

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Tuesday, March 7, 1995
1:45 - 3:30
Room 626 Campus Club

Present: Kenneth Heller (chair), Jeff Bauer, Anita Cholewa, Elayne Donahue, Robert Johnson, Manuel Kaplan, Laura Coffin Koch, William Van Essendelft, Darren Walhof, Gayle Graham Yates

Regrets: James Cotter, Judith Martin

Absent: Megan Gunnar, Darwin Hendel, Sara Hornstra, Ryan Nilsen

Guests: Associate Vice President Robert Kvavik

[In these minutes: State legislation on semesters and calendars; study of classrooms and the need for upgrading, scheduling changes, and reduction in number; transition task force reports; Senate policies on classes and schedules]

1. Legislative Matters

Professor Heller convened the meeting at 1:45 and welcomed Associate Vice President Kvavik. Before turning to the principal agenda item, there was brief discussion of a legislative proposal to require all institutions of higher education to be on the semester system by 1999 or lose all state financial aid. There is also a proposal to establish a common calendar for the systems. Legislators are tired of hearing complaints from students about problems caused by calendars.

The administration is neutral on these proposals, right now. Whatever happens, the University needs a new registration system, and would build into it the possibility of accommodating a change in calendar.

There would be a lot of faculty time required to adapt courses to a semester system, observed one Committee member. It would be an unfunded mandate, Dr. Kvavik observed, but it also costs the University and students to have them register three times a year instead of twice.

It is not a good precedent for the legislature to tell the University how to manage its schedule; the administration should take a position, and should make the legislature aware of the costs and time that would be required. Many courses would have to be redone. The biggest problem would probably be in CLA, which has many 3, 4, and 5-credit courses; one would want most to be four credits, so students would enroll for four courses per semester to be on target for graduation.

*These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate or Twin Cities Campus Assembly; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes reflect the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate or Assembly, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

2. Classroom Management

Discussion turned to the proposed policies and practices for classroom management at the University. Dr. Kvavik explained that there will be a report to the Board of Regents this month on an eight-month study of classrooms on the Twin Cities campus (the results of which will also be applied to the other campuses). The University used consultants in both construction and in classroom management; it also used students and Morse-Alumni award winners to assist in the study.

U2000 calls for an upgrade to the learning environment, and most everyone is aware of complaints about the poor quality of classrooms. Classrooms constitute 5% of the University's space, but many students spend more than 50% of their time on campus in classrooms, so it is a poor priority to let the quality slide.

There are 422 classrooms on the Twin Cities campus; 260 are scheduled centrally, the remainder by departments. Using a 119-point checklist to judge all classrooms by national standards, two-thirds failed.

The process will start with defining what a modern classroom should be (e.g., students can hear the instructors, see visual materials, be comfortable, have appropriate equipment, and so on). The study has three objectives: to develop a plan to upgrade classrooms, to promote responsible stewardship, and to provide tools to assess programmatic space requirements and allocation options.

At present, classroom scheduling is done by hand; a classroom computer system will be purchased. Testing shows that what previously took a month to do will now be completed in 58 seconds, and 90% of classroom assignments will be the departments' first choices.

The study considered utilization rates. The goal is 32 hours per week of use at 65% of occupancy. Neither general purpose nor departmental classrooms meet either of those recommended usage rates; the lowest levels of use are on the St. Paul campus and in the health sciences. Department classrooms are not well-scheduled.

When utilization and occupancy rates are not met, it means the University has a larger inventory of classrooms than it needs. If classrooms were to be used 32 hours per week, at 65% occupancy, 160,000 assignable square feet (three Morrill Halls) would be freed up; that space costs \$2 million per year. There needs to be a plan to increase utilization and occupancy and to transfer that money into upgrading the classrooms that are needed.

It also seems that classroom space is in the wrong place, said one Committee member. That is partly because departmental classrooms are under-utilized, Dr. Kvavik said. Because smaller spaces are poorly managed, small classes often take up large classrooms. It may seem hard to believe, but when all the data are put into the computer program, classrooms are filled and there are vacant rooms left over. This is true even if one does the scheduling by "zones" (e.g., the humanities, engineering, etc.)

Does this assume that departmental classrooms will be scheduled centrally, asked one Committee member? Either that, Dr. Kvavik said, or they should be removed from the classroom inventory and used for other purposes.

Another problem that wastes space is different calendars, such as the Law School being on semesters. Space utilization is one argument for a common calendar. There are also different time periods and multiple registration systems, which, when uncontrolled, means the system incurs greater costs than it should. The inventory is larger than it needs to be. The Committee should consider the educational benefits versus the costs, and evaluate if these differences are warranted.

The Committee might also consider the multiple grading systems in place--there are nine on the Twin Cities campus--which require a more complex registration system, with more money spent on programming and converting grades for students moving from one system to another. Only one college has received approval to operate on a different grading system, observed one Committee member; all of the others are operating in violation of Senate policy.

With a larger classroom inventory than needed and a fixed amount of resources, the money is spread too thinly. From 1960 to 1975, annual classroom maintenance funding was \$15,000. From 1976 to 1992 it was \$22,000. Academic Affairs finally complained, so there has been \$234,000 spent annually since 1992, and that is still not adequate. Expenditures for maintenance should be about \$500,000 per year, Dr. Kvavik said, and there should be another \$100,000 spent on technology and equipment maintenance, \$100,000 spent on one-time equipment purchases, and \$75,000 spent on communication. It would take about \$20 million to bring classrooms up to standards (lighting, acoustics, sound amplification, adequate furnishings, minimum technical standards), in order to create the learning environment the University should have.

The major recommendations of the study are five:

- automate classroom scheduling
- restructure management and oversight of classrooms
- reduce classroom inventory to programmatic demand
- implement a multi-year plan to modernize the reduced inventory
- establish and enforce standards to measure success of new classroom management and design.

This is the most comprehensive study of classrooms in the United States, Dr. Kvavik concluded. The result is a concrete plan to identify what is needed and how to get it done.

Is the distribution of classrooms a problem, asked one Committee member? One question is whether faculty and students want to walk, Dr. Kvavik said. The new Basic Sciences building has NO classrooms, which exacerbates problems on the East Bank. The loose philosophy has been that classrooms should be close to the faculty who use them, and that students will then go see faculty in their offices nearby. When asked, however, students would rather have classrooms near the bus stop. Another possibility would be to consolidate high-technology classrooms, so that a single support staff can maintain the equipment--which would be much more efficient. There are tradeoffs. The conventional goal, of having the faculty down the hall from the classroom, has costs.

But the University is trying to re-establish an academic culture of teaching and learning; it is important to have classes in the academic units, not by the bus stop, it was said. Putting classrooms in the units means students KNOW this is an academic institution. Classrooms now are more distributed than at

most institutions, Dr. Kvavik pointed out, and there are different ways of building an academic culture. He is suggesting the Committee think about cost as well.

Dr. Kvavik said he believed the distribution issue could be dealt with. Of greater concern is the classrooms with high-maintenance equipment. Scattering those classrooms means having specialists who run all over the campus, which means there would be more of them than necessary, or that the departments would hire technicians. It would be more efficient to consolidate them, perhaps by zones.

Would it be necessary to have central scheduling for graduate seminars, asked one Committee member? The system includes EVERY course taught, Dr. Kvavik said; even within departments, seminars are delayed because of unscheduled use of rooms and opportunities are lost. Can that be solved centrally, asked another Committee member? A central scheduling office won't know if a room is actually occupied. A faculty/student committee will have to make recommendations about these kinds of things, Dr. Kvavik said. He said he believed departments could have their first choice of room 90% of the time, with central scheduling, and there would be central maintenance of the classroom. If the department wants to control a room, it would not be maintained with central funds.

If a department cancels or moves a class, and does not tell the central scheduling office, there is no way for the office to know the room is unoccupied. If there is central scheduling, will there be a way to check? One way will be through maintenance; people will be needed for maintenance, and they can check usage. Another way will be simply to make departments aware of the need to notify the office of changes. With Responsibility Centered Management, there will also be an incentive, because the department will pay for the space if it is assigned to them.

Dr. Kvavik observed that one sees funny things pop up in the planning process. The University is trying to maintain an infrastructure that is bigger than it can afford. It has over-built, and now has facilities that would take over a billion dollars to bring to acceptable standards and \$100 million in systems to increase productivity. The state does not have the money, but the University has been acting like it will obtain resources in excess of inflation in the future, and using soft money in the meantime. Budgets have not kept up with inflation, and the funds cut from academic programs have almost all gone into debt service and facilities maintenance. If those facilities are not reduced, the drain will continue. At the end of five years of restructuring and reallocation, the University is no better off than it was, because what creates the problem--an oversized infrastructure--has not gone away. It is like people who have purchased a house they cannot afford; soon the costs overwhelm them and they are driven out.

To take classrooms out of operation means they must be demolished or turned to revenue-producing activities, one Committee member pointed out. There are multiple solutions, Dr. Kvavik said. In some cases, such as Jones and Nicholson, it might be possible to turn the buildings into dorms or temporary residence facilities; in other cases, the building might be torn down. The new CSOM building will have 28 classrooms; it might be possible, for example, to move the English Department to the Management and Economics Tower and free up space on the East Bank. The planning tool to do those kinds of "what ifs" is available.

That tool can also be used to test assumptions about semesters and classroom use (if there are a lot of 2 and 3-credit courses, there will not be enough classrooms; if classes are primarily 4 credits, the inventory is fine). The 8:00 a.m. period and those after 2:00 p.m. must be used more, but that may be

possible because of the increased number of students who live on campus. The trend of 72% of freshmen living on campus cannot be continued to the upper classes because there is not enough space, but work is underway with Dinnaken Properties to add housing to the campus. In addition, buildings in the center of campus could be renovated to dorms, thus also increasing the activity level, a goal of the master planning process.

Classes could also be distributed more into the summer, said one Committee member. Doing so would also save money, Dr. Kvavik said. If the University were to go to semesters, it could have three, including some half-semester courses in the summer. Institutions that have semesters also have short courses that are very popular, so semesters do not restrict offerings. The computer system can manage classrooms to most efficient use even with class periods of different length.

Space should NOT drive the delivery of education, Dr. Kvavik noted; the University must have high-quality programs. But it may be that different kinds of offerings--five-hour intensive classes in a foreign language, or five-week courses--are possible; the University has perhaps not dealt imaginatively with these possibilities.

Without additional funds, any changes or improvements must come from savings, said one Committee member. The Governor's budget recommendation is only temporary, Dr. Kvavik pointed out, because it is one-time funding; at the start of the next biennium, the University's base budget will be lower than it is now. The University can use the two-year funds to continue to expand, or it can use them to get itself on firmer footing. He expressed doubt the University would receive from the state this century the billion dollars it needs for facilities.

Asked about the cost of the central classroom scheduling computer system, Dr. Kvavik said it was less than \$100,000 and will pay for itself in three months in increased efficiency. It also offers other options, such as permitting departments to make modifications in the schedule once the initial assignments have been made (they can use the computer to book a room), and it has the capacity to help in planning (to ask the "what ifs"). He assured the Committee that this program has been used at over 50 other institutions, some the same size as the University; it is used on the Duluth campus and works fine.

One "what if," to use the English Department hypothetical again, might be to move it to the west bank, put Social Work in St. Paul, and then determine if Blegen Hall can be shut down for a year for remodeling. If the schedule can be handled with existing classrooms, maybe new buildings could be cheaper; maybe a new architecture facility could be built with fewer classrooms. Dr. Kvavik said he had the hunch that once the system is in place, and safely used to schedule classes, it would be possible to start taking facilities out of use and to close buildings. One Committee member suggested demolishing the Science Classroom Building; others concurred with this proposal. Dr. Kvavik observed that establishment of standards would mean that a building like that would never again be constructed.

Dr. Kvavik told the Committee that perhaps 50-60% of the classrooms themselves were acceptable but that the furnishings were not. Changing furniture (e.g., to accommodate laptop computers) would improve a lot of space. One question is whether to fix many existing classrooms or to build two or three high-tech facilities. This is another issue that a faculty/student committee could provide advice about.

Asked how he would respond to queries that faculty might have about classroom changes, Dr.

Kvavik said that is one purpose of the advisory committee, to relay faculty concerns.

One idea that has come up is a proposal to the Alumni Association: rather than build the gateway center, how about working with each graduating class to take responsibility for a classroom or group of classrooms? There could be plaques put up identifying the Class of '46 as responsible for the remodeling or maintenance of this room. It would not take a lot of money, and the Foundation people believe donors might be interested in this kind of project. It also might encourage students to think later about contributing to such an effort after they have graduated.

Dr. Kvavik assured the Committee there would be consultation with departments about upgrading classrooms. Demand must be matched to need, he said.

It is important to consider the implications of a change in scheduling, said one Committee member. Departments will lose control of rooms, for one. Another may be that it could force scheduling of classes after 2:00, which could be a concern to faculty. It is important that SCEP consider the implications, Dr. Kvavik agreed; there are educational policy implications to a common calendar and spreading classes over the day, and SCEP should comment on them. On the specific issue of classes later in the day, one senses that departments are reluctant to offer them because no one enrolls in them. When students are asked, however, they say they've been waiting for the course for two years and would take it no matter WHEN it were offered. There was a concern about the change to the 50-minute hour and the impact on jobs; when contacted, UPS, a major employer of students, said they would accommodate any schedule the University wanted. There are things thought to be constraints, he observed, which may NOT be constraints.

3. Transition Task Force Reports

Professor Heller then asked Dr. Kvavik to comment on the 16 Transition Task Force reports. They are intended to identify who is to do what among provosts, deans, departments, and the central administration. He agreed that it is heavier on what the administration does and lighter on faculty responsibilities, but that is because only three or four of the reports speak to mission functions; most are allocation of administrative responsibilities.

Once the division of labor has been decided on, the administration will begin to restructure tasks to accomplish them. If, for example, colleges will be more central in planning, then the central planning office should perhaps be reduced and the funds distributed to the colleges.

Dr. Kvavik urged the Committee to look over the reports carefully. In some ways, he said, they propose a radical restructuring of the way the University does business. Academic Affairs will no longer have line responsibilities for the colleges, so will not be involved in promotion and tenure decisions. They will have four major functions:

- institutional management, such as human resources and payroll
- academic management, such as planning and classrooms
- resource management, such as libraries and computing
- training and counseling.

Professor Heller thanked Dr. Kvavik for joining the meeting and promised that the Committee would look over the reports.

4. Educational Policies on Classes and Schedules

The Committee took up the educational policies adopted over the years by the Senate that deal with classes and schedules.

It appears that at least three of the major policies (dealing with credit modules, the time of first hour, and the length of the class period) are not being followed. For the efficient operation of the University, it is important that they be enforced, it was said.

The Committee spent a considerable period deliberating what matters it is appropriate to have Senate policy about and what is more appropriately left as implementation details; Committee members also discussed the degree of specificity that should be contained in Senate policies. There appeared to be general agreement on the following points:

- There should be uniformity in the starting times of classes.
- The distribution of courses over the day should not be left solely to departments to decide.
- Two-hour blocks of time are needed for some courses, and longer periods may be needed for labs.
- It may be appropriate to move class starting times back to the hour, reducing the time between classes to 10 minutes, because it is not necessarily educationally sound for students to be taking back-to-back courses, and it isn't really possible to get between classes a long ways apart even in 15 minutes. This would also make the class schedule much more sensible than is now the case.

What is the import of having a policy, asked one Committee member, if there are no teeth in them? What if a department does not follow the policy? The administration must enforce them, Professor Heller said. There is now in place a protocol for administrative response to Senate actions; once the existing policies have been reviewed, codified, and accepted by the administration, presumably the policies will be enforced. Moreover, it was pointed out, the policies are intended to reflect the decisions of the University community, as enacted by the Senate. There must be as much uniformity as required to make the institution function, but no more than needed.

There has been much departmental autonomy, it was noted, and there ought to be some institutional understanding about it. In the case of classrooms, pointed out another Committee member, that autonomy has markedly increased costs of operation.

What is it the policies on classes and schedules are intended to accomplish, asked one Committee member? The Committee agreed on two obvious goals, but others may exist:

- To make it possible for students to schedule classes and graduate in four years.
- To maximize the efficient educational utilization of the University's physical plant.

It may be appropriate to treat different levels of courses differently (e.g., have different class and schedule policies for 1-XXX courses, 5-XXX courses, and 8-XXX courses). Students in 1-XXX courses have to negotiate schedules across more departments than do upper level and graduate students.

It was agreed that the subcommittee that evaluated existing policies on classes and scheduling would prepare recommended policy changes for the next meeting.

Professor Heller then adjourned the meeting at 3:40.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota