

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy
January 23, 1992**

Present: Stanford Lehmborg (chair), Victor Bloomfield, Thomas Clayton, James Cotter, Michael Handberg, Kenneth Heller, Karen Karni, Clark Starr, Susan Wick

Guest: Vice Provost Anne Hopkins

1. Report of the Chair

Professor Lehmborg convened the meeting at 1:20 and first drew the attention of Committee members to additional minor revisions to the policy on scheduling athletic events during Study Day and Finals Week suggested by Dr. Elayne Donahue; the revisions were approved unanimously.

He then reviewed with Committee members the names of individuals who might serve on the Morse-Alumni Award nominating committee; the names were approved and Professor Lehmborg, in consultation with Professor Clayton, was given authority to find substitutes in the event any of those approved could not serve.

Professor Lehmborg then noted that Professor Richard Skaggs had been selected to serve as chair of the new Council on Liberal Education; he asked Dr. Hopkins to provide the Committee with a list of the final membership of the Council.

2. Discussion of Academic Advising

Professor Lehmborg then asked Dr. Hopkins to review the developments in academic advising in which she was involved. She began by noting that last year she began to express concern at how little faculty involvement she saw in undergraduate advising, especially at the lower division level, in some colleges. She has learned, she told the Committee, that advising in different units is done by different people. The FUNDAMENTAL issue, however, is that faculty are responsible for advising, in that it is an extension of the curriculum, and it is the faculty who must set the policies to ensure that advising is being done right. As a consequence of these views, she and SCEP, last year, appointed the task force on advising which reported to SCEP at its last meeting.

One issue from the report is the statement on faculty responsibility for advising.

A second issue is that advising is a very complex process. Dr. Hopkins related that the University has had many task force reports in recent years which dealt with the topic; when she came to the University, she read them all and didn't know what to make of all the different and divergent recommendations. The responsibility of the group which recently reported to SCEP was to review and assimilate all of the prior recommendations.

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A third issue is that many of the initiatives on undergraduate education overlap with the advising recommendations. The President, for instance, is interested in changing admissions so that it is more professional and much more aggressive in recruiting; the University has been relatively passive about admissions in the past. Internal and external reviews have been conducted and agreement has been reached on proposals to centralize admissions (rather than having separate collegiate admissions procedures). If the University makes these changes, then how students are passed into the institution can be looked at differently, including how they are advised.

A related example is the question of freshman-admitting colleges: At present, a new student is admitting into one of the freshman-admitting colleges and they wait until they are juniors before being admitted to an upper division college such as CBS. But there is no reason, she observed, why CBS could not be a sophomore-admitting college. This kind of change would also have an impact on advising.

Professor Lehmborg inquired about the computerized advising procedure which had been discussed at the last meeting (discussed as though it were an abstract concept, when, it was later learned, there is such a project now in progress). Dr. Hopkins reported that development of the "automated degree audit system" has been underway for several years; it was supposedly almost ready for implementation when she arrived at Minnesota. It is not yet ready and will not be for several more years. What the system will do for a student is list all courses taken, all requirements, and all remaining courses which need to be taken, for any degree program at the University.

The programming involved in the system is extremely complex; there are experiments currently being planned for several Twin Cities departments and the Morris campus. It is essential that faculty be involved in this process, Dr. Hopkins commented--they can see how complicated the programming is, and can also ask if it must BE so complicated. One consequence of having no central body with authority over curricular matters is that the Registrar's office must be in constant contact with all colleges to keep track of requirements and changes. Only about six universities have this degree audit system--and it is very expensive. It eliminates the need for a lot of clerks, however, so over the long term it saves money.

The audit system, Dr. Hopkins pointed out, also empowers faculty to be advisors. If they can call up a record, and the rules, they'll have everything they need; faculty members will not need to know the details of all kinds of policies and procedures. The system will, in addition, be more accurate than even the most professional of advisors. It is, she said, the most student-user-friendly system of which she is aware.

Even with the fanciest of systems, however, students need to talk to people, Dr. Hopkins commented. She inquired if the Committee concurred with her view that advising is an extension of the curriculum and that faculty have primary responsibility for it. Some have asked, she added, why it is necessary to make a statement about faculty responsibility for advising, but there are some units where that is not recognized. It was suggested that calling advising an extension of the curriculum could be misunderstood: if simply intended to guarantee adherence to the rules, one course before another, it is rather mechanical; if, however, it is seen in the larger sense of which courses are better or worse for a major or which courses will lead to research or to graduate or professional schools, then advising is something the faculty should do.

Dr. Hopkins responded that while she intends both meanings, the first--mechanical application of the curriculum rules--is not part of the statement about faculty responsibilities. She went on to observe that if a group claims responsibility for professional advising, a group that is not supervised and that can set its own curricula and grant exceptions, and the faculty do not know what the group is doing, then the faculty are not overseeing advising. Some would say, she noted, that they are not QUALIFIED to do so. In some departments and colleges the faculty do not want anything to with undergraduate advising--which, Dr. Hopkins said, should be among the activities at the heart of the faculty role.

Asked if she wanted a statement from the Committee, Dr. Hopkins affirmed that she did. She also said that implementation of the statement would not be something for which SCEP should be responsible. There is no "center" on this issue, she pointed out, and it would be a waste of time to try to achieve uniformity across the institution in the application of the policy; it is the responsibility of the COLLEGES, and within them, that of the faculty. She can, she told the Committee, charge the deans to look at the advising--without defining how the faculty role should be carried out.

Following queries about whether or not these recalcitrant departments exist--which Dr. Hopkins affirmed do--she opined that if advising could be "fixed well," the repair could have a significant impact on student success. All old models of centralized advising do not work in this University; it is probably appropriate that there is no pattern to who does what. There are variations among colleges because of resources, number of students, and the nature of what is done in the college. Biological Sciences, for instance, with upper division students and far fewer than in CLA, has them work in labs where there is close to a 1:1 faculty-student ratio and an optimum situation for advising. Other scientific disciplines, with larger numbers of students and different ratios, do things differently.

The biggest problem by far, Dr. Hopkins told the Committee, is in CLA--but it is a University problem, not a CLA problem. That is the college where students wait until they decide what they will major in or until they are admissible to an upper division college. CLA is grossly underfunded, and in advising it carries the biggest burden of all of the colleges. One alternative is to get some of the students out of CLA and into such places as CBS earlier. Even within CLA there are great variations among departments; some have 15 faculty and 75 majors while others have 20 faculty and 700 majors. In the latter departments, there is NO WAY the faculty could provide individualized undergraduate advising. There is no pattern that can be imposed; both peer and graduate advising can be done well, as can faculty or professional advising, but all of the people involved need training, which requires funding.

Dr. Hopkins said that she does not have the answers but that certain themes emerge: 1) different people will do the advising; 2) the mix of who does advising depends on funding and numbers of people; and 3) it is a University-wide issue, not a college issue.

Committee members discussed the possibility that a computerized degree audit system would reduce even further the incentives for students to see faculty and whether or not it would be necessary to "invent" reasons or rules by which students must see faculty members. One Committee member averred that students will not see faculty without a reason; Dr. Hopkins suggested that the problems might be different for new students compared to upper division students.

It was maintained by one Committee member that resources drive policy and that one cannot simply declare that faculty will now be involved in advising; either faculty must be added or others must

do some of the things faculty are now doing. Dr. Hopkins noted that she has not put a great deal of money into advising, although there are funds available in her office, because she has been unsure what needed to be fixed. The bulk of the problem, it is clear, is in CLA, and even if some of the burdens are shifted to other colleges, CLA will still have far more students than it is funded to deal with. The available resources, she said, need not buy more professional advisors; it could, for instance, buy faculty time to be devoted to advising.

It was noted that the University generally has a poor record of monitoring what it does and that there would need to be a mechanism for ensuring that the colleges deliver advising in accord with institutional policy. Dr. Hopkins agreed, and pointed out that there is no mechanism for the enforcement of any Senate policies; policies should contain provisions allocating responsibility to identified administrators and then "hold my feet to the fire."

Asked if one measure of better advising might be higher graduation rates, Dr. Hopkins thought not and said a better way to measure it would be simply to ask students. Annual surveys of students are now being conducted, by college, so it is possible to know what changes are occurring from year to year. It is true, she acknowledged, that not all students will need to see advisors very much--and their responses on this issue would not be relevant--but the University needs to create an environment whereby students who feel the need for advising, or who are smart enough to want it, can readily get it.

Discussion turned to the statement on faculty responsibility for advising. One Committee member cautioned that to grant so much flexibility, and to acknowledge so much decentralization, may be self-defeating; who would have thought, ten years ago, that a centralized admissions process would be desirable? Dr. Hopkins conceded she was not certain if this represented capitulation or recognition of the strength of decentralization; at this University, however, what works best, she said, comes from the departments and then has the support of the administration. What is local is what makes the University great; that state of affairs makes sense for advising as well, especially at the level of the major. She also said that decentralization, in her judgment, was more a matter of tradition than size; few institutions, she pointed out by way of comparison, permit colleges autonomy in curricular matters, but Minnesota does.

What is the goal of advising, asked one Committee member. Unless the goals can be identified, there are no yardsticks by which to measure advising. The policy should be general, it was agreed, to fit the different academic environments of the University, but somewhere goals need to be set. Another Committee member suggested that the setting of goals should be a part of the dealings between Academic Affairs and the colleges; the colleges could develop goals, in consultation with Academic Affairs and the faculty, and ways to measure their accomplishment. There was general agreement that the faculty should be solicited for their views, but a distinction was drawn between the goals and how they should be accomplished--the latter to be decided upon by the colleges. Dr. Hopkins responded that who "the faculty" are with whom she should consult was not clear; it was agreed that she would make the first attempt at drafting goals, which SCEP would then review at a meeting later in the year.

It was moved, seconded, and voted (with none opposed and one abstention) to approve the "Policy Statement: Faculty Role in Advising" drafted by the Anderson committee and to forward it to the Senate Consultative Committee for placement on the docket of the Senate for action.

It noted that some in the Senate may have the same reaction that SCEP members did: Who needs

this policy? Professor Lehmborg concurred and asked Vice Provost Hopkins to assist him in drafting comments about the policy which would provide evidence "that something is broken."

It was also suggested that this is "enabling legislation" in which the faculty say "we're in charge of this and don't forget it!" It also says, it was added by another, that the administration has the responsibility to enforce the policy.

3. Discussion of Evaluation of Teaching

Professor Lehmborg then drew the attention of Committee members to the draft report of the ad hoc subcommittee on evaluation of teaching and turned to Professor Wick for comment.

Dr. Wick informed the Committee that this report was only intended to serve as a first draft. She, along with Mr. Handberg and Professor Karen Seashore Louis, obtained information from the colleges about existing policies on evaluation of teaching; Dr. Hopkins had obtained parallel information from the other Big Ten schools. The subcommittee considered these materials as well as the 1974 policy on evaluation of teaching that had been adopted by the University Senate.

There are a number of points which should be emphasized, Dr. Wick said. First, it is important to the vitality of the University that it appraise teaching. Second, no single means of assessment should be relied upon. Third, one result must be to identify strengths and weaknesses for individual faculty members--and not simply rank instructors in a department. Fourth, there are sensitive issues involved, and a major one is that the results of evaluation must not be used for purposes other than which they were intended (e.g., say they will be used to improve teaching methods and then incorporate them in promotion and tenure reviews). Fifth, the results should be used sensibly, such as in the assignment of faculty to certain courses in a department. Sixth, peer evaluation consists of more than class visitation; it also includes review of syllabi, grades awarded, and student work in a particular course.

The bottom line, Professor Wick concluded, is that the subcommittee favors a strong policy.

One Committee member observed that Biological Sciences has from time to time been held up as a good example of how teaching evaluation should be done--but even it does little beyond course evaluations. The report from Professor Wick suggests that other mechanisms are at least as important--but are not used.

One Committee member argued that the report does not get at the heart of the issue, which is teaching effectiveness--how much students learn. What is being proposed, and should be recognized, is the collection of opinions about the process of teaching, not of the outcomes. This is a small perturbation in a minimalist system, it was argued, and large change is required if the system is to do better--and if one proposes large change, one is more likely to get rolled over than to accomplish the change. This report, it was concluded, may get at some evil practices but will not have significant impact.

Dr. Hopkins took issue with this view, contending that there is no evidence one gets rolled over for proposing significant change and that no one knows how to measure teaching effectiveness. Inasmuch as this report, and efforts which might ensue from it, are not intended to be a "giant research project for the world," one can begin by obtaining measures of teaching. The measurement results will be clustered, she

observed, and will identify the best and the worst teachers, but that in itself has utility. She constantly hears, Dr. Hopkins told the Committee, that people who love teaching feel undervalued at the University. Before one can reward excellent teaching, one has to find it, and there are different ways to tell who is superb.

The problem, it was suggested, is that with a confined range of results, faculty will be discouraged from being concerned about teaching. Most faculty members are not "showmen" or instinctively scintillating; there are a few people with natural talent, but some faculty work hard at their teaching. Those who work hard at it will receive average ratings--and receive no reward for their effort, so will direct their attention to their research, for which they WILL be rewarded. This report will not encourage people to put time into their teaching.

What should happen, it was argued, is that central administration should put some resources into developing measures of teaching effectiveness--what people know. It has a vested interest in evaluating the outcomes.

Dr. Hopkins characterized this view as "baloney." The disciplines can find out quickly what effective teaching is, she said; the University doesn't have to do research on the subject. One direct way to measure effectiveness, it was noted, is when courses are prerequisites; one can look at the results in the next course (with appropriate controls).

The problem with this discussion, asserted one Committee member, is that the question of goals has not been addressed, as with the issue of advising. Some think there is less need for teaching evaluation than for an increase in learning; students do not have the ability to make discriminations and their abilities have declined steadily over the past two decades. Student evaluations can be valuable--if they are essays and one can gauge the ability of the author. Peer reviews, in some places, are complicated by politics and are busywork for most faculty.

Dr. Hopkins agreed that the question of goals is a good one. There is a widespread perception that teaching is not valued (which may or may not actually be true). If one believes that a great university has excellent teaching, research, and outreach, how does one encourage the faculty to do better for students? does one set a standard and hold everyone to it, and without reaching it one is not promoted or tenured? She said she did not know how to make teaching a more vital part of the University.

One Committee member observed that a candidate for tenure in one department, who consistently ranks in the bottom 20% in terms of teaching evaluation but who has published consistently and well, WILL without doubt receive tenure. Dr. Hopkins rejoined that some departments will NOT accept mediocre teaching when they make tenure decisions.

There are faculty who care about their teaching, it was argued, even though the results may not show up on student evaluations; what is more important is what administrators do. It is not acceptable to use the surveys to measure teaching effectiveness. It was then pointed out by members of the subcommittee that the report stresses evaluation methods that go beyond student surveys.

The evaluation process, it was pointed out, is not fine-tuned; it can identify the stars and the deadwood. Unfortunately, in some departments it is used for fine-tuned decisions--there needs to be an

evaluation of the evaluation process. Another Committee member said that in over 20 years of looking at reports on teaching evaluation, this report makes sense. A department head knows who the good teachers are, student evaluations identify them ("students don't lie") and the Committee needs to take up the report as a way to get at evaluation.

It was agreed that the subcommittee report would be taken up again at the SCEP meeting of February 27, the next time that Vice Provost Hopkins would be able to attend.

The Committee adjourned at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota