Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, September 29, 1999
1:00 – 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall

Present: Judith Martin (chair), Wilbert Ahern, Steve Fitzgerald, Darwin Hendel, Gordon Hirsch,
              Emily Hoover, Karen Seashore Louis, Christine Maziar, Kathleen Newell, Marsha
              Odom, Riv-Ellen Prell, Tina Rovick, Richard Skaggs, Suzanne Bates Smith, Thomas
              Soulen, Craig Swan

Regrets: Steven Sperber, Lisa Wersal

Absent: Rita Snider, Bradley Wuotila

Guests: none

[In these minutes: teaching award recipients; classroom expectations; overlapping classes; ordering texts
online; repeating courses; class notes on the web]

1.   Data on Teaching Award Recipients

        Professor Martin convened the meeting at 1:05 and related that she had received from Ms.
Linquist, in Human Resources, data on the distribution of Morse-Alumni Award winners (since 1991
only; the database before that year does not contain the information requested). Nominees/winners were
as follows:

Instructor	5 nominations	1 award
Asst Prof	13 nominations	4 awards
Assoc Prof	84 nominations	31 awards
Prof	83 nominations	35 awards

        Does the adoption of the requirement that an individual must have been at the University for five
years largely address the concern that was raised about the potential for embarrassment if the award is
given to a tenure-track faculty member who subsequently does not obtain tenure? The Committee
concluded that it did.

2.   Draft Guidelines on Classroom Expectations

        The Committee next took up the draft Guidelines on Classroom Expectations, which the
Committee had approved in draft last spring and which had recently been circulated for comment to deans
and department heads. The Committee began the process of considering the comments and amending the

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represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate or Assembly, the Administration, or the Board of
Regents.

draft guidelines accordingly. A number of issues arose during the "editing" discussion, and the draft will be revised accordingly.

3.   Policy on Overlapping Classes

        Professor Martin next recalled that the Committee some time ago had recommended to the Assembly a change in the class schedule, for semesters, on the Twin Cities campus, that was intended to alleviate problems with students taking courses on the Minneapolis and St. Paul campuses that ended/began too close together. With the change, students would no longer be constantly late to class.

        The problem has not been solved, however, and it arises most often in connection with the intersection between "A" schedule classes and "B" schedule classes (the latter are the 75-minute classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays). Classes continue to end, and begin, at the same time, on different parts of the campus, so that students are recurrently late to class. Professor Martin said she continues to have students tell her they will be consistently late to her class because another class ends too late for them to make it on time, and she has heard similar stories from many other faculty members.

        This problem might be ameliorated were the "B" schedule classes shifted by 15 minutes; the end/start times would be the same at 2:00 rather than 11:00, which would at least reduce the number of students with the problem (because the number of classes offered at those times is far less than at 11:00). The impact on the St. Paul campus must be studied, however.

        Another problem is that some classes are programmed to end, and start, at exactly the same time in the same classroom. That is physically impossible, it was noted.

        One question that came up last year was the cost to make a change in PeopleSoft. The original policy on overlapping classes that the Assembly approved called for the registration system to prohibit students from registering from overlapping classes, and also from registering for courses that ended/started in less than 30 minutes of each other when one was on the Minneapolis campus and one was in St. Paul, or vice-versa.

        Dr. Swan said he would inquire if it is possible to obtain data on the number of students affected by the problem of classes ending/starting at the same time. Mr. Fitzgerald advised that if any change is to be made for the 2000-01 academic year, it must be in place by mid-November, 1999. That precludes action this year, because the next Senate meeting is December 2. On the other hand, the existing policy leaves to the Registrar the discretion to determine actual class start times, so perhaps something could be done within the limits of existing policy.

        Professor Martin observed that since SCEP is the committee responsible for looking out for the best interests of students and faculty in educational matters, it should take a strong stand on this issue.

        One Committee member inquired why PeopleSoft does not track side-by-side classes, and figure out a buffer? What would the cost of implementing one be? This, it was said, is a significant educational issue. Another Committee member explained that PeopleSoft is still in a transition period to a customized system at the University, and it will do what it needs to do. There are enhancements that need to be added, and this could be an appropriate one to add to the priority list. Many changes to PeopleSoft, it was

noted, have been rejected because of cost. It is important, concluded one Committee member, that this Committee make it clear that the problem cannot be allowed to continue.

4.   Ordering Textbooks Online

Professor Martin asked Dr. Swan to outline the issue raised about ordering textbooks online.

Dr. Swan noted that there are places where a student can order textbooks online. It is not clear how good those services are. He has heard it said that some of the services induce faculty to give them book orders by providing incentives to the faculty, such as scholarship funds for the faculty member's department or personal payments to the faculty member. The scholarship funds may be acceptable, although that requires thought; the personal payment is bothersome, and existing policy may not cover it. There are policies on the use of materials that a faculty member has authored; they can be used by the author in a course, but may not profit from that use.

This may be a trivial issue, Dr. Swan concluded, but if the future of book purchasing is on the web, and campus bookstores are going to become dinosaurs, then it merit attention.

Committee members offered a number of comments on the matter:

--   From what one can tell, the prices of books online aren't much lower than bookstore prices. What is bothersome is that students get no benefit from the service.

--   Bookstores give money to student groups, which support would be lost if bookstore sales dry up.

--   How do these services obtain information about University courses? No one knew, but as University bookstores themselves do more online sales, others can view the websites. Most "TextsRUs.com" ventures will be interested in large classes, not specialized graduate seminars. The University should NOT say it will not share information; the problem is possible kickbacks. One would like to think that people would see them as wrong, but the world is changing.

--   This is not a new issue. Many years ago, there was a question about whether faculty members could submit their book lists EXCLUSIVELY to an off-campus bookstore. The answer was that the lists HAD to be provided to the University bookstores, even if also to other retailers. All that is needed here is a rule to forbid kickbacks.

--   Students may be under the impression that they can purchase their books online for less money; there could be a rule requiring them to go through the University bookstores. (On the other hand, some universities have terrible bookstores and no good faculty member ever gives their book list to the campus bookstore. The University bookstore should be supported, but others should not be constrained from the market.)

--   Some universities are going to online book sales exclusively, and eliminating the campus bookstore.

--   Free enterprise should not be quashed; conflict of interest should be.

It was agreed that the Committee would examine existing policy to determine if it covered this issue.

5.   Repeating Courses

Again, Professor Martin turned to Dr. Swan to begin the discussion.

Dr. Swan reported that he had informed Professor Martin of recommendations from the student affairs people (CSAA) in the colleges concerning the policy on repeating courses. There are access issues raised. The policy adopted by SCEP provides that students may repeat a course as many times as they wish. The policy also says that "where colleges allow" students to repeat course, which raises two questions:

1. If a CLA student takes an IT course, and each college has different repeat policies, which college rules controls whether or not the student can repeat the course?

2. When a college does allow repeats, which grade counts? CSAA has recommended that if a student receives a C- or better in a course, that grade will count whether or not the student repeats the course.

Dr. Swan said that he believed while the answer to the first question was not settled, SCEP and the Senate had spoken clearly on the second question: the policy provides that the LAST grade earned in the course is the one that will count in the GPA (although all grades must appear on the transcript). Does SCEP wish to revisit this question? The CSAA recommendation is going to the Council of Undergraduate Deans (CUD), not to SCEP, but Dr. Swan said he would like to be able to advise CUD on whether SCEP was likely to change its mind on this point.

One Committee member inquired why a student would want to repeat a course if he or she had obtained a passing grade. It was recalled, from SCEP conversations last year, that students who need a high GPA to get into professional programs (e.g., computer science, business, etc.) may need to repeat a course to increase their GPA. And in some fields, students may need to repeat a course simply to acquire mastery of the material, irrespective of their GPA.

It was suggested, and the Committee agreed, that SCEP should see what CUD recommends.

Why are colleges allowed to have different policies, asked one Committee member? That just leads to confusion for students AND faculty.

6.   Class Notes on the Web

Professor Martin recalled that the Committee had been provided recently with articles noting web sites where student notes from courses were being posted. Is this something the Committee is concerned about?

Dr. Swan cautioned that this may not be an area where the Committee has free rein; if it believes the matter should be pursued, someone from the General Counsel's office should be invited to join a meeting.

Committee members raised a number of points.

--   If there were a policy, how would it be enforced? What would happen to students who were found to have violated it?

--   Some professional schools have note-takers who write up notes and sell them to other students. This does not necessarily occur with the consent of the instructor, but no one stops it and says students must come to class.

--   This is not necessarily harmful. If the notes are good, it can promote student learning; if they are bad, it is a waste of money. One faculty member said that the copyright notice now appears on everything that she puts on the web. Faculty members have to protect themselves, but it is unwise to think that the University can constrain information. And if a student can pass a course without coming to class, the class isn't very good.

--   This is an intellectual property question. A recent article highlighted notes that contained unpublished data and unpublished textbooks.

--   One faculty member noted that he puts his notes on the web--but that it is his choice. It is appropriate for the University to regulate this.

--   Some believe the practice encourages non-attendance at classes. It is correct to say that putting notes on the web can be useful, but there has been no controlled experiment to determine if the practice has an impact on learning, grades, or attendance.

--   Faculty need to be provided assistance on how to protect intellectual property and yet provide for a benefit to the community.

--   In this case, as with the bookstores, technology is racing ahead of the University's ability to deal with it.

Professor Martin said a representative from the General Counsel's office would be invited to a future meeting to discuss this issue. She then adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota