

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, October 25, 1995
1:15 - 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall

Present: Laura Koch (chair), Anita Cholewa, Elayne Donahue, Thomas Johnson, Jeffrey Larsen, Judith Martin, Glenn Merkel, Helen Phin, William Van Essendelft

Regrets: Avram Bar-Cohen, Robert Johnson

Absent: Paul Cleary, Gayle Graham Yates, Megan Gunnar, Darwin Hendel, Ryan Nilsen, Mark Schuller

Guests: Professor Leonard Kuhi, Dean Michael Martin

Others: Elizabeth Grundner (Office of the Registrar), Robert Leik (Graduate School), Peter Zetterberg (Academic Affairs)

[In these minutes: Semester conversion; grading policy]

1. Semester Conversion

Professor Koch convened the meeting at 1:00 and welcomed Professor Kuhi and Dean Martin to discuss their experiences with semester conversions at other institutions.

Professor Kuhi began the discussion by reviewing the contents of a paper he had prepared several years ago concerning a possible switch to semesters; he made a number of observations about the experience at the University of California at Berkeley. He recalled one observation: asked which was better, semesters or quarters, it was said that it makes no difference, as long as one does not change.

Professor Kuhi said it must be understood that the change should NOT be made for financial reasons, because there are no financial gains; the change should only be made for academic reasons. The other most important point to remember is that all the issues must be addressed in advance.

He then outlined what should have happened at Berkeley, an institution similar to Minnesota:

- courses needed to be reduced by one-third
- graduation requirements were reduced from 180 quarter credits to 120 semester credits, four years at 15 credits per semester
- ten-week quarters were converted to 15-week semesters
- it was a wonderful opportunity to clean house on courses and to consolidate courses. Three-quarter

*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.

- courses became two semesters; typically two-quarter courses became one semester; a lot of one-quarter courses were combined.
- the course credit module should have gone from four credits to three so the idea of a full load was five 3-credit courses
 - while not an opportunity to save money, the change was an opportunity to improve efficiencies and services
 - a big principle, agreed on in advance, was that there would be no change in workloads

What did happen was somewhat different.

- Courses were not cut by one-third; a lot of old favorites of the faculty were left on the books.
- There was the temptation to lengthen a quarter course by adding lectures and making it better. This happened a lot in the reading and writing courses, which was acceptable pedagogically, except that one-third fewer students could take the courses in one year.
- A lot of units did clean house and updated their requirements, the liberal education requirements were improved, and the support services were improved. Units and staff had been so strapped for funds--just as at Minnesota--that the elimination of one cycle of work permitted them to do their jobs better. It reduced staff stress.
- In one college, they started tracking students at risk and making them attend workshops and study periods, which could only occur because staff time had been released as a result of the change.
- Workload is a question. Under the former semester system (before 1965), faculty taught two courses per term, which translated to six courses per year under the quarter system. However, 16 years later, the load under the quarter system had declined to 5 courses per year; hence, going back to semesters with two courses per term would have meant an increase in workload.
- Students were to take 15 credits per term under the quarter system, but were only taking 12.9 credits and about four courses per term. When the change to semesters was made, students did NOT want to take five courses. In the early 1960s, the average student load was 14.5 credits, but it had dropped to 12.9 by the early 1980s. In the College of Letters and Science, students were forced to increase their load, which improved graduation rates slightly to about 70%.
- Because only 120 credits are required for graduation, and the flexibility of the quarter system was reduced by the change to semesters, the number of courses required for a degree dropped and it was difficult to get breadth in the curriculum.

The bottom line is that one must plan very carefully. Both this Committee and other groups must identify issues and solutions, and should NOT assume that people will find solutions by themselves.

Professor Kuhl also said he hoped the steering committee at Minnesota would be more responsible than the one at Berkeley, which represented the academic side only--it made decisions and left it up to the administration to implement them and pay for them.

Several questions were posed.

- Students did not want to take five courses? They were not required to do so. This is an issue; people get set in their ways and four courses sounded like a normal load. The current graduation rate at Berkeley is at least twice that of Minnesota, but the system is more tightly controlled and they could mandate student credit load.

- Does increasing the load mean there could not be part-time students? Berkeley does not allow part-time students; a student could not just take one course. With specific dispensation in certain circumstances, a student could take 9 credits, but if one wanted to be part-time, one took courses through the extension division, which WAS in the evenings, not the late afternoons. They were very strict about part-time students.
- Is that preferable to practices at the University of Minnesota? The settings are similar, but the metropolitan area of Berkeley is larger. The extension program provided the outlet for part-time students. At Minnesota there is too much confusion between extension and day school. Berkeley also did not allow day students to take extension courses concurrently.
- The extension program had a separate faculty? Yes; the extension program hired extension faculty. There was very little mixing of day and extension faculty, as there is at Minnesota.
- Berkeley opted for the three-credit module as standard for the semester system? Yes, but it is likely a number of courses have drifted back to the four-credit module. There was also built in a one-credit flexibility between credits and contact hours.
- One worries about the loss of diversity in the curriculum. There is no question that the loss occurs. At the same time, Berkeley revised its requirements and tried to keep the same amount of diversity, but the number of courses dropped.
- What was the educational impact of the change? There was a feeling that one negative result was that students knew more about a smaller number of areas.

Dean Martin then reported to the Committee on his experience at Oregon State, which actually made all the preparations for the change but never switched because at the last minute the Board of Higher Education changed its mind and retained the quarter system. But Oregon State had made all the preparations for the change.

- The change to semesters was very divisive, Dr. Martin related; although the faculty were probably about evenly divided, those who opposed the change felt MUCH more strongly than did those who favored it.
- The process took a lot more time, and there were a lot more issues, than anyone expected, even at an institution that is less complex than Minnesota. Small issues caused a great deal of upset, such as the disarrangement of staff daycare agreements, exchange student calendar problems, part-time student work schedules, and internships--many peripheral to the core change, but of great emotional impact.
- There was a commitment to reform, but it was only differentially followed across the campus and it was VERY differentially followed in the classroom. Some ten-week courses were made into fifteen weeks; some twenty-week courses were turned into fifteen weeks. It is difficult, but the University should try to monitor this.

- They did not understand the integration across units until the change was made. What one department did affected others, and in some cases one department could not set its curriculum until another had completed its work. The changes occurred in the departments but the externalities were very important.
- They tried modularization so that units could offer courses less than a semester in length. (Professor Kuhi said they avoided this at Berkeley, but they did allow one- and two-credit courses.) Many activities in agriculture are built around the seasons, so they had to make accommodations.
- The most difficult changes were at the graduate level, even though most of the attention was focused on undergraduate education. Graduate education changes were left to the last minute, and faculty clung to graduate teaching the most; they cut some slack on undergraduate courses, but were extremely reluctant to give ground at the graduate level.

In terms of Minnesota, Dean Martin observed, there are so many other things going on--RCM, U2000, grants management, information technology--that unless the administration puts some things on the shelf, the conversion will not get done. (Although, Dr. Shively pointed out, the change to semesters could be used as an excuse not to do other things.) At Oregon State there was no sense of urgency about the change until about the last nine months (of the 22 months they had to make the change).

Questions and issues were raised.

- Professor Kuhi is right; the University must anticipate broad policy implications of the change and be willing to enforce them. If curricular reform is wanted, the University must call for it and be ready to exercise oversight. There is almost a need for a separate task force to deal with peripheral implications.
- On the St. Paul campus, the level of activity two weeks before classes is almost the same as when classes are in session; starting after Labor Day is no fix. The Fair has the right to the transitway and some parking on both campuses until the year 2001.
- Regardless of the specifics of the calendar, two semesters take less time than three quarters, which has implications for parking, housing, graduate assistants, and so on.
- Oregon State planned on the three-credit module as average, but allowed modularization for more flexibility. There are schools at Minnesota that will need flexibility because of their programming for outside professionals (e.g., teachers in the summer, who might be able to commit 10 weeks but not 15).
- When the institution is making the conversion, it is still converting students; there is the implication that students on the quarter system are receiving a substandard education--why else would the institution be making the change? Parents are also concerned about what will happen to students caught in the middle--which half of their education will be the better? Even though it is known that there are both pluses and minuses to each system, the fact that the institution is making the change will lead people to think the University believes semesters are better. The answer to that is that the impetus to make the change came from outside the University, in order to

accommodate the calendars of other Minnesota and midwestern schools.

Discussion then turned to the draft semester conversion standards; several questions were raised.

- Why are the semesters only proposed to be 14 weeks? That (tries to) recognize the problem with St. Paul and the State Fair (although probably does so inadequately). 14-week semesters make for a very short year; if there were no spring break, classes could be done by the last week of April. That will be a political issue as well; the faculty will only be teaching eight months of the year, and presumably their salaries could be cut. There has already been criticism of faculty workload; this could exacerbate it. Right now the academic year is clearly defined as the nine months from September 15 to June 15.

It would also exaggerate the "peak" problems from which this campus suffers. There is congestion during the day, much of which could be solved if the class day were extended by an hour. There is also an annual peak load problem which would be made worse by this schedule. The class day and the academic year should be stretched, not condensed.

- One possibility might be 14-week trimesters, although a separate summer session would still be needed. This would make it possible for students to graduate in three years, or even four.

One must be careful in making these kinds of changes; students may not make them. At Berkeley they tried a full summer quarter when they first went to the quarter system; students did NOT want to attend, and the effort was dropped after a couple of years. They also lost the normal summer session students, who could not afford to come for a regular quarter.

- The demographics suggest there will be a lot of changes; the percentage of traditional students entering at age 18 and graduating at 27 will not be as prominent as it has been. In 15-20 years there will be a different student body, and one institution in the Twin Cities is beating the University at this game because it has flexible scheduling for part-time students who are full-time workers.

But the number of high school graduates is going to increase in the next few years. There may be a market shift and a demand for more flexible campuses, but there will be no lack of 17-year-olds entering the University. Nor will there be an increase in older students; the University already serves an enormous number of them, and there may not be a lot of room to increase that group.

There is always room for innovation, however. Universities have a tendency to look at student populations in real time and to build programs around what they know, not what they can know. Faculty resist change, but institutional innovation will be aimed at the next generation of faculty and students.

- How is one to think about teaching loads? If there is a standard credit module, one can think in terms of courses, but if there are varied numbers of credits, then one must factor in contact hours. That is a never-ending issue that is never resolved, and there are endless discussions of whether a 5-credit humanities course is equivalent to a 3-credit engineering course.

This occurs in any university setting. Measuring workload is not measuring productivity, and what is being measured is inputs, not outputs. It is also not just the sciences versus the humanities; it is graduate versus undergraduate education--how does one count advising a Ph.D. student? There are "a lot of wacky ways" to ensure faculty are working hard, but that is because in higher education it is hard to measure outputs, so inputs are measured instead.

The change should be neutral with respect to faculty workload, and people want to move as many courses as possible to three credits. One cannot do both.

Dean Martin concluded by maintaining that if the faculty governance system is not fundamental to the process of making the change, it will fail. He urged that the Committee energize as many faculty to participate as possible across the campuses; there will be no reform and quality improvements at the classroom level without that participation. On the issue of modularization, he said he would not encourage it, that the conversion should be as traditional as possible, but units that need to have modularization should be permitted to propose it to deal with special problems.

Dr. Zetterberg then reported that there will be a semester task force and an academic policy committee that will develop what it believes the principles for conversion should be. All issues, however, will go to Senate committees and the Senate.

Dean Martin said the Committee was off to a great start. Dr. Shively said that he was worried there is so much in the air that cannot be taken off the table, but one compensation may be that all will realize that the University must move fast on converting to semesters.

Professor Koch thanked Professor Kuhi and Dean Martin for joining the Committee.

2. Continued Discussion, Semester Conversion

One Committee member noted that there has been much discussion of the fall term but not the spring; faculty would not like a calendar where the only break in the year is between fall and spring terms. Several possibilities were mentioned by various members of the Committee:

- A break in the spring semester is needed, or a two week-break between semesters and a one-week break during each of them.
- Some kind of J-term between the two semesters.
- An extended break between the two semesters.
- Even if there were three 14-week semesters, there would be ten weeks "to play with."

There is also need for lead time going into the fall semester for a variety of departmental activities, it was noted, so the payroll will have to begin before it does now. Is it assumed that faculty will still be on nine-month appointments? Dr. Shively said there have been no assumptions made, but one would think the nine-month appointment was probable.

Do the conversion standards apply only to the Twin Cities campus? That needs thought, Professor Koch said; there is a wish to standardize much, but that may not be accomplished completely. Some of the proposed standards would be difficult to accomplish at Morris, it was said; their most common

module is five credits, for example, which would make a three-credit semester course a problem.

The outgoing Council on Liberal Education chair has recommended a halt to "double-dipping," (taking liberal education courses that count both for a core requirement and a theme requirement) Dr. Shively reported, and he is sympathetic to that view. But one worries if all of the elements of the proposed conversion standards can fit together. He said he likes the spirit of the standards, but wonders if it will work if double-dipping is ended. He said he has not counted, for example, to see if an engineering student can complete a degree in a reasonable time without double-dipping and with increased writing requirements and with the number of electives prescribed.

Asked why the opposition to double-dipping, Dr. Shively said it has led to perverse course selections. IT advisors, for example, reputedly tell their students not to take any course that does not double-dip, which significantly restricts the pool of courses from which they can choose. He said he is also not convinced, except in rare instances, that double-dipping in most courses is justified; it is more likely that a minor modification was made to an existing course, modifications that do not really warrant designation as a "theme" course and which may not improve the course in any way. These are hypotheses, he added. Being even more restrictive about the number of courses permitted to double-dip would make it even harder for students who "must" double-dip.

Double-dipping also means those courses that count twice will be favored in enrollment over those that do not. Dr. Shively agreed, and speculated that the reason for the significant drop in Economics enrollment is because none of their courses double-dip.

If the intent is to expose students to content in different areas, and a course can deliver in two areas, why restrict it? That will decrease flexibility. Dr. Shively said that he argued VERY strongly, when he was first on CLE, to not restrict student freedom and to allow double-dipping. Since he has seen the results, and the unforeseen consequences, he has changed his mind.

Dr. Zetterberg expressed a concern about one of the conversion standards (Baccalaureate degrees consist of a minimum of 40 courses and a minimum of 120 semester credits. . . . Baccalaureate degree programs may not require more than 140 semester credits). The way it is worded, it sounds like 120 will be the minimum number of credits. Right now it is a 180-credit system, but there are a number of programs that require 192 or 196 credits; this increases costs for the student, the University, and the state. Some units police the 180-credit limit, others do not. The way it is worded it could encourage programs to go to 140 semester credits; it would be better to require that every program requiring more than 120 credits be obligated to justify the additional requirement.

What about 123 credits, asked one Committee member? Dr. Zetterberg reported that they have pulled together a list of all authorized degree programs (of which there are 661--including all graduate programs and counting a B.A. in History as different from a B.A. in English) and identified the credit requirements for each degree. Most agriculture and engineering programs are at 192 credits. It would be better to say that ANYTHING required above 120 credits requires review and approval; in many cases, accreditation will be the issue. Berkeley tried to keep all degrees at 120 credits, and made students pay fully-allocated instructional costs once they went above a certain number of credits (e.g., 140), which addresses the extent to which the state should subsidize students beyond their degree requirements.

To do so, the University would have to demonstrate that the student could have graduated and that there were no institutional hurdles; by the same token, if there were, the University should provide the tuition for students who are barred from graduation because of barriers it imposed. Another Committee member suggested that charging full cost after a certain limit would be penny-wise and pound-foolish. Dr. Zetterberg said he was not advocating such a policy, and noted that the State University System requires 186 quarter credits for graduation, because they continue to require 6 credits in physical education.

Discussion turned to courses and credits. One Committee member suggested that the standard three-credit module was not one most sciences would adopt. There are vast differences between the colleges, it was noted, and some will not change what they are doing. The question is whether one wants significantly different educational outcomes than what now occurs.

It is complicated, Dr. Zetterberg observed. If one looks at year-long sequences (e.g., introductory French), they consist of three 5-credit courses (one per quarter); they could become three 4-credit courses, but then first year French is first year-and-a-half French. Standard introductory calculus is two 4-credit courses; Math could be instructed to offer three 3-credit courses, but then again it will take a year and a half. At the lower division, three-credit courses may not make sense, and SCEP may not want to mandate a minimum number of courses.

Several points were made on this issue. Whoever does course approvals will have to take these kinds of courses into account. It will also affect interaction among departments. Even if there is a minimum number of courses, there needs to be flexibility; a student taking a 4-credit course will look for a 2-credit course to balance it with. But if the majority of courses are four credits, a student will only take 30 courses to obtain a degree.

Will there be an oversight committee in each college to review the curriculum? Will they be charged to review all courses, or will they assume most are acceptable? Dr. Shively said he assumed there would be such a group--it would be up to the colleges--and that they would review all the courses.

3. Other Policies

Discussion turned briefly to the grading policy, and a question was raised about the inclusion of the A+. Professor Koch explained that the students voted down the plus/minus grading system several years ago because there was no A+; good students could receive A-'s but not an offsetting A+ in order to keep a 4.0 GPA.

One suggestion that has been made is that there be no A+ or A-, so that pluses and minuses would attach only to B's, C's, and D's, while A and F would stand on their own. In this case, however, faculty may give more B+'s because they would not want to give A's to students who were on the margin.

Committee members deliberated again over the wisdom of including the A+ and what the views of students might be. Most faculty oppose the A+, it was said, because they worry about students arguing for A+'s.

Faculty want students to learn for reasons other than grades; beyond A's, there are other

satisfactions from doing extremely well--a handshake from the faculty member should count for a lot. To give a tangible reward at every level of performance is to reinforce the completely external nature of the reward.

One Committee member asked to be reminded why the plus/minus proposal was being considered; it is because the faculty in the Carlson School have found the plus/minus system quite superior to the existing system, and because faculty know there is a wide range of performance between a top B and a bottom B; pluses and minuses permit the distinction to be made.

It was agreed that the grading system would be distributed to those who receive minutes and views solicited before the policy is brought to the Senate.

Professor Koch thanked everyone for attending the extra meeting and then adjourned it at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota