning Schroeder

Guests: none

Other: Suzanne Bardouche (Office of Undergraduate Education); Tina Falkner (Academic Support Resources); Jon Steadland (Office of the President)

[In these minutes: (1) Twin Cities campus curriculum committee; (2) update on "Access to Success"; (3) questions from the Classroom Advisory Subcommittee]

1. Twin Cities Campus Curriculum Committee

Professor Brothen convened the meeting at 2:00 and welcomed Vice Provost McMaster to discuss further his proposal for a Twin Cities campus curriculum committee.

Dr. McMaster began by suggesting that the Committee could review the draft proposal and act on it at the next meeting after he has received feedback and counsel at this one. He reviewed the events of the last year or so that led him to propose the establishment of the committee (conflicts between colleges rooted in financial and pedagogical issues and the use of ad hoc committees to try to resolve them); the process he proposed last year has not worked as well as he hoped it might, so he now believes there needs to be a campus curriculum committee.

The proposal for the committee is supported by President Kaler, incoming Provost Hanson, outgoing Provost Sullivan, and his office, Dr. McMaster reported. This Committee has supported it as well.

He has surveyed some of the University's peer institutions and learned that almost all of them have a curriculum committee, the roles and responsibilities of which vary. The committee on this campus, for example, would not need to address liberal-education requirements because that task is handled by the Council on Liberal Education.

* 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.

Dr. McMaster reviewed the roles and responsibilities he envisions for the Twin Cities campus curriculum committee:

- a. Work with colleges in mediating conflicts that arise over curriculum issues.
- b. Work closely with the Council on Liberal Education on the impact of new liberal-education classes. The Council would continue to evaluate and approve new courses. The new committee would not approve liberal-education or writing-intensive courses but it would need to be knowledgeable about them.
- c. Look at potential duplication of newly-established courses after approval by collegiate curriculum committees. It is important that the committee do this, and it will not be onerous because most will be approved without controversy, but the process will allow the committee to catch potential duplication.
- d. Help to determine the impact of eliminating courses (on other degree programs).
- e. Other issues as identified by the Senate Committee on Educational Policy.

The committee membership would be "appointed by the Provost, will have between 12-15 members representing the university community. As with the Council for Liberal Education, I anticipate that this would be a committee of mostly faculty with a few senior P/A instructional staff. Members would serve three-year terms. The initial focus would be on undergraduate issues. The Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education, Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Education, and a member of Academic Support Resources (either the Director or a staff member selected by the Director) would sit ex officio on the committee."

Dr. McMaster outlined the process that would be used. "For specific curricular conflicts and concerns with mission creep, colleges may directly ask the committee to provide an analysis and recommendation on the appropriateness of offering certain classes or degree programs. In these cases, both collegiate units will be asked to provide the necessary data and background material. The Senate Committee on Educational Policy, Office of Undergraduate Education, or Graduate School may also ask the committee to look into curricular issues.

"In order to determine potential curricular redundancy, each collegiate curriculum committee will forward newly-established courses to the Campus Curriculum Committee. The Committee will consider possible duplication with other units and request additional materials as needed. It is anticipated that very few newly-established courses would pose a problem for the committee.

"For either specific course duplication, or broader issues of curricular conflict and mission creep, the Committee will make a recommendation (on approval or disapproval) to the Provost and appropriate Vice Provost. The final decision by the Provost is binding."

It is important to create the curriculum committee because of the budget model the University uses, Dr. McMaster concluded. The deans overwhelmingly support the proposal and he has asked them to provide the names of potential members of the committee.

Professor Tarone said she was uncomfortable with the process being used to create the committee and asked that other entities besides this Committee (such as the Faculty Consultative Committee and the Faculty Senate) weigh in on the proposal because this will be a committee with considerable power. She asked if it would be a subcommittee of this Committee.

It is not a subcommittee of this Committee, Dr. McMaster clarified; it is advisory to the Provost and this Committee is assisting in its establishment. He confirmed that it would be a curriculum committee, not a policy committee. Professor Tarone said she thought the mission of this Committee is to deal with policy, not create a curriculum committee; Dr. McMaster explained that the curriculum committee would be parallel to the Council on Liberal Education, which SCEP helped establish and for which it advises on membership. He affirmed that if this Committee approves the proposal, the curriculum committee would be created. The provost could create the committee but thought it important to bring the proposal to this Committee, expert in educational policy, for approval. Professor Brothen suggested that the proposal was for this Committee to endorse the idea of a curriculum committee but that it would be created by the provost. Dr. McMaster accepted that as an appropriate description of the process.

Professor Tarone asked about the relationship between the campus curriculum committee and collegiate curriculum committees. Most colleges do have curriculum committees, Dr. McMaster affirmed in response to a question from Ms. Combs, but noted that they function differently; in general, however, they review and approve courses and programs for majors and minors within the college. Dr. Higdon said he understood the campus curriculum committee would mediate tensions between college curricular units, would serve as a mechanism to resolve them—a mechanism that is desperately needed, he added. No matter the details, it needs to be created because there are real questions about disciplinary domains. Professor Tarone agreed and said part of the problem is the budget model that affects decision-making. Would the committee say what would happen? It would be advisory, Dr. Higdon pointed out.

Dr. Brandt recalled that she had eight years ago recommended to then Vice Provost Swan that such a committee be created and said it is odd for a university not to have one. She said she handles these issues for the health professions, and agreed that with the budget model, there are duplications. One must ask if students are getting the best instructors when one college has the best teachers and experts in a field—but another college across campus decides to offer courses in the same field. It will be very helpful to have curriculum-committee review.

Dr. McMaster affirmed that the committee would look at cross-college duplication and mediation; the deans would be expected to resolve differences within a college. He also indicated that the curriculum committee would consult with the graduate curriculum committee; he has talked with Vice Provost Schroeder and agreed that if a problem arises that becomes too complicated for the graduate curriculum committee, this committee could take it up.

Professor Wambach said one potential danger is that the University can be siloed, with knowledge contained in one area, and there are fights about interdisciplinary programs and majors. It will be interesting to see how the committee deals with those problems as it confronts cross-disciplinary issues. Dr. McMaster said he would like to see this faculty committee discuss the issues in a thoughtful way rather than have an administrator decide. Professor Wambach recalled that the

Howe Committee (1991) recommended that all colleges get into the delivery of general education and get out of their silos. So there was a call for broader participation, it happened, and then colleges became concerned about duplication and opening the silos. That concern will not go away.

Professor von Dassow said she thought the committee was a good idea in general and that it has the potential to undo some of the worst artifacts of the liberal-education process. That process was intended to be integrative but the effect has been that colleges seek to corral students in the colleges, which causes damage. There is duplication of offerings—she cited one she is aware of—but in some cases the duplication is not problematic because both courses fill up. Duplication can be a problem, however, if there is declining enrollment and departments must compete with each other for students for a course. Professor von Dassow concurred with Professor Tarone: If faculty endorsement for the proposal is to be sought, it should come from the Faculty Senate, which is more representative of the faculty at large.

Ms. Phillips said she also worried about the term "mission creep" in the description of the process; the only reason that is spoken of is because of the budget model. Dr. McMaster demurred and said it happens at institutions without the University's budget model. Ms. Phillips said that interdisciplinarity of programs means there will be expertise in the same field across colleges and all the world's experts in a discipline may not be in one college. The curriculum committee could work well—or it could make things worse.

Professor Root said she worries about how the committee will function. She has been on the curriculum committee of her college and still does not know about certain courses; how would she know anything about courses in another college? Moreover, seeing how slowly things happen at the University, to add another committee on top of the college curriculum committees would mean obtaining approval for a course will take a longer time than it already does. She urged that Vice Provost McMaster continue to use the subcommittee approach and commended him for the job he had done in the last year. Dr. McMaster said he believed the decisions would have more credibility if they come from a committee composed of faculty members drawn from across the campus. The Council on Liberal Education has a similar role, and the curriculum committee would have a representative from Academic Support Resources to help connect it with the information it needs and to provide background.

Dr. Higdon asked if the committee would be a gate for course approval or a mechanism for conflict resolution. It would be both, Dr. McMaster said, and it must play the first role because if it does not review courses, new courses will slide through and duplication will continue to occur. Dr. Higdon thought that deans would raise questions if they perceive duplication and that issues would emerge organically; he expressed doubt about the need for another gate. For 95% of courses there would be no issue, Dr. McMaster said; in his view, the critical part is catching duplicative courses when they are proposed, which is not an overwhelming task. The Council on Liberal Education has reviewed about 600 course proposal per year, in the past two years, so the curriculum committee could handle the demand.

Professor Nelson said that what is really needed is item (d) in the charge, evaluation of the impact of eliminating courses. Often there is course duplication because a college needs a course and a different college isn't offering it or not offering it frequently enough. She also agreed with the

comments about the interdisciplinary nature of the world and courses; this will be an evolving discussion, she predicted. There are historians in different colleges for good reason.

Professor Nelson also asked about the relationship of the curriculum committee to the Council on Liberal Education. As did Professor Tarone. Dr. McMaster explained that as the Council approves new courses to meet liberal-education requirements, the Council will provide the information to the curriculum committee.

Professor Tarone wondered how the curriculum committee would know that a course has been eliminated. College committees do not always know. There are many courses in the catalogue that are not taught, which can be a problem for students. The curriculum committee cannot deal with that issue, Dr. McMaster said. But if the lack of a course offering becomes a problem, it will land in the committee's lap, Professor Brothen predicted. Dr. McMaster said that if College A requires a course that is taught in College B, and College B has not offered the course in the past few years, College A could ask the curriculum committee for permission to offer it. Ms. Bardouche suggested that the committee may need different reports from what is available today; Dr. Falkner said that perhaps Academic Support Resources could provide the committee with a report on when courses have been offered; if one has not been offered for three years, for example, in her view the institution should not wait for students to complain. Ms. Combs pointed out that graduate students need to file degree programs and it would be helpful to get courses off the books if they will not be offered.

Professor Wambach asked Dr. McMaster if he has thought about the process that will be used. Will the parties provide written documents and speak to the issues? Both, Dr. McMaster said. The committee will need to sort that out as it starts its work. There will be ample opportunity for units to provide documentation.

Professor Brothen reiterated the point that Dr. McMaster is looking for endorsement from this Committee for establishment of the curriculum committee. Dr. McMaster said he intended to bring it to this Committee, and if approved, would move forward, but if the Committee believes there should be broader consultation, he could accept that suggestion. That the deans have been consulted, Professor von Dassow observed, does not mean that the faculty know about the proposal, and even if chairs have heard about it, that doesn't mean the faculty know about it. If he wants the endorsement of the faculty, he must go to the Faculty Senate. Professor McCormick concurred, saying that if the proposed committee is going to provide advice to the administration that has teeth, he would want the committee to have more support than just this Committee. It will only be making recommendations, Professor Brothen pointed out; Dr. McMaster agreed that the key word is "recommendation." There will be some decisions required where the administration must decide, Professor Brothen observed; Professor McCormick concurred.

Professor Tarone said the discussion has helped clarify a number of points, and if the proposal is redrafted, there is no reason it cannot go to the Faculty Senate, which would increase faculty support for its actions in the future. This Committee does not want to be in the position of having faculty say it saddled them with a curriculum committee.

Professor Breuch commented that with respect to provision (d), when one program was eliminated (Rhetoric) and moved and recreated as Writing Studies in another college, the proposed committee would have been essential to considering the impact. Vice Provost McMaster agreed but

also observed that the administration can move departments. When programs are eliminated, the proposal goes through the Office of Undergraduate Education (OUE), as a recommendation to the Provost, and ultimately for final decision by the Regents, but OUE does not get involved with the elimination of single courses.

Committee members continued to indicate a lack of understanding about the relationship between the curriculum committee and the Council on Liberal Education. Dr. McMaster said he would try to clarify the language.

The Committee voted unanimously to endorse the idea of the Twin Cities campus curriculum committee; it also voted unanimously that the proposal should be brought to the Faculty Senate.

2. Update on "Access to Success"

Vice Provost McMaster next provided the Committee with materials related to "Access to Success" (hereinafter ATS). The background of the program is this:

Initiated in September 2008 at the University of Minnesota, Access to Success (ATS) is a program designed to help ensure the academic success of a specific cohort of incoming freshmen students. As a strategic planning decision, the University chose to close the General College in June 2006. Because a significant number of students admitted to this college were students of color, low income individuals, first generation college students and / or low academic performers, administrators feared that this decision would hinder educational access for them. They knew that it was critical to provide a means to a quality of education at the university for this diverse group of students. As a result, ATS was created and implemented into three colleges at the University.

This program is active in the College of Liberal Arts (CLA), the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) and the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS). In the 2009-2010, ATS cohort, the freshmen to sophomore retention rate was 81.7%. With the 2010-2011 academic year ATS cohort the freshmen to sophomore retention rate rose to 87%, which represents a significant achievement in the retention of these students. First-year retention is a critical indicator of the potential four-year graduation rate.

Students are selected by the admissions office on an individual basis according to a holistic review process. The program is geared toward nontraditional students with diverse backgrounds, including urban students, first-generation college students, student parents, students with disabilities, students of color, older students, and non-native speakers of English, who do not necessarily align with the "typical profile" of students admitted to the University. These students exhibited the potential to succeed in college in ways other than their academic achievement or college entrance exams. Ultimately, ATS is intended to help students effectively transition into the university by providing them with the strategies, tools, and academic support they need to succeed during their first year of college.

Access to Success Program Goals and Objectives

1. To enrich the academic experience of students in their first year of college
2. To help ensure a successful transition from senior year of high school to the first year of college
3. To enhance students' academic experiences and achievement during their first year of college
4. To provide an opportunity to be involved in a supportive learning community at the University of Minnesota

When the University closed General College, there remained a need for program to accommodate some of the students who would have been admitted to it. ATS has about 450-475 students per year distributed across the three colleges, and each college has a different program for ATS students. Dr. McMaster noted that the retention rate for ATS students in CEHD and CLA mirrors the retention rate for the general student body in those colleges; the rate is slightly lower for ATS students in CFANS.

Overall, ATS has been a great success, Dr. McMaster said, and its retention rate is noticeably higher than was the case for GC students 5-6 years ago. (There are no graduation rates for ATS yet because it was only started in the fall of 2008.)

One concern about ATS is that students have to go into one of three colleges and that it is not an all-campus program, Dean McMaster said. The ATS Committee believes it should be expanded to be all-campus and should be a four-year program. As a result, the Committee to Redesign the Access to Success Program is currently working to transform the ATS program from a collegiate-based one-year program to an all-University four-year experience, tentatively named the Golden Scholars Program. The revised program will be dedicated to serving the needs of underrepresented students at the University of Minnesota, and specifically, will honor the personal differences of its students by encouraging participants to use their individual histories to bring unique perspectives into the classroom. The details of what the new program will look like are still being developed.

Ms. Combs asked about ATS retention rates after the first year. They slip a bit year by year, Dr. McMaster said.

Professor Tarone said she was glad to hear that Dr. McMaster would like to provide more support to the program. She asked if he has thought about more support for writing, especially at the upper levels. That is extremely important, she said. And have they thought about special sections for bottleneck courses, Professor Nelson added. Dr. McMaster said he is aware there needs to be a strong support program all the way through. Professor Tarone suggested providing money for salaries for writing support to help students in their third and fourth year in addition to scholarship funds.

Professor McCormick commented that he's heard that Federal funding agencies see the Big Ten and upper Midwest as having responsibility for reaching out to Native American students. He also noted that some of the University's Native American students come as transfer students; is there any support for them? They have sidestepped the issue of transfers for now, Dean McMaster said; ATS has been viewed as a freshman program and there are no transfer students in it now. But he said he understood the point and said the committee would have to think about support for transfer students. Professor Tarone agreed and said they need to think about potential ATS students who attend a community college first and then come to the University.

Dr. Higdon said he thought the program was great. The year-to-year retention metric is interesting, but it says nothing about student academic workload. ATS students are expected to be full-time students, Dr. McMaster affirmed. Their average credit load on the campus is now about 15 credits.

Professor Brothen thanked Vice Provost McMaster for the update.

3. Questions from the Classroom Advisory Subcommittee

Professor Brothen asked Committee members to consider two questions posed by the Classroom Advisory Subcommittee pursuant to its work on classroom issues:

- Whether it is fair to students to have final, comprehensive projects due the last week of class, in place of a final exam, and
- Whether it is fair to instructors/graders to consider final projects equivalent to a final exam and thus required to be turned in only during finals week.

Ms. Phillips commented that these are very different questions. One is whether it is fair not to give students time through the final exam period to complete major projects. It is not permissible to have a comprehensive exam during the last week of classes—that must be given during final exam week. Then there is the question of fairness to instructors who have 72 hours to grade comprehensive major projects that are due during final exam week (because they cannot be due the week before). [It was noted that the 72 hours start to run after the last scheduled final examination of that exam period, not after any specific exam.] Presenting a final project during final examination week is permissible, Professor McCormick confirmed.

Professor Breuch observed that if a faculty member assigned 100 huge projects for finals week and then has to grade them all, it was that faculty member's choice to make the assignment.

Professor Wambach clarified that if something is a comprehensive project, it does not matter if the project/writing is in or out of class: It should be due final exam week. If a project supports the course goals but is not comprehensive, it can be given/due any time.

There was discussion about the nebulousness of the term "comprehensive." Professor Ng cautioned that the Committee needed to be careful in defining "comprehensive." Professor Tarone suggested the definition includes encompassing the entire 14-15 weeks of the semester, which means it cannot be required the last week of the course (because the course won't be completed). There is a difference between cumulative and comprehensive, Ms. Phillips said; a cumulative exam relies on material given earlier but doesn't require a comprehensive synthesis of the whole semester. So, Professor Brothen said, if something is a comprehensive project, it may not be due before the final exam period. Professor von Dassow observed that term papers are not necessarily cumulative but they could still overload a student inappropriately at the end of the semester.

Dr. Higdon asked if this is a pedagogical problem or a policy problem. He suggested it is as much the former as the latter; when situations arise, such as those raised by the question, there could be problems with poor course design. It might be better to try to teach instructors about pacing

courses. But the policy can help provide clout, Ms. Phillips said; it is University policy that comprehensive exams/projects may not be required during the last week of classes.

It was noted that the syllabus policy already requires instructors to note when assignments are due.

Professor Wambach suggested that the problems identified in the questions from the Subcommittee could be addressed in an FAQ in the policy on final exams. Dr. Falkner said that she and Ms. Bardouche would volunteer to draft language for the Committee to review.

Professor Brothen thanked Dr. Falkner and adjourned the meeting at 3:55.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota