

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy  
March 28, 1991**

Present: J. Kim Munholland (chair), JoAnne DeMoss, Michael Handberg, Ken Heller, Karen Seashore Louis, Marvin Mattson, Clark Starr, Susan Wick

Guests: Rich Broderick (Brief), William Charlesworth, Jean Congdon, Joan Stenberg

**1. Report of the Chair**

Professor Munholland first reviewed several possible agenda items for the remainder of the year. He then reported on what has occurred with respect to the policy on Study Day and Finals Week; he has received several requests for exemptions and advised the Committee how he had responded to them. He said he intended to make stern decisions and would report them back to the Committee; he would not object if the Committee wished to change his decision. There is a need to make certain that groups are aware of the policy. At some point someone in an office could make the decisions, he said, rather than having him spend time on the telephone.

He told the Committee he had spoken with Vice Provost Hopkins during the break; she wishes to appoint a task force on advising. A draft charge has been prepared; it is to look at the many reports on advising which have already been written and develop recommendations on how advising can be improved. She is particularly interested in the role that faculty should play in advising. SCEP should play a role in nominating individuals to serve; there are to be three faculty, one professional advisor, and one student peer advisor. He asked Committee members to suggest the names of individuals who might serve; he has agreed to serve either as an ex-officio member or as a full member--unless there is another member of SCEP who would be interested in doing so.

One faculty Committee member said he had no idea what an undergraduate advisor should do, even though he has served as an advisor. Advising seems to be a band-aid--if anything goes wrong, blame the advising. It is often used as a way to cover up University shortcomings: If students got good advice, "they could steer their way through the minefield--why did we build the minefield?" The whole idea of advising seems not to be well thought out. Professor Munholland agreed that these questions should be brought to the group and that the discussions should reflect the views of SCEP.

Darwin Hendel has prepared a questionnaire on the student experience, Professor Munholland told the Committee; copies will be circulated for comment.

**2. Discussion of the Draft Report of the Task Force on Liberal Education**

Professor Munholland noted that Professor Clayton had prepared an item-by-item evaluation of the report; he acknowledged that he could not ascertain the correspondence between Professor Clayton's

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numbered items and the Task Force report. The Committee is, he concluded, on its own in terms of how it wishes to comment on the report.

Professor Munholland said it was his view that the Committee's opinions should be forwarded to the Task Force; there is sufficient time to advise it because the report will not be presented for action until the middle of May. The Task Force has a number of meetings scheduled in the near future, so SCEP comments would be timely.

One Committee member commented that after re-reading the entire report, his concerns were more global. One overriding question arose: For whom is the report? Presumably there is some view of what a liberal education should be, for every student--but the University does not have every student on this campus and the students who are here are in well-defined boxes. Many come for career training of some kind and know what they want. There are students in a variety of majors and fields; considering them, one asks what it is they are lacking that the Task Force report addresses. What problem does the report fix? Problems of those who are humanities students? Of those who are "technology" students? Or neither of them? Which group of students does the report address? Who needs it?

Those Committee members who are also Task Force members said they will speak as SCEP members. One said that there is a general problem at most major universities with any student who comes in, no matter what their orientation, in the degree to which they are exposed to ideas other than those which conform most closely to what they think they are interested in. Another commented that in terms of the dichotomy between the professionally-oriented and those seeking a general education, the report is oriented toward the former group. If directed towards a particular group, it would be that one. The Task Force, however, did not develop its report with that in mind.

Does the report do what is necessary, or is it important? The kinds of experiences and problems addressed, said one, seem to be more weighted in favor of what one might call a "classical" education--versus what a 21st century education might be. There is much being said about the scientific and mathematical illiteracy of the general population; yet this report does not address that as a deep-seated problem. Rather, the report seems to say "yes, by the way, everyone should take a couple of science courses, and yes, everyone should know some mathematics." There is no symmetry in the report. There is, for instance, a symmetry between mathematics and language; everything the report says about writing and language can also be said about mathematics. That symmetry does not appear in the report.

It was pointed out that 40% of the required credits are in science and math. Is the argument that the case was not presented compellingly? It is, it was said, a question of integration. The report calls for "writing intensive" courses throughout the undergraduate career; there should be "math intensive" courses as well. No one who is ignorant of mathematics should graduate from the University; to permit them to do so puts them at risk: People who cannot understand graphs and statistical analysis are helpless in our society.

In terms of the literacies one ought to be equipped with, it was responded, the Task Force has also not spoken about economics--which would be equally logical. Economics, it was rejoined, could be grouped with mathematics; it is numbers and trends. Mathematics is not necessarily calculus; everyone is not a poet, but everyone should write and everyone should have some experience reading poetry. Not everyone is a mathematician or scientist, but everyone should understand mathematics when they see it

and read it. Every justification for everything one sees these days is based on numbers.

The Task Force approached these issues in terms of competencies, it was reported; it is correct to observe that the concerns were more focused on writing and communications skills. Another individual reported that the subcommittee which dealt with skills and competencies began its work unanimously of the view that there should be two required courses in mathematics or statistics--numerically-based courses. After many meetings with the math department, the subcommittee became convinced that with the current level of preparation of incoming students, and with what is required in order to teach people who are not mathematically competent, it would be an impossible recommendation. It was literally the one recommendation which was rejected out-of-hand because of the cost. The Math Department claims that about 40% of the incoming students would have to be taught in groups of 15 or fewer if they were to be able to pass a two-quarter sequence of math courses.

Is writing different? How large are Composition courses? They are not small. It was pointed out, however, that the Math Department believes that TAs cannot provide this instruction; they are good at teaching math to people who are good at math but not to those who are not. That is probably also true in Composition, it was rejoined. But people are already failing the mathematics courses in droves; 40% of the students who take the introductory algebra course fail, it was reported. "I rest my case," said the Committee member who called for strengthened math requirements.

The Task Force had to make a decision, however, it was said: Is the University going to try to compensate for the failure of preparation in the high schools, and use so many of its resources to do so? The Task Force decided to put pressure on the high schools rather than spend University funds. But that is what the report is supposed to be about, it was argued--about a liberal education compensating in some senses for the failure of the society. Why teach ethics? Or composition? This is a *reductio ad absurdum*, of course, but to wash our hands of a part of society that is becoming more and more important is a large failing of the process. To recognize that the problem is bad, and big, and getting bigger, and then to write our students off, is unacceptable.

There are other serious issues involved in this question, one Task Force member observed, having to do with resources and with the Math Department. It is, however, legitimate to raise this issue; the Task Force wrestled with it and a number of similar ones. It is hoped that the report will transmit messages to the secondary school systems. The hidden message in the math and foreign language section is that if students do not come in with a certain level of preparation--irrespective of the amount of "seat time" spent on the subjects--you cannot take courses at the University. If the University would tell students that they have to be at a certain level of preparation, then the failure rate would be lower.

This discussion has to do with tools, it was said. Courses will be identified for writing. The same thing could be done with math, and it should not just be in science courses. Economics, sociology, and virtually every department could identify an introductory course which could be "math intensive." Even though not mathematics courses, such a designator would signal to students that competence in this area is expected.

The Task Force has also heard, Professor Munholland next reported, that it has paid insufficient attention to the traditional humanistic side of education. No one, however, has complained that the social sciences would receive insufficient attention.

Another Committee member said that the word "heresy" comes to mind if the University might consider setting aside the need to provide a secure grounding in math and science because it has not the time or money. Part of the reason, for instance, that Waseca, Morris, Crookston, and Duluth have higher per-student costs is because the regular faculty do the teaching; it may be necessary to look differently at the Twin Cities campus and argue that the extra expenditures will be necessary if the foundations in math and science are important. "And they damn well are."

What kind of message would be delivered to the student, Professor Munholland inquired, if the University had "math intensive" courses--where students might have to do some statistical analysis or read graphs ("stuff that you were supposed to have learned in 7th grade," added one Committee member wryly)? It is hard to say, said one student member. If one is not well-prepared in high school, a student would feel lost--but students should be prepared because they've been warned years in advance to sign up for economics rather than physical education.

One problem, noted another Committee member, is that even students who have gone through the courses do not know the material. A good example is algebra: people who take high school algebra do not know high school algebra; they cannot pass a qualifying exam and they cannot pass the University's college algebra course--of which 60% is a repeat of high school algebra.

The Committee discussed the kinds of courses, and the intensiveness that would be needed, in a non-math course which might be designated "math intensive." Several Committee members noted courses in a variety of disciplines where a basic understanding of the symbols of algebra and math are necessary to understand the materials.

The Task Force subcommittee on skills, which dealt with math, began with a vision on the teaching of math. There are exciting developments in teaching mathematics which don't introduce in traditional ways. The subcommittee believed the University could design a two- or three-quarter sequence which would be an introduction to critical mathematical and statistical concepts--and get away from the rote learning of algebra and calculus, something probably not very useful for an English major. This proposal was developed after a long series of discussions with math faculty. Unfortunately, there is no one to teach the courses. The Task Force, it was said, would have recommended finding the funds if it thought the Math Department would have taught them.

The point, however, is that math is the common language of many disciplines. But math is developmental, it was rejoined; one must understand certain things before more advanced work can be undertaken. That is not true for sociology and political science, at least not to the same extent. It is also not true of composition; the Task Force looked at the question and concluded that writing can effectively be taught more quickly. There are models for teaching composition across the curriculum; there are no equivalent models for math.

Would it be possible to offer clinics or workshops, perhaps year-round, for people to brush up on math or statistics? That strategy, it was agreed, might be useful--in both math and writing. This is a useful idea, one Task Force member observed, but noted that it dodges the problem of remedial instruction.

One Committee member argued that "writing intensive" courses make sense; if you want students to write, you have them write in a context where it makes sense to write and it's not just busywork. That is true across subjects; it would be equally possible to identify a number of courses in any curriculum where instructors could use the tools of mathematics.

Would not the remedial problem be addressed by entrance examinations, one Committee member inquired? They should help, it was agreed; what is missing in the report, vis-a-vis mathematics, is the same language that appears in the section on oral communication, where the Task Force wanted to do more, could not, but called for the University to begin planning now to do more in the future. The same wording appears with respect to a second language. Committee members agreed that something similar should be said about mathematics.

One Committee member suggested that SCEP should take up the question of "math intensive" courses and perhaps develop a model of coursework structure which could be used. A pilot project could be started which would spread "mathematics across the curriculum."

Professor Munholland agreed to bring all of these points to the Task Force.

One student member of the Committee recalled that he had only been required to write two papers during four years of high school; both were in the sciences. A message needs to be sent to secondary education. Professor Munholland agreed, although pointed out the problem is a difficult one and the process is painfully slow. The fact that the University has stiffened its language requirement, however, has had an effect on the hiring of language teachers in the high schools; there is clear evidence of improved language training, and competency, on the part of incoming students.

Professor Munholland inquired if there were other points which should be raised with the Task Force.

One Committee member itemized several issues. One, the way that "cultural diversity," "international perspectives," and "citizen ethics" are integrated into the curriculum: Why not require the diversified core courses to deal with these issues--rather than segregating them? There is the possibility of overlap, it was pointed out, but to require them gets into the problem of prescribing what or how people will teach; the Task Force wanted to avoid that. The Council on Liberal Education will have a lot of responsibility in ascertaining the extent to which courses will satisfy those three requirements. To make them separate courses, rather than permitting overlap, would require nearly one additional year of work. The students, it was reported, almost all support the "cultural diversity" requirement. If there is the "double dipping," however, students will be learning more about international perspectives and cultural diversity than about the foundations of this society, which is the Western European tradition. Some students argue one learns that in other places; others argue to the contrary.

Second, at least one of the "cultural diversity" courses should be devoted to U.S. cultural diversity. There are sufficient problems with race relations in the United States; why should students study race problems in India? Committee members tended not to concur with this suggestion.

Third, there is much confusion about the "new student colloquium"; many students, the Committee was told, do not support it (as least as it is described in the report). The students, noting the list of things

that it should not include, find that it is the items on that list that they are most interested in. A discussion of liberal education would be a waste of time, in their view. While they could not imagine what a 10-week course would look like, they admit they are confused about what it would entail. Freshmen, however, have very few tools to work with; such a colloquium would be more useful for upper class students.

Fourth, many students are concerned about the definition of "cultural diversity," identified as issues of race and gender. Why not issues of homophobia and religious intolerance? Those issues would be relevant to a course, the Task Force members replied.

Another Committee member raised an implementation issue, which arose in discussions about transfer students: There needs to be a fair amount of flexibility, especially for those programs which admit students, who already have a baccalaureate degree, to another baccalaureate degree program. Those individuals should not be unnecessarily hindered. The Task Force members agreed this question needed re-examination. The transfer issue generally has been one the Task Force has paid much attention to.

One Committee member said he had trouble with the cultural diversity proposal. One learns best when the learning is based on concrete experiences, it was said. The trouble with Minnesota and cultural diversity is that there isn't much of it; what there is is subtle. How can one study cultural diversity in the abstract? A good history or political science or physics course could be a cultural diversity course--set in the context of a course which points out how people of different backgrounds contribute to human business. The Task Force members pointed out that there will be no "cultural diversity 1001"; the requirement would be met through disciplinary courses. It still may be abstract, and may be "sensitizing," but it is intended to be primarily an academic engagement with an important issue. As one Committee added, "they can continue to be biased but not ignorant." Moreover, much of education is abstract; if it were not, people would be in college for 200 years. The discussion continued for some while about the relationship between abstract and applied learning.

Comments turned to the "citizen ethics" requirement. Some have expressed opposition to it because it carries with it the notion of community service. Others fear that it may create norms and expected behaviors; one Committee member said that is true and should be acknowledged--and that that is not necessarily bad. The Task Force also proposes that courses dealing with ethical problems be permitted to meet the requirement.

One of weaknesses of the report, one Task Force member noted, is the failure to deal with instruction and different learning styles--an omission the Task Force made by conscious decision because of the constraints of time. Research shows, for instance, that people learn math in very different ways; post-secondary education does not address that problem.

There is another symmetry problem in the report, one Committee member observed. There is an asymmetry between the knowledge incorporated in what might be called the professional fields and the traditional humanities. A liberal education should mean there is knowledge which everyone should have which is incorporated in the professions. There are elements of agriculture, engineering, and medical fields upon which the society is based--and about which most of the population is entirely ignorant. This is particularly true of agriculture--one of the United States's great successes, a driving force in the world,

and a great paradigm for the use of technology in everyday life. It is also the biggest success of American universities; agricultural education in land-grant universities is what made this country. Yet almost no one knows anything about it. There is a kind of 20th-century knowledge which should be part of a liberal education--which is totally missing from the report.

One Task Force member observed that the language on involvement of the professional school faculty in undergraduate education will be strengthened. If some of these issues were incorporated into that language, that would be a useful addition to the report.

Professor Munholland outlined how these points of discussion would be carried to the Task Force.

### **3. Morse-Alumni Award Nominees**

Professor Munholland next welcomed to the meeting Professors Jean Congdon and William Charlesworth, co-chairs of the Morse-Alumni Award committee.

The information being presented, Professor Congdon cautioned, is at this point confidential. Once the Committee has acted on the nominations, the notification letters will go out. Committee members will receive invitations to the award ceremonies and the luncheon which follows.

The process of selecting award winners was difficult, Professor Congdon said; it was separating cream from cream and the result is to make 10 people happy with them and 16 people angry. The new guidelines from SCEP were very helpful, she reported; the different categories were weighted differently, for the first time, and the numbers were used only as guides. No consideration was given to demographic characteristics, she also told the Committee; the 10 selected could have been all males or all associate professors. The result, however, was a considerable spread.

One regret of the nominating committee, Professor Congdon reported, was that there were not 27 nominees; the 27th nominee would have been the late John Clausen.

Professor Congdon provided to the Committee information and statistics on the nominees, reviewed briefly the discussions held by the nominating committee, and invited questions. The Committee also discussed the number of nominees each college and unit is permitted and how those nominations from the units are forwarded. Consideration was given to the quotas assigned to colleges; no decision was made.

Given that one of the objectives of the award is to set examples for the improvement of undergraduate education, one Committee member said, there should be widespread publicity about the kinds of things the award-winners have done, the contributions which they have made, which makes the University want to recognize them. Professor Congdon agreed; she also noted that award carries a matching grant to the department to make those activities more visible and to provide incentives to strengthen undergraduate education. Items are also abstracted from the dossiers and presented publicly. It was suggested that the nominating committee, rather than Academic Affairs or anyone else, should do the abstracting--because it is the nominating committee that considered the dossiers and that made the choices.

In response to a question, Professor Congdon said she believed the nominating committee tended to be more impressed, in the case of senior faculty, with individuals who remained committed to teaching introductory courses. Others on the nominating committee concurred that commendation for outstanding teaching in 5-XXX level courses tended to carry less weight. What was missing, noted another, was the extent to which faculty members have an effect on students--how they change them in terms of improved problem-solving skills, communication of knowledge, and so on.

**It was moved and seconded to accept the report of the nominating committee. The motion was unanimously approved.**

The Committee adjourned at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota