

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy
November 30, 1989**

Present: John Clark (chair), John Clausen, Jean Congdon, Carol Grishen, Karen Karni, Marvin Mattson, Timothy Mazzoni, J. Kim Munholland, Gary Parnes, Julie Peterson, Jennifer Wesson

Guests: Lesley Cafarelli (Educational Development Programs), Elizabeth Grundner (Room Scheduling), Darwin Hendel (Academic Affairs), Warren Ibele (Senate Consultative Committee)

1. Report of the Chair

Professor Clark reported on several items accomplished and pending. Committee members held a brief discussion about the intent of the action of the Senate in adopting the 1:1 ratio between credits and contact hours.

2. Discussion with Professor Ibele

Professor Ibele opened his remarks by saying that the subject matter was of such importance that he thought it worthwhile to meet personally with the Committee. There were two issues he proposed to bring to it. The first arises from a question raised by the Board of Regents: How will the University measure the improvements in quality it is proposing to accomplish. The second issue arises from the commitment by the institution, from the president, the administration, and the deans, to increase diversity in the student body. Professor Ibele advised the members of SCEP that he was placing these questions, in the first instance, in front of them.

Part of the bargain with the legislature, he recalled, is that the University would receive increased funding at the same time it managed a decline in enrollment; in return, the University would improve the quality of the education delivered.

On the matter of increasing diversity, he said, there must be involvement of the faculty. In the past the University has been passive about the composition of the student body; it has accepted those who have applied and are qualified. There must be a different posture now; the University must take an active role in recruiting the members of under-represented groups (many of whom, anecdotal evidence suggests, are fully qualified to enter the University but who go elsewhere because they never hear anything from the University). Professor Ibele cautioned that he was not implying that the faculty are solely responsible for this situation; rather, he argued, if the institutional commitment is to be given effect, it must ultimately come through activity and support from the faculty.

The faculty, he explained, goes about its work in various ways--through committee activity,

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through summer session undergraduate research appointments, through hiring on research contracts, recruiting, advising, and the like. Professor Ibele asked that SCEP consider what might be appropriate indices of educational quality and advise the Consultative Committee on what might be done to enhance diversity.

On the measures of improvement in quality, Professor Ibele reported, the President has cited several indices which might be used: class size, availability of courses, undergraduate research opportunities, advisor/student ratios, the number of holds, study space availability and security, availability of athletic facilities, retention, graduation rates (including by different cohorts), and so on. The Consultative Committee and the administration are soliciting the help of SCEP in developing appropriate measures of quality.

Another element of both issues, Professor Ibele suggested, might be financial aid and employment. If students are strapped for funds they must commit too much time to work. He inquired about the large numbers of students hired on the campus: Could those employment funds be targeted in such a way that in return for employment, based on need, the students in return would commit themselves to study on a more full-time basis?

Professor Clark turned then to Dr. Hendel and questioned him about the status of the outcomes assessment projects. Dr. Hendel said they are only just beginning and have no results to report to the Committee. He added, however, that the accrediting agencies are taking up the matter of outcomes: They are focussing on undergraduate education and the actual learning that takes place; the accreditation materials now require attention to outcomes. It will be several years before the Twin Cities campus must undergo an accreditation review, but the University will have to be prepared to respond to those questions.

Professor Ibele agreed with the observation that care must be taken so that educational programs are not constructed with outcome assessment in mind such that the tail wags the dog. Of course outcomes are central to the educational process, he observed--but it may not be possible to quantify the full benefit of an education. Education, he pointed out, is an investment and one never knows quite how or when it will affect a student.

Professor Ibele was asked if the University would make it possible for faculty to spend time with lower division students; the question was coupled with the observation that undergraduate education here has declined since the 1950s because the faculty have delegated away most responsibilities for dealing with students. Professor Ibele responded that the Consultative Committee had taken up this very topic at its meeting earlier in the day; while no conclusions were reached, the recommendations for the single admissions office would entail increased funding. Several faculty on the Consultative Committee, in the context of better treatment of lower division students, had also called for increased faculty contact.

Discussion also touched on the perceived dichotomy between undergraduate education, on the one hand, and graduate education and research on the other. The Committee seemed of the view that the University ought not emphasize one, then the other, or it runs the risk of sitting on a seesaw.

Professor Clark thanked Professor Ibele and promised that the Committee would respond to his requests.

3. Diversity Among Teaching and Research Assistants

The Committee learned of data collected by Ms. Grishen concerning the racial/ethnic backgrounds of those who hold TA and RA appointments. She reported that she has, thus far, accounted for 61% of the 4467 RA and TA positions at the University. Of those 2762 about which she has information, 141 are held by minorities. Of those 141, 94 are held by Asian-Americans. That may not, she said, actually represent 94 different people, because one individual can hold more than one position. These numbers, she concluded, say that something is badly wrong at the University.

Committee members took various views on the meaning of the data. It was suggested that departments could hire outside their own graduate students for teaching and research; another said that might work for research but it would not do to have a math graduate student teaching history or vice-versa. If graduate students are seen as junior faculty, it is only natural that departments will provide funding to their own students first.

There was agreement that there are insufficient numbers of minority graduate students; the solution seen by some, however, was to get more minorities into the programs rather than attempt to jockey the existing numbers around.

4. Meetings of subcommittees

The Committee broke for a short while into subcommittees. When the full Committee regrouped, Professor Clark announced that the subcommittees would be expected to meet at their own convenience; he then asked for brief reports from each.

5. Attitudes about the quality of undergraduate education

Professor Clark asked if there were any Committee members who wished to express their views on the quality of undergraduate education.

One Committee member began by noting deep concern, after many years on the campus, about the decline in faculty contact with undergraduate students--as well as graduate students. Part of teaching is to talk about graduate school, about the subject matter, about career plans. The faculty are kept so busy with graduate education, research, and committees that they have no time for undergraduates. Part of the problem is the University simply needs more faculty. Another way to address it would be to have one good speech from the dean about the importance of teaching. Several Committee members agreed that there has been a leadership vacuum from both central administration and the deans on the importance of teaching.

It was argued that the University should not retain faculty who do not like students. Several who are good researchers, it was noted, were not granted tenure in IT because they did not like teaching--and making those decisions takes leadership. Some who are good teachers but see the emphasis on research at the University will leave and go to St. Olaf or Carleton; from IT many go to industry.

It was suggested that the Committee needs to know what undergraduates are doing. Is the

Committee hampered too much by the perceived need to protect student jobs? Would it be better if they borrowed a little more, and went to school a shorter time? Dr. Hendel responded that his office would be doing a focussed study on the interaction between student employment and educational success; the University has always had gross statistics but has never examined the issue closely.

Other comments included the following:

- That a lot of students feel there is no reason to come to campus; the quality of the educational experience is so uninspiring that the reason students are off campus is not because they are working but because it is a better place to be.
- Perhaps there should be a contract between undergraduate and the professor, with the expectations of each laid out; if not met, there would be sanctions on either side.
- Undergraduate programs should be subject to external reviews; this will be a subject for SCEP inquiry during Winter Quarter.
- At the end of each course there should be immediate assessment of how it could have been done better. For example, the instructor should be asked if more resources were needed or if a different module would be appropriate.

Professor Clark advised the Committee that as it deliberates over matters during the next many meetings, it will need to move to specific recommendations which can be taken up for action.

The Committee adjourned at 5:05.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota