

Minutes *

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Thursday, September 23, 1993
2:30 - 4:30
Room 608 Campus Club

Present: Kenneth Heller (chair), Anita Cholewa, James Cotter, William Van Essendelft, Gayle Graham Yates

Absent: Daniel Boler, Craig Bursch, Sue Donaldson, Megan Gunnar, Darwin Hendel, Robert Johnson, Manuel Kaplan, Carla Phillips

Guests: None

Others: None

[In these minutes: the strategic plan]

1. Report of the Chair

Professor Heller convened the meeting at 2:30 and welcomed the members of the Committee who were able to attend on short notice. Committee members briefly discussed the meeting schedule for Fall Quarter and agreed to change the meeting date from Monday afternoon to Wednesday afternoon. Because of the press of the planning process, the Committee will meet every week through December 2.

Professor Heller then briefly reviewed the other business that the Committee has in front of it for the year.

2. The Strategic Planning Process

The Committee then turned to an exploratory discussion of the strategic plan. Committee members made a number of observations and extrapolations designed to focus future discussions about the plan. In the process questions about the plan were raised.

Where will CEE be? It be handled differently administratively, but CEE may NOT merely be a subset of University College. It is possible that CEE functions may be redistributed.

Professor Heller noted that it is proposed that there be 11 academic clusters that cut across the traditional academic units. Intersecting the clusters will be the major University functions of undergraduate education, research, outreach, and University College. The reason for the clusters, it was said, may be to redistribute resources in the University. A conservative plan would assume a constant or decreasing budget. One can understand the plan without the clusters, it was said; what drives their

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existence? Some programs must be eliminated, said another Committee member; who is to decide which ones? If quality is to be increased in a zero sum game, decisions about which programs are to go must be made. The criteria are announced in the plan; the clusters will serve as the decision-making units. The units within the clusters are seen as having more in common than other arrangements.

Another goal of the clusters might be to seek efficiencies. Professor Heller reported that the administration has mentioned a study done in the College of Education to achieve efficiency. The Committee expressed interest in seeing this study to assess its educational impact. The administration recognizes that if units find funds, through achievement of efficiencies, there must be a balance between internal and external reallocation.

It was agreed that SCEP must identify major questions that bear on educational policy; the remainder of the meeting was devoted to suggesting such questions and raising collateral issues that need to be addressed.

1. The question of quality control in University College. If it is to have primarily external faculty, how will quality be controlled? At the University, quality is controlled by the selection of faculty members. In University College, 2/3 of the faculty will not be subject to University's traditional hiring and promotion process. One Committee member then inquired about the percent of day school classes currently taught by faculty; TAs, for example, are not subject to the same quality control. Not so, it was said, because the selection of TAs is part of the departmental exercise of responsibility for the education it offers. Whose responsibility would this be in University College? The faculty of the Research University?
2. One Committee member said it appears that for University College degree programs, a large percentage of the courses needed to meet degree requirements will consist of current courses offered by the University--so there will not be a great deal of change for most people. One comment that has appeared is that research university courses will be taught by faculty members--which would be an enormous change. Soft funds for part-time teachers and TAs are used by many departments in hiring. What does this plan mean for those departments? In CEE, hiring for individual courses is controlled by the department. One can imagine, it was said, University College degrees will have a liberal education requirement; University College would presumably go to the departments of the Research University to obtain the courses needed. It may be quite different, said another Committee member. It is possible the University will offer those courses in the community colleges around the Twin Cities using their faculty and other professionals who are not traditional faculty. The traditional faculty - the 30% of University College faculty from the research university - might serve mostly as oversight committees rather than doing much of the actual teaching.
3. In terms of numbers, there are about 16,000 full-time students on the Twin Cities campus and about 25,000 part-time students. One thrust of University College would be to separate some subset of the part-time students. There is an attempt underway to define the serious, degree-seeking student (who may be part-time but who has a path to a degree)--versus the individual taking courses for life-long education purposes. The term that has been used, "casual," is a good one, said one Committee member; the student seeking a degree versus the recreational student.

This is not a crisp attempt at definition, but does recognize the sense that the University has two student bodies attending the same institution at the same time (the high-talent, motivated students who attend full time with a good graduation rate; those in no hurry or who are not well-directed or who are not well-qualified to be at a research university). Since there is much educational value from peer interactions, one might conclude that this plan could remove the second type of student from the research university classrooms--because having these two groups of students in the same classes blunts the motivation of the first type of student. Whether or not there will be different physical locations for the classes of the University College and the Research University students, it was said, is one that needs to be explored.

One wishes, said one Committee member, that the University were not so afraid to speak of an elite institution--why not say the University is seeking to be a UM-Berkeley and a UM-City College of New York? Although perhaps not in quite those terms, the plan does make it clear that there must be an "elite" university if it is to compete--and at the same time there must be an accessible university. The question is whether or not one can have them both under the same umbrella, two campuses occupying the same physical space.

4. Questions about full-time and part-time students in the research university and University College also need to be answered. Will there be part-time students in the research university? And can a student attend University College full-time, perhaps during the day?
5. It is clearly the intent that University College will grant degrees, it was said. Is it clear that there will not be two English degrees, for example, so University College degrees will not be the same as those from the research university?
6. One Committee member noted that some of the clusters will have units that seem to be delivering instruction in the same field (e.g., Rhetoric and English, the various biochemistry departments). Will these units be combined? Another Committee member said the clusters are part of the planning process so that decisions can be made about whether or not the University needs a number of departments delivering instruction in the same field. If the clusters are unable to function as planning units, would decisions be made centrally? The clusters, using the criteria set out in the planning documents (centrality, relative advantage, quality, etc.), are to make recommendations about what to strengthen and what to starve. If undergraduate education is to be upgraded, this process will cost money. Will those resources come from the cluster planning? The clusters will be asked to evaluate their units in terms of quality; the administration will presumably then rely on a bureaucratic process (as it should) to adopt the cluster plans. This process would actually have the faculty exercise the real reallocation power. Will the faculty exercise that power doing the substantive work of pruning and let the administration judge the results? It seems unlikely that the administration on its own will make the judgments of program quality.
7. The planning documents call for each cluster to have one department in the top 10 nationally and 30% in the top twenty, it was pointed out. With constant funding, the quality in the best departments can only be maintained if they continually eat away at the funding of the remainder. That is implicit, it was said by another Committee member, although there will be some units not in the top 20 but without which one cannot have an educationally functional university, so funds

for those units will also be required. Presumably the University could decide to eliminate a top-20 department as a result. In terms of how to decide to make such a cut, would one look at the funding the unit brings in and whether or not it would actually COST money to eliminate it?

It was also suggested that the planning documents do not necessarily assume constant funding, although they do not anticipate any increase in state support. That is true, said one Committee member, for the longer term, but for the next five years one must assume constant funding; at the same time, the planning documents also assume raising the quality institution. Without raising quality, the University will not be able to recruit non-resident students and raise tuition--the "customer resistance" level may have already been reached: the educational product as it exists is not worth more than the money being paid for it. If the FUTURE plan is to raise tuition to make the University College self supporting; the University College must be seen as still being a good value. But there are some who believe that in the meantime that this plan implies an open-ended commitment to University College that will drain funds away from the already underfunded research university.

8. The plans call for addressing the user-friendliness of the University, one Committee member commented; now it is a "monster" to get through. Some students find a niche, but many never get to know a professor. Even without the strategic planning process, this Committee should attend to these questions--the principal one being how to deal humanely with students. When class size goes from 150 to 400, the ONLY way a faculty member can teach is to perform. This is not the way for the University to serve its students; there needs to be more contact between faculty and students.

Senior Vice President Infante is very interested in the academic quality of life, observed another Committee member; right now he compares the University to the New York City Port Authority bus terminal--one can obtain transportation but sure doesn't want to spend any time there. This Committee must examine the plans to be sure they address these issues. Increased faculty contact with students will mean examining the quality of faculty life--right now, one reason the campus is not friendly for students is because faculty have too much to do.

What is it, inquired a Committee member, that makes the University NOT user friendly, compared with its peer Big Ten institutions? Are others more residential? The undergraduate experience, one could argue, is not totally dependent on the classroom. The lack of places to gather and interact with peers is one factor, said one Committee member. Students go home after classes because this is a commuter campus.

The problems are coupled, it was said. If one builds a university with no gathering places, students develop the attitude that they should leave campus after classes. The University has gone down that slope as resources have decreased. To return to an atmosphere fostering a culture of academic interaction will not be easy.

Related to this is the physical condition of the campus. If the classroom is important, it should not be falling apart. When it is, that sends a message to the students that their class work is not valued. Compared with other Big Ten institutions, EVERYTHING seems to be working against the University of Minnesota. It is the least spacious campus, it has the smallest faculty per

student, all the resources available to students, faculty and staff are less. Registration is user-unfriendly, the libraries are atrocious (especially in the summer)--the place radiates "bus station."

At Berkeley, for example, said one Committee member, the teaching is uneven and perhaps not as good as at Minnesota, but the educational quality is higher. Students know the research quality is high and they are in an important place. When they graduate, their students are be proud of the place no matter how they were treated. Minnesota students do not seem to be.

The feeling of many students, it was observed, is that they do not count; faculty are more concerned with research which the students do not value. Alumni feel they have obtained an education and a degree, not because of the faculty but rather by their own persistence.

There appears to be a lack of recognition in departments for those who carry heavier teaching loads allowing the research faculty get ahead. How to address that problem is a puzzle. Splitting the Twin Cities campus into a research university and University College, may exacerbate the problem. That is not the intent, offered another Committee member. The term "research university" may be unfortunate; what is really being sought appears to be a return to the "traditional" university--when the University was seen to offer both quality undergraduate education and outstanding research. This relates to the question of elitism, it was said; it is NOT elitist to say that anyone in the state who qualifies may attend the University; it would be an elite university, not an elitist one. Access will be selective, based on merit, but at the same time there is a need for more generally accessible higher education.

9. The difference in recognition for superb teachers and superb researchers may always be present but it can be addressed. The plan also implies, however, that the research university faculty will not need the wide range of teaching skills they are now called on to possess. With students more homogenous in ability levels, faculty can focus on a narrower range of teaching skills.
10. One major question is whether or not University College should have a lower division--or should lower division education be left to the community colleges, with University College only offering upper division instruction? Alternatively, said another Committee member, could lower division courses from the research university be part of University College (e.g., for liberal education requirements)? When the partnerships with the technical colleges were discussed last year, there was mention of a "firewall" between them and the research university. What will be the nature of the firewall between University College and the research university?

This issue goes back to the question of combining students with different objectives in the same courses. Lower division students in University College would not typically be from the top 25% of their high school class. Because what an instructor does in the classroom is very much affected by the makeup of the students in the class, combining these two sets of students, as is done now, diminishes the education of both.

11. Another issue involves "fixing" the graduation rate; one can question if this plan addresses it. It tries to do so by definition, in seeking to attract only the top 25% of high school classes, which would eliminate those less likely to complete their degree in four years. One of the graphs in the planning documents considers graduation rate as a function of class rank, and for most

institutions it is nearly linear. That isn't so at Minnesota, which suggests that changing the student body to those who graduate in the top 25% of their class may not be graduation rate answer--there seem to be other things at work in Minnesota.

We cannot ignore the fact that we have a large population of commuter students, which has a direct effect on graduation rates. Even brighter students must work and go home from campus; the University may not be able to work in the same way as other institutions.

The average number of credits per quarter taken by students on the Twin Cities campus is 12, which means a student will not graduate in four years unless they attend for 4 quarters per year. Perhaps courses should be spread across all 4 quarters so that students could work 20 hours per week all year while also attending school. Another Committee member expressed doubt such a change could be effected. For one thing, many commuter students who live at home have a pretty good thing going--they earn money for tuition and for maintaining their lifestyle. They have no incentive to rush their education or change their experience. There is a cultural perception that school happens for 9 months during the year and summers are off; that would be very hard to change.

What must be looked at, in order to address the graduation rate problem, is also academic organization: the availability of courses, the speed at which they can be taken, the number of required and elective courses taken, advising, and so on. Many students come an extra quarter to take their last required credits. It might be helpful to have a computerized listing of all courses in various fields during the year so students could see what they need to get in order to fulfill requirements. If a student could not take one class, perhaps another would serve to fulfill a requirement.

Another question about graduation rates is "how good a yardstick is it?" Part of that, it was said, is economic--graduates are more productive members of society. Another economic factor relates to the operation of the University--it is not a wise use of the resources of this very expensive institution to provide services and support for students for 6 or 7 or 8 years. But would there be savings if students were to move through faster? And what do students want? Is there anything to suggest that graduating in 4 years is better than doing so in 5 or 6?

One Committee member expressed the opinion that this plan was very wise. The University could not survive by only attracting the top 25% of the students. It must look at societal needs and, in the Twin Cities, must provide programs for students whose interests are practical and applied--doing so will serve a large group. For the University to back away from those students would mean its death financially, and would also mean a retreat from its mission, so there are both high moral reasons and practical ones for offering the University

In terms of what the Committee would like Vice President Hopkins to address next week, several questions were raised: is there a better explanation of how the clusters will be formed and what they will do in the planning process; a better definition of University College; a description of the "firewall" and whether or not parts of the two institutions would be blended (e.g., in teaching); a description of the characteristics of who will teach where; an idea of who would be responsible for designing the curriculum and maintaining the educational quality of University College; and

will liberal education courses be taught in University College.

The meeting was then adjourned at 4:30.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota