

Minutes \*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy  
Wednesday, October 29, 1997  
1:00 - 3:00  
Room 238 Morrill Hall**

Present: Laura Koch (chair), Avram Bar-Cohen, Elayne Donahue, Gordon Hirsch, Judith Martin, Kathleen Newell, Kevin Nicholson, Palmer Rogers, Jessie Jo Roos, Tina Rovick, Craig Swan, William Van Essendelft, Adam Miller

Regrets: Thomas Johnson, Robert Leik, Gayle Graham Yates

Absent: Darwin Hendel

[In these minutes: Summer session calendar 1999; review of policies; grading policy questions; Twin Cities curriculum committee]

**1. Summer Session Calendar 1999**

Professor Koch convened the meeting at 1:00 and began by noting that there is a problem with the 1999 Twin Cities summer session (which was adopted before the change to semesters was approved). The summer session will end and the new fall semester will begin almost simultaneously. This raises questions about faculty appointments, the nature of the curriculum for that summer session (will there be extra quarter courses offered for students to finish up, or to complete sequences, transition courses, and a regular curriculum?), overload on advisors, and the lack of a break between instructional session. Professor Koch said that a revised 1999 summer session will have to be brought to the February Assembly meeting.

Committee members raised a number of points.

- If students rush to finish, colleges will see enrollment declines the following year, or if a lot of courses go from 4 to 3 credits, colleges will see a decline in enrollment.
- There is a decline expected in evening courses, when students will have only two opportunities to enroll, not three.
- Should a preference be given to students above a certain number of credits, those who have a chance to graduate before the change to semesters?
- It may be that student plans should be assessed, as an imperfect guide to departments in planning what courses to offer (i.e., for students who want to graduate, or who may need transition courses).
- How 9-month faculty appointments will be structured needs to be assessed and dealt with.

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-- It may be that sequence courses should not be started after the fall quarter of 1998-99; the language departments have already decided not to do so while the math and science departments have not decided.

There needs to be a "heads up" on this for department chairs, because when faculty see that there will be no break between summer and fall semester, many will decline to teach summer session.

## **2. Policies**

The Committee turned next to policies. Professor Koch distributed a document, prepared by the Office of Planning and Analysis, outlining the various college policies and practices in a wide variety of areas, and the administrative recommendations concerning each. A major concern is the cost of exceptions in the new computing systems and need for uniformity wherever possible. Uniformity also makes it easier for students. The Committee considered the policy on honors that it had approved last spring, which varied from the recommendation of the administrative group, and concluded it would reconsider the honors policy in the light of all the other policy questions before it.

It was agreed that in the review of policies by groups outside SCEP, students should be involved. While faculty must make the decisions, student participation is important.

It was also agreed that the Committee would take up these policy matters as quickly as possible, and aim to bring a package of revisions to the winter Assembly meeting. The policy questions will also be brought to the attention of the coordinate campuses, although at present attention is directed to the Twin Cities campus.

## **3. ROTC**

Professor Koch reported that she had met with the ROTC subcommittee and will do so for its other two meetings of the year.

## **4. Grading Policy**

Professor Koch distributed copies of two letters concerning the grading policy, and noted that questions are being raised only AFTER extensive circularization, consultation, and debate about the policy.

The Graduate School has raised questions about the "I." Under the new grading policy, an "I" converts to an "F" after one quarter; long-standing Graduate School policy is that an "I" remains an "I" in perpetuity on graduate transcripts. Could this be changed?

The Committee concluded it did not wish to have the "I" grade mean two different things, depending on level of enrollment, and it also concluded it lacked sufficient information about the practice in professional programs to be able to make a recommendation. It was agreed that there should be a different symbol for Graduate School students, and that inquiry was needed about professional programs before any decision could be made about whether they also had problems.

With respect to the present Graduate School practices, Professor Koch said that she doubted the Registrar's office would make any changes in the policy until they heard from SCEP.

The second question about grading came from a student, who was displeased with the adoption of plus/minus grading. It was said that students did not know about it, and that the change should be delayed until the semester system.

This was a proposition the Committee was not inclined to accept. There was, two years ago, widespread publicity and discussion about the change in policy; it may be that a new generation of students is not aware of the policy change, but the policy was adopted by the normal Senate processes, and to accept the argument being made means that every policy must be re-confirmed each year. Committee members also expressed confidence in the integrity of faculty giving grades, and that all "A" grades would not automatically become "A-" grades. The Committee agreed that students who might have received an "A" before will in some cases now receive an "A-," and bounce between a 3.9 and 4.0 average, but those students were benefiting from grading system that did not make finer distinctions.

The Committee also recalled that it had purposely adopted the change in the grading system now, so it did NOT coincide with the change to semesters, and concluded it did not wish to take any action on the grading policy.

#### **5. Twin Cities Curriculum Subcommittee**

Professor Koch asked about the connection between the subcommittee and the Council on Liberal Education. It is larger than CLE, said one Committee member, but the subcommittee must not make college curriculum committees believe their work is not important. It was agreed that the charge to the subcommittee would be circulated to Committee members for review.

Another question was whether to once again seek Assembly approval of the curriculum committee, rather than having it as a SCEP subcommittee. It was noted that all committees are advisory to the administration, and that Dr. Bruininks has agreed to provide staff to the group irrespective of its appointment source. There is, however, a need for the group, under any name, with the advent of IMG. It was noted that the subcommittee would take action only on an exception basis, and then only when a college appealed to it (departments would not have standing to bring complaints or issues to the subcommittee).

The Committee had a brief discussion with Vice Provost Swan about writing courses. He told the Committee that there has been a concern about the cost of writing-intensive courses; the way they are to be implemented is being reviewed, but the administration is committed to implementing them.

Professor Koch adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand