

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, November 13, 2013
2:00 – 4:00
510 Morrill Hall

Present: Alon McCormick (chair), Gifty Amarteifio, Michael Anderson, Nicola Alexander, Karla Hemesath (for Barbara Brandt), Thomas Brothen, Lee-Ann Breuch, Elaine Darst, Charlene Ellingson, Timothy Gearns, Gayle Golden, Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, Kenneth Leopold, Keith Mayes, Robert McMaster, Nic McPhee, Kristen Nelson, Moshe Volovik, Susan Wick

Absent: Erich Beckert, Janine Grebin

Guests: Suzanne Bardouche (Office of the Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education); Susan Van Voorhis (Academic Support Resources); Ole Gram (Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs), David Langley (Center for Teaching and Learning); Professor Scott Lanyon (chair, Special Committee on Graduate Education)

Other: none

[In these minutes: (1) spring and summer calendars; (2) financial aid principles and data; (3) revisions to the Student-Rating-of-Teaching form; (4) update from the Special Committee on Graduate Education]

1. Spring and Summer Calendars

Professor McCormick convened the meeting at 2:00 and asked Vice Provost McMaster to provide an update on financial aid and thoughts on potential adjustments to the Twin Cities academic calendar.

Dr. McMaster noted first that the University was one of two finalists for a new award from the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities for its "Trailblazer" award. This award is given to those institutions making the greatest progress in retention and graduation.

The question about calendars is what changes the Committee would like to see, if any, Dr. McMaster said. The president asked a group of people, including people from his office, about possible expansion of the summer curriculum (which could range from a full trimester to tweaking the existing curriculum), and a number of related issues arise (e.g., financial aid, housing). He asked Ms. VanVoorhis, the director of Academic Support Resources, to look at what courses are taught in the summer; in the course of looking at the results, they learned that there is a myriad of courses in the summer: the basic regular academic session from early June to early August; half terms; the May

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session; 10-week sessions; 13-week sessions; and so on. One of his questions to Ms. VanVoorhis was about the teaching load in these sessions.

There are many sections offered during the regular summer term (1,568 in 2012, which includes lectures, recitations, and labs). There were 334 in the May sessions, 166 10-week courses, 117 13-week courses, and some that were unique. His sense, Dr. McMaster said in response to a question from Professor Brothen, is that the number of students tracks with the number of sections offered.

They also looked at the liberal-education courses taught in the summer, Dr. McMaster said, because one reason to enhance summer session would be to enable students to more easily complete their degrees. The offerings are variable but there are some. They are trying to make sure that as many online liberal-education courses as possible are offered in the summer (because students are not necessarily on campus during that time).

Dr. McMaster posed questions. One, does the regular summer session start later than may be desired? He said he believes that it should run, basically, in June and July; right now it goes into August. Two, does the May session start too late? He asked Ms. VanVoorhis to look at the overlap between the May session and spring semester: if there were not many students who take courses in both, it would be possible to let them overlap, but it turns out that a large number of students do enroll for both terms. So a third question then becomes whether to start before the MLK holiday in some years. Last year MLK was late, so spring semester ran late, into mid-May, and the May term ran into mid-June. One possibility might be to start spring semester before MLK, in years when it is late, and just have the MLK Monday off. A fourth question is whether the existing summer session, established in 1997 and not re-examined since, is the most effective way to offer the summer curriculum. That, he concluded, is where things stand. He asked that the Committee discuss the options.

Professor McCormick recalled that at the request of this Committee and the Faculty Consultative Committee, he brought to the Senate floor for discussion the question of changing the start of spring semester before the MLK holiday; some people were opposed because that break is time they use for research and other programs. Dr. McMaster said that people would not lose that time because the break length would essentially be the same; the question is when they want to give up the occasional week, in January or later in May or early June.

Professor Brothen inquired if the May term is needed, given the variety of summer terms that are used. Dr. McMaster said that there are many students in May term; it is very popular, and it also provides study-abroad opportunities.

Professor Nelson said she had spoken with a number of faculty members about a change to spring semester. In biological disciplines, in Minnesota, January is not the best time to do field research, so people in those fields would favor starting spring semester earlier and leave May term in May.

Ms. Golden asked why not start all summer terms at the beginning of June. His concern is the regular academic summer session, Dr. McMaster said, which the last two years have started on June 11 and June 18. Ms. Golden asked whether spring semester and May term would not overlap with the regular summer session if spring semester starts early. It would not, Dr. McMaster said. Ms.

VanVoorhis said that there are also many students who take a May-term class and then go to summer school.

Professor Mayes asked if the goal is to streamline the summer calendar or to adopt a full trimester schedule. Dr. McMaster said it is to fine-tune the summer calendar, not go to a full trimester system at this time, and retain the May session. Right now there seems to be too much variation in the system, especially at the end of 2013 because the start of spring semester was so late.

When will an unusually late summer start next occur, Professor McCormick asked? This coming year, in fact; in 2014, the regular summer session will start at the late date of June 18, Dr. McMaster said. He commented that he did not see anything illogical about always starting spring semester the third week in January, irrespective when the MLK holiday falls. Professor Nelson said there would need to be a consistent start day so that programs and students will know if they can do study abroad. She said she would support starting spring semester even earlier, such as January 15.

Professor McPhee reported that the Morris campus begins classes the week before MLK; there had sometimes been an overlap between the May term and summer session, something he would not encourage. Students need 6 credits to qualify for financial aid, so the terms must be structure so students can receive aid. Dr. McMaster agreed that the May session and the regular summer session should not overlap.

Professor Brothen suggested starting summer session after spring semester, given that there are 3-week courses, 6-week courses, 10-week courses, and so on. Ms. VanVoorhis pointed out that the May session is attached to summer for financial-aid reasons; students must have 15 weeks in combined May/summer terms to receive aid. Dr. McMaster observed that a 13-week summer session equals the May term plus the regular summer term that now runs into August.

Professor McCormick asked if the Committee should look only at calendars beyond those already approved (through 2017-18) or would it revisit those calendars. Dr. McMaster said he would prefer that any changes be adopted before the 2018-19 academic year.

Mr. Volovik inquired how it would be decided to start classes before the MLK holiday, which is always the third Monday in January. Dr. McMaster said that if the MLK holiday is in the fourth week of the month, classes would begin earlier. Ms. Golden commented that it would be easier just to set a spring semester start date rather than orient it to the MLK holiday. Professor Leopold said he remembered that some years ago classes started before MLK; they did, Dr. McMaster said: when the University was on the quarter system, classes started on January 2 or 3.

Professor Leopold said that when he thinks about summer session, he thinks about pedagogy and worries about retention of material taught. Dr. McMaster said that under the quarter system, summer session was two 5-week sessions. He said he did not know the number of faculty members who teach a 10-week course.

Ms. Golden asked if the aim is to avoid summer session running into August. Dr. McMaster said it is, for the regular summer term; 10-week and 13-week classes would do so in any case.

Professor McCormick asked if the Committee wished to address the compressed summer term as a distinct question. Dr. McMaster said he believed the "ship has left the port" on the former; the assumption is that summer terms are compressed. He said he has taught summer classes and they worked well, even if they were somewhat more intense than fall or spring classes. Professor Wick noted that courses are supposed to require the same amount of time from the student irrespective of the term they are offered. Professor McCormick said that in his experience, students often have positive things to say about summer courses. Professor Nelson said that there are students who benefit from deep immersion in a summer course—and some who do not—and there are topics that departments need to consider when developing summer offerings.

Dr. McMaster said there is one drawback to starting the regular summer session close to June 1: high school students are disadvantaged because their school year is not over by then. Ms. Golden asked what percentage of high school students take summer terms; it is very small, Dr. McMaster said. Professor Wick pointed out that graduating seniors are usually out a week earlier than the other students, so could probably enroll in a University summer course.

Professor Brothen said that CLA and Online and Distance Learning are removing all 9-month courses because they hurt graduation rates. This discussion seems to be going in the opposite direction from the federal government, which is moving toward giving waivers for competency-based education. Professor McCormick said that competency-based credit is a discussion for another meeting.

Dr. McMaster suggested that the Committee could ask his office to look at the alternatives and make a recommendation. Professor McCormick suggested they start with calendars already approved for the next four years. Dr. McMaster asked if there was any interest in starting spring semester earlier in January, which would mean final examinations would be the first week in May. He said he would provide various options for the Committee to consider.

2. Financial Aid Principles and Data

Dr. McMaster turned briefly to financial aid principles and data and suggested the Committee return to the topic at a future meeting, given the limited amount of time available. He recalled that a few years ago he created a financial aid team, of 5-6 experts, to establish a set of principles; they developed a very good starting point with four meta-principles.

- Attract the best undergraduate students.
- Retain and support these students throughout their undergraduate career.
- Provide these students with a world-class education.
- Graduate these students in a timely manner.

These, in turn, led to principles to guide financial aid for undergraduate students.

- Connect financial aid strategies to University and state goals and priorities (including merit and need-based aid, which are not mutually exclusive)
- Align financial aid strategies and tuition strategies
- Support access for qualified students
- Attract high-achieving students

- Focus aid on Minnesota residents
- Support timely graduation
- Support the University's strengths and increase enrollments in priority areas

Dr. McMaster asked Committee members to review handouts he had provided before the discussion is scheduled at a future meeting.

3. Revisions to the Student-Rating-of-Teaching (SRT) Form

Professor McCormick welcomed Drs. Gram and Langley to the meeting to discuss the revisions to the SRT form following earlier Committee discussion and suggestions. The revised version was this (between the * * *):

* * *

Overview of the proposed revision:

- Make the results of six items from the revised SRT available to students
- Retain six core items from the current SRT; add five additional items
- Incorporate, as far as possible, questions similar to those in the current Student Release Survey
- Eliminate the Student Release Survey and release a subset of SRT results (questions 7-11) for all courses and instead identify a subset of SRT results that will be released to students without violating the Minnesota Data Practices Act.

Revised SRT

1. The instructor was well prepared for class.
2. The instructor presented the subject matter clearly.
3. The instructor provided feedback intended to improve my course performance.
4. The instructor treated me with respect.
5. The instructor set high expectations for learning the content.
6. I would recommend this instructor to other students.

Course related items 7-11 will be released to students

7. I have a deeper understanding of the subject matter as a result of this course.
8. My interest in the subject matter was stimulated by this course.
9. Instructional technology employed in this course was used effectively (1 2 3 4 5 6 N/A).
10. The grading standards for this course were clear.
11. I would recommend this course to other students.

WRITTEN COMMENTS SECTION

- What did the instructor do that most helped your learning?
- What suggestions do you have for improving this course?

* * *

Dr. Gram said the revisions reflect changes made in response to comments made by this Committee and from the Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs. He provided a brief background: the University has been faced with a poor response to the request that instructors permit the release of the data from the current student-release questions. Moreover, some of the student-release questions duplicated the core questions but some of them were useful. They learned, as they investigated options, that the General Counsel advised that personnel-related data cannot be released (under the provisions of Minnesota law), so data on the full set of questions cannot be released. The General Counsel did indicate, however, that the institution can release data about a course. There is a gray area, Dr. Gram said, and it has not been an easy exercise to draw the line. The discussions will continue, including with student groups, and will include the Faculty Senate on December 5. The hope is that there can be action at the May Faculty Senate meeting.

In terms of the changes, Dr. Gram said, they have removed the question about the physical environment for purposes of this discussion; it needs to be separated from the SRT questions and they are exploring it further with the Office of Classroom Management. It will not be deleted but may be treated differently. The Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs was generally positive about the changes.

Dr. Langley said that the discussion returns to the art and science of writing questions for forms such as this. They have examined the construction of the questions and the points that they touch on. At some institutions these forms are very long; he said they have developed a set of questions that is the least that can be lived with. He reviewed some of the other changes that were made in the wording of the questions and said that they had considered the research about these questions. They propose essentially one question per teaching construct; other institutions may have three or four per construct with forms that are 30-40 questions long.

Dr. McMaster said there is no perfect SRT form. He noted his own objection to #10; he said he understood why the term "fair" was not retained but the objections to it apply as well to "clear" and believes "fair" to be a better descriptor—but this not a matter about which he feels strongly.

Professor Brothen suggested that of the first six questions, the first five are better; he also said that the responses to #5 could be curvilinear and asked if "appropriately" could be inserted in it. He also commented that if the General Counsel finds questions 7-11 legally acceptable, that is fine, but one must recognize that students will be evaluating the instructor.

Professor Mayes suggested that #10 could ask for written comment; Dr. Langley invited possible phrasing. Professor Mayes said it should be generic, allowing the student to say something about the grading system.

Ms. Ellingson asked if the responses to the open-ended questions are excluded from the information released; they are, Dr. Gram said.

Mr. Volovik asked if the data would be released to students by instructor or by course; by course, Dr. Gram said. That will limit its usefulness to students, Mr. Volovik said.

Professor McPhee said that one concern expressed at the Morris Campus Assembly was about when there is only one section of a course taught and a high correlation between faculty member and course. The Assembly favored releasing the information but was concerned that in at least some cases these are evaluations of the instructor. Dr. Gram said that is a fair observation and that they will hear again from the General Counsel's office. Professor McCormick asked if Twin Cities faculty might also raise concerns if there is only one section of a course; they could, Professor McPhee said, because that is the case for the majority of the courses at Morris. Dr. Gram said that no such questions had arisen at the Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs.

Ms. Amarteifio asked how much student-release information is available; very little, Dr. Gram said. She commented that if a student must dig through layers on the web to find it, it is worthless. Dr. Gram said there is a quick link from the student 1-stop.

Dr. Anderson said that the last time the SRT form was revised, it moved toward providing information about what students did in a class; this revision moves away from that approach. That seems to be important information. Dr. Langley replied that information about "effort" from students can be problematic. If students see that a course supposedly requires a massive amount of work, they will not choose it. Dr. Anderson said that instructors find the information useful: does the work take more time than he expected? Mr. Volovik said that he would like to see more information about the amount of time students can expect to spend in a course.

Professor McPhee said that one point raised at Morris was that faculty members liked having the information about time spent as well as the open-ended question about what individuals said they could have done to be a better student. Professor Wick said that as one looks at hundreds of answers about the amount of time students put in, she said there would be a wide range of responses and the average would be meaningless.

Ms. Golden asked about the timetable for giving the SRT form online. It is the same as the paper version, Dr. Gram said. It is important that the Committee have a discussion on this question and it may require some policy changes. The issue with online evaluations (endemic to all online systems) is that the response rate is very low. The University has purchased new software so that instructors can include customized questions, so the technology will be available, but the problem of response rate remains. At some other institutions students are allowed to complete the online form after the end of the term—but must do so before they can see their grades. That is a possibility the Committee could discuss because it does increase the response rate dramatically.

Professor McCormick said that practice is common among engineering programs at other schools, but there is always the option to sign on but decline to complete the form. That would be true here as well, Dr. Gram said.

In response to a question about the course guide from Professor Brothen, Dr. Gram said that it will be part of the information provided to students. Not many instructors use it but the best ones are extremely informative. Professor McCormick suggested that the Committee revisit a discussion of the course guide at some point.

Professor McCormick asked what the next steps would be. Dr. Gram said the proposal would go to the Faculty Senate as well as to student groups, with ultimate action by the Faculty Senate.

Professor Leopold said that if there is a problem with response rate from faculty (for releasing the data from the student-release questions), there must be a reason and the Committee should learn what it is. Is it too difficult to do so? Are faculty uncomfortable with doing so? He agreed that questions 7-11 will be seen as tied to the instructor. Professor Wick asked if the current message asking faculty members to release the data is by section or course; that could affect their willingness to release the data.

Professor Nelson commented that the system is not capable of dealing with courses with two instructors, and as the University moves toward more interdisciplinary work and more than one instructor, the limitation will be more of a problem. Professor McCormick asked if a course is team-taught, with multiple instructors, should all be melded together or individual information teased out? That relates to the purpose of the form, Ms. Ellingson said, which is not crystal clear. Professor Mayes said he was also unsure about the purpose: is it to assess the quality of instruction in the classroom because students have complained about it? Is the failure to release the information due to faculty members trying to protect their product? Another purpose could be feedback to the instructor, Ms. Ellingson said.

Professor McCormick reminded that the data are used for promotion and tenure; Dr. Gram confirmed that they are crucial for probationary faculty members (not the student-release questions). In general, departments are very thoughtful about how they use the information and often includes an iterative discussion with the faculty member about the scores. Those discussions tend to focus on the first four questions (in the current SRT form); those are the ones that senior faculty and department chairs rely on in personnel decisions.

Professor McCormick asked whether, if the form serves two different purposes, there could be two forms with two different preambles. One could be for instructor evaluation and one for course evaluation, and the differences could be communicated in preamble language. (If so, they should be on one page, Dr. Gram said.) Ms. Golden said that aside from use in personnel decisions, the feedback is very valuable. Dr. Langley reported that the Center for Teaching and Learning has suggestions for faculty members when the responses to the six core questions are not as positive as desired. There are many strategies faculty members can use. If the revised SRT form is adopted, they will be glad to prepare additional materials for the other items on the form.

Professor McCormick thanked Drs. Gram and Langley for joining the meeting.

4. Special Committee on Graduate Education (SCGE) Update

Professor McCormick welcomed Professor Lanyon to the meeting to provide an update on the work of the Special Committee on Graduate Education (SCGE).

Professor Lanyon provided the background on why the SCGE came to be appointed (jointly by Provost Hanson and the Faculty Consultative Committee) and the sources of the issues that were raised that it is addressing. They will issue a report to the provost and FCC on December 1; subcommittees have prepared drafts and each of them were asked two over-arching questions: what issues arise with respect to interdisciplinary work vis-à-vis graduate students and what should be the role of faculty governance in graduate education?

At present graduate education is under the purview of this Committee, Professor Lanyon noted, but it seems to focus primarily on undergraduate education. The SCGE is likely to recommend a separate senate committee for graduate education. What is the Committee's view about that possibility?

Professor McPhee said that he has found this Committee spending a lot of time talking about graduate education, which does not affect the Morris campus; some of the topics, however, have been interesting.

Professor McCormick asked if the views, context, and expertise Committee members bring to graduate education different from that which it brings to undergraduate education. Professor Nelson said she believes about 80% of the material is similar but that there is an important 20% that is different. Her question is what is being under-served. Where are the problems that need to be overcome?

Professor Lanyon said that coordinating between two committees could be a problem and agreed that there are commonalities between graduate and undergraduate education. The biggest problem, however, is that when people on and off the campus talk about education, it is almost invariably about undergraduate education; graduate education is nearly invisible. When people do talk about post-baccalaureate education, it usually is about law or medicine. The question is how to increase the visibility of graduate education? (This is a problem around the country.) Legislators tend to focus on undergraduate education. Graduate education needs to be separated out, he said.

Professor Nelson said she understood the argument and asked if a subcommittee of this Committee would serve the purpose. Professor Breuch said that this is her third year on the Committee and that she thinks about both graduate and undergraduate education, she noted the recurring discussions with Vice Provosts Schroeder and now Kohlstedt, and said the Committee sees a considerable volume of materials related to graduate education. She said she also appreciated Professor Lanyon's point but said the Committee is presented with many graduate student issues. Professor Brothen said that two committees would need to meet together to talk about calendars, which affect both groups, and recalled that when the graduate-education policies were being rewritten, the Committee spent a great deal of time on graduate education; it also talked about the Graduate Education Council and its relationship to this Committee. Could the latter partially fulfill the role for which Professor Lanyon has pointed out a need?

Professor Lanyon said the Graduate Education Council and this Committee play fundamentally distinct roles. SCEP is part of the governance system; the Council is advisory to the Vice Provost and Dean and exists within the Graduate School. Vice Provost Kohlstedt commented that while the Council is elected campus-wide, and thus feels like governance, it does not have contested elections. There seem to remain questions about the balance between advising and governance, although the current committee is positioned to do both advising on broad issues and also making recommendations on policy matters that subsequently move through governance.

Professor Wick asked if the Council includes professional education. Dr. Kohlstedt said that there are five colleges that are considered to offer "first professional degrees" (two degrees in Law

plus Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Pharmacy, and Dentistry), and they are not represented on the Council.

Ms. Golden asked if there are policy matters before this Committee that require a more specialized committee. Professor Lanyon thought not, but said that SCEP has more than enough to do with respect to undergraduate education and that it would be better to have a separate committee; it seems to him that asking one committee to handle all education at the University is neither fair nor reasonable. The idea is to have a named group identified with graduate education; it might be that a subcommittee of this Committee would work.

If the argument is that the graduate education voice is muted by the undergraduate, Professor Nelson said, a subcommittee would allow the graduate education voice to emerge. Dr. Kohlstedt observed that people self-select for governance committees; if there were a committee focused on undergraduate education, people with an interest it would gravitate to that committee, and similarly for a committee focused on graduate education. Many faculty members, she added, are interested in both. Professor Nelson said she would not favor splitting the responsibilities into two committees.

Professor Alexander said that she does not teach undergraduates but likes the idea of a committee that knows what is happening in both graduate and undergraduate education. It would seem like creating silos to establish a separate committee and moving away from communication and interaction, so she would favor a nesting approach.

Professor Lanyon noted that the charge to the SCGE was to focus on NRC-like Ph.D. program, although they do talk more broadly about post-baccalaureate education. If there is at least one thing he hopes the SCGE can accomplish, he said, it is to convey to faculty members that what they think they know about their graduate education program bears no relationship to most of the rest of the University. Professor McCormick said there is a difference between graduate and undergraduate education and there are differences across Ph.D. programs. Professor Lanyon agreed but said there is an enormous difference among the vast array of post-baccalaureate programs at the University.

Professor McCormick asked Professor Lanyon to help the Committee understand the terrain of SCGE's discussion of interdisciplinarity, given that there is also a Graduate School committee, the work of Dr. Levine in the provost's office, and perhaps others. Professor Lanyon said that the SCGE is ready to punt on interdisciplinarity because of the many others who are working on it. He said that "interdisciplinary" does not equal "intercollegiate"; the former includes any scholarship that involves working with someone else at the University. What needs to be assured is that there are no barriers to working with whomever one wants to, and equating interdisciplinary with cross-boundaries is a mistake.

Professor Breuch said that the conversations she's been involved in go immediately to the University's budget model. She expressed hope that a way to overcome boundaries can be found.

Professor McCormick asked if this Committee should deal with the issue. Professor Lanyon said it might focus on what the term means. The immediate focus should be on problems, especially between colleges; there should be a broader goal of encouraging interdisciplinary scholarship for faculty and students at all levels. There are barriers that need to be eliminated, he said, and it is

ridiculous place for the University to be when a faculty member identifies a colleague with whom he or she wants to teach—and immediately drops the idea because the budget model will not allow it to work.

Professor Mayes asked if the focus should be on cross-college work or on work across units within a college. Professor Lanyon said that the problem is with intercollegiate work; it is a subset of interdisciplinary work. Professor McCormick suggested the Committee could focus on intercollegiate work and not equate it with all interdisciplinary work. Professor Lanyon agreed.

Professor McCormick thanked Professor Lanyon for his report and adjourned the meeting at 3:50.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota