

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy  
Wednesday, January 22, 2014  
2:30 – 4:00  
238A Morrill Hall**

- Present: Alon McCormick (chair), Gifty Amarteifio, Michael Anderson, Nicola Alexander, Lee-Ann Breuch, Elaine Darst, Charlene Ellingson, Timothy Gearns, Gayle Golden, Janine Grebin, Karla Hemesath, Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, Kenneth Leopold, Keith Mayes, Robert McMaster, Nic McPhee, Thomas Michaels, Kristen Nelson, Moshe Volovik, Susan Wick
- Absent: Erich Beckert
- Guests: Associate Dean Melissa Anderson, Daniel Jones-Whyte, Ronald Huesman (Graduate School)
- Other: Assistant Vice Provost Suzanne Bardouche, Associate Dean Leslie Schiff (Office of Undergraduate Education), Tina Falkner (Academic Support Resources)

[In these minutes: (1) survey of graduate students; (2) syllabus policy correction; (3) issues pending]

**1. Survey of Graduate Students**

Professor McCormick convened the meeting at 2:30 and welcomed Associate Dean Anderson, Dr. Huesman, and Mr. Jones-Whyte to discuss a national survey of graduate students that will be housed at the University of Minnesota.

Dean Anderson explained that the Graduate School is interested in a survey of graduate students that parallels the survey of undergraduates about their student experience. The Graduate School is very interested in having good data for a number of purposes (e.g., program reviews, accreditation, learning outcomes). So they want valid survey results that get at the student experience. There are a number of existing surveys that get at various aspects of graduate education but none of them provide adequate, comprehensive information about the experiences of students at the University now. The survey of graduate students, like the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey of undergraduates, will be grounded in a conceptual understanding of the student experience. [<http://www.seru.umn.edu/>]

Dr. Huesman told the Committee that the genesis of the survey of graduate students is SERU, a consortium of research universities of which the University has been a part since 2009. Minnesota is one of 24 schools participating in SERU (along with 5 other Big Ten schools), which originated at the University of California, Berkeley, but which will be housed at the University of Minnesota in the future. The survey of graduate students will be similar to that for undergraduates: a core set of questions that all participating schools will administer plus additional optional modules. There is a

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working group, with representatives from several institutions, developing a draft survey; there will be a field trial in the fall of 2014, after which they will refine the document and begin using it thereafter. The goal is a national student survey with data that can be compared across institutions by program—and having those reference points, about how a program stands compared to its peers, is critical, Dr. Huesman said. He reported that he will serve as director of the national survey.

Professor Michaels asked to what uses the survey results will be put. Have the SERU results had any impact on academic programs? Dr. Huesman said that SERU is a population survey of all undergraduates and permits comparisons across programs. Some have used it extensively, in different ways. Do they envision using it differently in the context of graduate education, Professor Michaels asked? They will focus on research and teaching experiences, how they got to their candidacy, and financial support, Dr. Huesman said.

Professor McCormick asked how data from the survey will be made available. On an Institutional Research website? Provided to the deans? Dr. Huesman said he assumed provision of data would be similar to that for the undergraduate survey: the deans and associate deans would have access to more detailed information than the public. Within limits of confidentiality agreements, it will also be possible to compare across institutions. So programs doing a self-study could use the data to compare across the field, Professor McCormick said; Dr. Huesman concurred.

Mr. Jones-White explained the reasons for creating the survey (primarily because of a demand for data on the student experience at the post-graduate level) and described the extensive process that is being used to develop survey items. The goal is a pilot survey in fall 2014. At present there are 125 questions on the draft, but the final will likely have fewer.

Professor Michaels asked what question the survey is intended to answer or if it is to find out what is not known. The most important outcome, Dean Anderson responded, is to identify ways the University can improve the graduate student experience and student satisfaction. Mr. Jones-White added that there is no single question; units have different questions they want addressed, so they are developing this survey to obviate the need for units to send out a lot of their own surveys (e.g., Boynton Health Service). Professor Michaels observed that Boynton would ask questions pertinent to Boynton while an institution-wide survey might be more vague on matters important to Boynton. This is a shotgun approach and he expressed skepticism about its usefulness. Dean Anderson said that there is a reason for the structure of the survey, a set of core questions plus modules targeted at specific units. Every student receives the core questions and a random sample will receive the more specific modules. Dr. Huesman said it is similar to the undergraduate survey in that respect; he noted that there is also a wild-card module that an institution can use to ask questions important at the time.

Mr. Volovik asked how the 125 questions compares to the number on SERU. It is similar, Dr. Huesman said. It is a large survey, with branching, so the actual number a student answers can vary; they will try to keep it to a size that requires no more than 20-25 minutes. The new survey will replace 4-5 surveys that have been conducted in the past. He agreed with Professor McCormick that a great advantage of this survey is that it will allow cross-institutional comparisons, both with the core responses as well as with the modules.

Professor Breuch asked what expected of this Committee. Dr. Huesman said they were presenting for information; Dean Anderson said that this is a significant initiative that will put the

University in the spotlight and they want the community to know about it. Institutional Research and Reporting will lead the effort and Dr. Huesman will be co-head. Professor Nelson asked if there are competitors; Dr. Huesman said not, that this survey will be unique. He said that if the AAU model is followed, it will be used primarily by the public institutions, although private institutions will be welcome to participate if they wish.

Professor McCormick thanked Dean Anderson, Dr. Huesman, and Mr. Jones-White for the update and said it would be useful for the Committee to hear more as the project moves along and that it will be interested in how the results can be used.

## **2. Syllabus Policy Correction**

Professor McCormick explained that when the syllabus policy was put into the official policy format and moved to the policy web site in 2009 (as part of the overall organization and clean-up of educational policies) the part of the policy itemizing the specific policies/items that needed to be included or referenced on the syllabus omitted one item. In the discussion at the Faculty Senate in February 2009, the draft had included a requirement for a statement on disabilities; however, when the policy was approved in April 2009, somehow that requirement had been deleted

Professor McCormick asked the Committee to approve what was essentially a correction to a clerical mistake and noted that the appendix to the policy, Recommended Policy Statements for Syllabi [[http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/SYLLABUSREQUIREMENTS\\_APPA.html](http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/SYLLABUSREQUIREMENTS_APPA.html)] does include recommended language on disability accommodations. As the policy is currently published, however, it lacks the requirement that such a statement be included on syllabi.

The Committee voted unanimously to recommend to the Faculty Consultative Committee that it act on behalf of the Faculty Senate to correct the error so that the policy can be changed immediately.

## **3. Issues Pending**

The Committee turned next to a list of issues pending that Professor McCormick had prepared for possible discussion at future SCEP meetings.

1. Policy authority for liberal education requirements, writing intensive courses, etc.
2. Possible spring and summer calendar changes
3. Report of the Special Committee on Graduate Education
4. Graduate Student Learning Principles/Outcomes
5. Strategic Planning: Undergraduate Education
6. Strategic Planning: Graduate Education
7. Policies related to online education (e.g., credit by exam for competency/for MOOCs)
8. Graduate Student Survey [scheduled 1/22]
9. Revisions to the SRT Form
10. Consolidation of Policy Notices on Syllabi
11. Public engagement issues
12. Revisiting the undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes, CLE, and the Twin Cities Curriculum

Committee

13. D in Prerequisite Courses
14. Academic program review process
15. Post-baccalaureate/"first professional" degrees

Other possible issues:

- Graduation rate disparities
- Educational policy implications of any college merger
- Role of REU programs in assisting graduate student recruitment

Committee members discussed the issues and commented on several.

1. Professor McCormick said that while CLE and the Writing Board are asked to give updates, a question has arisen how they fit into the governance structure; that relationship and policy authority needs to be clarified.
2. Regarding possible calendar changes: Dr. McMaster said he has asked Ms. VanVoorhis to compile a list of pros and cons on whether there should be a fixed starting date for spring semester in order to avoid it spilling into the May term; he said he would bring back the issue for discussion. Dr. Falkner said that if there is to be a proposal for a significant change in the calendar, she would appreciate having a small ad hoc subcommittee to develop proposals; she also said she assumed that any proposal would be consulted with deans and departments before it moved through this Committee and to the Faculty Senate for action. Mr. Volovik said the change would greatly affect students so asked that any proposal also be brought to the Student Senate for discussion.
10. Regarding policy notices on syllabi: Professor McCormick said the question is whether to communicate policy requirements to all students in a more general manner, rather than requiring them on all syllabi; one point of view is that it is valuable to have discussions in every class and require the policy references on every syllabi; other see the required listing as repetitive and a waste of paper. The Committee tentatively concluded it is valuable to refer to the policies on every syllabus, which can be accomplished by going to the link to the template language for such statements, provided at [http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/SYLLABUSREQUIREMENTS\\_APPA.html](http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/SYLLABUSREQUIREMENTS_APPA.html), and inserting that language into your syllabus. In response to a question about how to find that information, Ms. Bardouche noted that typing "syllabi" or "syllabus" into the search box on the University's home page will take one right to the policy.
12. Regarding student learning outcomes: Dr. McMaster said that it should be tabled for now; there is an intensive effort underway in his office related to the 2015-16 accreditation that will be based, in large part, on the seven Student learning Outcomes. A good time to discuss/revisit the SLOs would be after the Higher Learning Commission has completed the review.
13. Regarding D's in prerequisite courses: in response to a question from Ms. Golden, Dr. Falkner said she believed the Committee had concluded the decisions should be left to departments and the Committee did not have more to do. Dr. Schiff said that if a department does not want a student to earn a D in a prerequisite course related to the major, that course should be moved into the degree requirements (because grades of D do not count as satisfying a course required for a major);

departments may need to be educated about what should and should not be considered a prerequisite. Dr. Falkner said programs worry about increasing the size of the major; Dr. Schiff said that if a course is required, students should be told that it is required and there should not be a lot of required prerequisites that are not counted for the major. As for a policy issue, Ms. Bardouche said the Committee should have a discussion about curricular principles and affirm that there may not be hidden requirements. Professor Nelson suggested that question of a D in prerequisites is a very small part of the larger problem of the number of credits required in the major and said she would like the Committee to have a report on that matter when Ms. VanVoorhis is done with the study she is conducting. That question is related to timely graduation and student debt, among other things.

14. Regarding academic program review: Dr. McMaster said the development of the academic program review process is moving along and will focus on both undergraduate and graduate programs, and the Committee should return to the issue later in the spring.

-- Mr. Volovik asked about releasing previous syllabi for a course. Professor Nelson said that a number of departments do so but the practice is not universal. Dr. Schiff said she has prepared a memo encouraging faculty to upload syllabi when they update the course guide. Dr. Falkner observed that in some cases there could be intellectual property concerns because some syllabi fall into that category.

-- Ms. Ellingson asked about Moodle and impact of its use on students and teachers. Dr. Falkner suggested that it is academic technology, and thus questions fall to the Office for Information Technology rather than the Classroom Advisory Subcommittee. Professor McPhee agreed but said that there are potential policy issues about making information available and technology working against that objective. There could be a question for the Committee to consider.

Professor McCormick adjourned the meeting at 3:50.

-- Gary Engstrand

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