

**Faculty Consultative Committee
Meeting Minutes*
Thursday, April 17, 2014
1:00 – 3:00
Room 238A Morrill Hall**

* These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represents the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

Present: Will Durfee (chair), Linda Bearinger, Avner Ben-Ner, James Cloyd, Janet Ericksen, Jigna Desai, Gary Gardner, Maria Gini, Joseph Konstan, Russell Luepker, Alon McCormick, Karen Mesce, James Pacala, Ned Patterson, Paul Ranelli, Christopher Uggen, Eva von Dassow, Jean Wyman

Absent: Tabitha Grier-Reed

Guests: Provost Karen Hanson, Vice Provost Robert McMaster, Vice Provost Arlene Carney, Roger Feldman, Peter Hudleston, Ole Gram, Richard McGehee, Ellen Messer-Davidow, Fred Morrison, Leslie Schiff, JB Shank

Others: Kathy Brown

[In these minutes: Liberal Education Requirements discussion; Discussion with Benefits Advisory Committee members; Student Rating of Teaching - Action]

Liberal Education Requirements Discussion

Professor Durfee convened the meeting and asked for introductions.

Professor Durfee began the discussion of Liberal Education (LE) requirements at the Twin Cities. He explained that recently there has been considerable focus on LE and a large number of the faculty signed a letter to the FCC to emphasize the need for this discussion. The purpose of the discussion was to talk more broadly about LE. Since the letter, there have been several meetings around this topic, notably the provost and vice provost met with the College of Liberal Arts (CLA) Chairs and Assembly. He then noted the different facets of the issue include academic, collegiate, and budgetary concerns.

He posed the question: What will the LE environment look like 5 years from now? In his opinion, from a strategic positioning perspective, he believes LE requirements will change. It is important to create an appropriate path for these future changes. He asked Professor Shank, the faculty member that delivered the letter to FCC, to speak on the matter and the other guests followed with their perspectives.

Professor Shank began by clarifying that he is not the sole author of the letter, it was collectively written to reflect the views of the 98 signatories. He will be speaking from his own perspective, not that of the entire group. He served a term on the Council of Liberal Education and served as Chair of the implementation committee for the Humanistic Commons. He highlighted the following points:

- The letter was a call for the discussion to begin because the current system is not working and there is a need to revisit it.

- Large-scale changes cannot happen until accreditation is completed.
- The current system has a long history and it was not a radical overhaul of previous system. Now is the time to consider how this system can be changed.
- There is a problem in the way that LE and curricular planning are perceived to be entangled with the budget model. LE has become perceived as a solution to the ever increasing problem of enrollments. LE requirements are not discussed in terms of their educational value.
- There is a need to create a space for LE that does not automatically become part of the discussion about enrollments. One way to accomplish this is to imagine an LE curriculum that is detached from departmental curricular courses - a University-wide system designed to meet certain goals. As part of Strategic Planning, a new Grand Challenges curriculum has been discussed. How can LE be considered as part of the Grand Challenges curriculum?

Provost Hanson added that she agrees that it is time to rethink this system, and the question will take time to consider. She emphasized that the discussion should be about the curriculum, not the budget model. The Dean of CLA acknowledged that there are issues specific to CLA and they must end practices that result in departments competing with each other. There are some issues across colleges related to how undergraduate versus professional education is conducted, though she added, that this is not only at the LE level. She closed by saying that she believes this is a faculty matter and they should determine the direction.

Professor Hudleston, chair, Council on Liberal Education (CLE), said that he appreciates that LE requirements are not static and need to be reviewed regularly. The members of the CLE have reviewed courses according to the criteria listed in the policy. He added that they have operated in a consistent way since the last policy review. He noted that the present LE requirements were arrived at through broad consultation with the faculty.

Professor Messer-Davidow, chair of the English Department, explained that she is interested in the internal dynamics and broader US educational economics related to knowledge production and institutional competition. She emphasized that she does not want the University to lose its innovative, interdisciplinary, and progressive nature that drew her here 28 years ago. She continued:

- How do we rethink and then institutionalize LE that could give us a comparative advantage with other institutions?
- She considers knowledge production and training of knowers as central to this discussion. She hopes that they can learn to resist producing knowledge only for employment. She does not want the University to follow the trend of dampening the humanities, and instead strive to retain characteristics like community outreach.

Prof Durfee reiterated that this is the time to have the conversation because these changes would take years to implement and accreditation agencies would appreciate that we are examining the curriculum.

Professor Konstan added that he agrees that it is time to lay groundwork for LE requirements and this will further demonstrate to accreditors that the University has a real commitment to continuous improvement. He believes that the current model is not much different from the 1970s. He personally believes that LE requirements should be considered less in terms of a core that should be studied or learned, and more in terms of skills a student should master and perhaps experiences a student should have. He provided the following examples of potential skills and experiences:

- Be able to read essays, articles, and other writings critically, identifying the biases of the author and being critical about the evidence behind the argument -- no matter the topic.

- Be able to analyze features of the designed environment -- from designed buildings and cities to policies and procedures to machines and software -- including analyzing the expected and actual effect on humans in that designed environment.
- Iterative experience of creating and refining a work designed to create an experience for others, whether that is music, a play, writing, or other experiences. Such an experience would include an example of how people refine creations to improve them.
- Be able to learn and argue from data, embedded in a real context. This could involve statistics, data mining, and other techniques together with experience in identifying and refining deep questions in a discipline.
- Experience of working on an interdisciplinary diverse team, for some sustained project.

Professor Konstan clarified that these skills and those outlined in the Learning Outcomes will not be attained within the current structure. The current Liberal Education requirements are very much tied to traditional disciplines and they fail to take full advantage of this University's strengths in Engineering, Design, Education, and other areas. They should not be generalized and developed for any four year institution.

Professor von Dassow said that the disciplines each exist for a reason, have intellectual autonomy, and ideally are integrated with one another. The present LE requirements do not constitute a core curriculum and developing one would require considering what subjects students should learn, which further entails considering what they have not learned before they arrive.

Professor Shank said that when he considers the areas that now exist within the University, it is the result of a particular history of undergraduate education as credentialing for advancing research. This discipline specific education resulted in a call for the addition of general education, which is now LE. In his opinion, learning and knowing can be reimagined outside of the specific disciplines of the University. He emphasized that the competitive advantage exists in the researchers that are here. He suggested that a system be designed to meet undergraduates where they are now, without the assumption that they will become researchers, and mobilize the research and activities in ways that students can use.

Professor Gardner suggested that, without considering budget models, the goal as a research university is to produce leaders and problem solvers. Teaching within disciplines follows a linear development of understanding. Designing a course to attract someone that will not be a biologist creates the question of how the course will be designed, it will not matter what college it resides in.

Professor Schiff was part of the review of LE requirements two years ago. They considered what LE could be, and how those decisions intersect with the budget model. During that particular review, there was no intention to revolutionize the requirements, as campus-wide liberal education requirements had just been implemented in 1994. Further, the LE requirements were (are) tied to being able to transfer to the U of M, but she believes that this is a different time and the Grand Challenges could inform what LE could become.

Professor Hudleston said that some of the skills suggested, such as analyzing arguments, are present in the current LE courses and are considered within the reviews.

Professor Luepker noted that the LE classes average from 60-200 students, so there are budgetary implications. He encouraged the strategic planning group to look at the financing system as well. Provost Hanson responded that campus wide requirements will create larger courses.

Professor Messer-Davidow said that education will continue within a mixed economy of disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields. There are examples of fields that are interdisciplinary but are now institutionalized as single disciplines such as Biochemistry, American Studies, and Women Studies.

Instead of just focusing on LE, also consider what are the structures that need to be created to institutionalize the interdisciplinary skill sets and thinking that we expect of students.

Professor Desai posed the following questions for consideration: What are the relevant questions to ask? What is knowledge itself? Different components will need to be considered that are both disciplinary and interdisciplinary. She sees the Grand Challenges as an opportunity begin to address these questions.

Professor Konstan suggested requiring any course that fulfills LE requirements have instructors from two disciplines. He does not think it possible to convey the strengths of disciplines if one does not show that other disciplines respect it as well. It is powerful to show appreciation and talk together from across disciplines.

Professor Mesce said that requiring a minor outside of the major discipline, and a language requirement, would solve some of these issues.

Professor Ranelli said that from the health sciences perspective, LE courses help students develop a level of academic maturity before they enter their major courses.

Professor Uggen made a closing statement that the development of a core curriculum could create a unified expression of common mission values, common experience, and community building. As students graduate they would have the advantage of a common vocabulary and shared experience with alumni.

Professor Durfee thanked members for attending the discussion and said that this was a good launching point from which to move forward. Overall, members expressed their desire for this conversation to be a continuing part of Strategic Planning.

Benefits Advisory Committee Discussion

Professor Durfee began the discussion by explaining that the Benefits Advisory Committee (BAC) is critical to the University, and represents all constituents of the University.

Professor Morrison explained the membership of the committee:

- “The BAC membership is comprised of staff, faculty and retirees of the University who are eligible for University benefits and include voting, non-voting and ex-officio members. The voting members of the BAC include the chair, and four representatives from each of the non-represented employees groups - faculty, P&A, civil service as well as two retirees. The non-voting members of the committee, to the extent permitted by applicable labor law, include one representative from each of the bargaining units that receive (or plan to receive) benefits through the UPlan. The ex-officio members of the committee are employees who have been appointed by virtue of their position.” [<http://www.bac.umn.edu/>]
- The BAC was created when the University separated from the State Employee Insurance Plan in 2002.
- He distributed a PowerPoint: 2013 U Plan Performance Review for the calendar year 2013. The following points were highlighted in the document:
 - UPlan Medical
 - Medical Loss Ratio (MLR): 95.2%. This indicates that the overhead costs of running the plan are 4.8%. The Federal Government takes issue with MLRs that are 20% or higher. Professor Morrison added that he does not know of another plan that has such a high MLR.
 - The University paid 95.8% of the allowed costs, members paid 4.2%.

- Employee share of the premium has increased significantly as the cost of healthcare has increased.
 - To combat this: They are watching pharmacy aggressively and steer people to generics and low cost options. 80% of drugs that are prescribed and paid for are generics. Twelve years ago it was 50%. However, specialty drugs are emerging rapidly and cost from \$1,000-6,000 per month. They are treated as generic plus, so the copay is only \$10. The rest is paid by the University.
- The Wellness Program encourages participants to take part in healthy lifestyle choices and preventative care. Since it was instituted, the number of prescriptions per employee has been reduced.
- The two year cycle corresponds to the labor contracts and how the legislative session operates. Changes usually happen on January 1st of an even numbered year. Adjustment will mainly be to the premium, but not many other changes. A year from now other options will have to be looked at.
- 5% increase in healthcare costs is anticipated for next year.
- Affordable Care Act (ACA) changes:
 - If a plan costs more than \$10,500 per year for an individual or \$20,500 for a family a 40% excise tax will be incurred. The tax takes effect in 2018. This was the first year there were deductibles and they will probably have to continue.
 - Accountable Care Organizations (ACO) introduction. They are supposed to be more efficient than ordinary medical care and involve the coordination of care between doctors and doctors' assistants.

Professor Morrison closed his presentation by saying that the future challenges will be creating plans that will not incur the excise tax and the pressure to find additional funding within the budget. He then opened the discussion to comments and questions:

- Professor Konstan emphasized the importance of creating systems that reduce administrative issues and are less confusing than deductibles at the point of care.

Professor Durfee inquired about the committee structure and if it is functioning.

- Professor Feldman said that he feels the various voices of employees are heard. However the committee is still advisory to those that make decisions and he has noticed that friction has developed as they confront the task of finding savings. As benefits are cut and premiums increased, many expect to see these plan savings result in offsets to wages.
- Professor McGehee provided the history of the committee. In his opinion, currently the committee has essentially become a focus group and only reacts to the information that is brought to them. In the past they had more autonomy and brought their own ideas forward. He is concerned with the structure because there is no way for the BAC to communicate to the groups they represent. In the past, they were blocked from sending a broader communication regarding healthcare changes. Recently they a chair was nominated, and they were told by the OGC that they could not have this person could not be elected as chair. They will have a subcommittee write a letter to the president to see if there is a resolution.
- Vice President Brown commented that the faculty member who was nominated as chair is a labor represented employee from Duluth. She further explained that the OGC issue is with the distinction between the relationship with labor represented and non-labor represented individuals and the difference in the law. The issue is not about the person, it is in interest of ensuring the University has appropriate labor relationships. Labor representatives have traditionally not been voting members of the committee.

Professor Durfee thanked the guests and informed members that VP Brown will be speaking with the committee in May.

Student Rating of Teaching Discussion

Vice Provost Carney and Assistant Vice Provost Gram attended the meeting to discuss the proposed changes to the administrative policy *Evaluation of Teaching: Twin Cities, Crookston, Morris, Rochester*. Professor Durfee summarized the proposed changes; some of the questions are changing, a clear distinction between questions about the course and the questions about the instructor, and the course evaluations will automatically be released to students. SCEP and SCFA approved the changes, FCC must approve it, and then the Student and Faculty Senates will simultaneously vote on it.

Members asked questions and received the following responses:

- Course evaluation data will still be released even if only one instructor teaches the course. Students will have to go to a page that is separate from the registration site to read course evaluations, just as they now go to less useful sites such as Ratemyprofessor.com.
- Question 5 will not be released: “I would recommend this instructor to another student.”
- Advisers and students supported the inclusion of questions 11: Approximately how many hours per week do you spend working on homework?
- Professor Konstan explained that SCFA was supportive because of the idea that course evaluation data should be available and it will be there in one form. It should be done well, rather than only have the extreme views represented.
- For courses that are taught online, “N/A” is an answer option to the question about the physical environment. The Office of Classroom Management uses the data from this question each semester to determine where improvements are needed. Optional questions for online sections were discussed, but are not currently included. This topic will potentially be revisited in the future. The questions are intended to address a broad range of courses and subjects.
- After a year of this process, the collected data will be analyzed to determine if the questions are meeting the needs.
- Students would benefit from more contextual information for course selection, such as distribution of grades. Grade distributions by department and course level are released, not currently by course.
- There is no policy stating that the syllabus must be available at the time of registration, though students might want this information.

Vice Provost Carney provided an anecdote that during her time, and for 40 years prior, at the University of Illinois, a list of the names of the top 30% of instructors by course evaluations was published. An asterisk denoted those in the top 10% and the list was titled the Incomplete List of Excellent Teachers. She discussed this with SCEP two years ago and they were not supportive of this idea.

Members expressed support in the spirit of providing greater transparency. They unanimously voted in favor of the changes.

Jeannine Rich
University of Minnesota