

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy  
November 24, 1992**

Present: James Tracy (chair), Victor Bloomfield, James Cotter, Megan Gunnar, Kenneth Heller, Robert Johnson, Clark Starr, Tim Swierczek

Guests: Vice President Anne Hopkins, Gary Jocelyn, Dallis Perry (both University Counseling Services)

**1. Honors Task Force**

Professor Tracy convened the meeting at 1:20 and reported on his efforts to obtain individuals to serve on the Honors Task Force. Committee members deliberated over who might serve as chair and reached agreement on who Professor Tracy should contact.

The Committee also agreed that the purpose of the task force report will NOT be to fix what is not broken, that it should report by the end of Winter Quarter, that it should meet early with Vice President Hopkins and Professor Tracy, and it would start with the charge of the Senate language plus the 1988 report of the Honors Committee.

**2. Protocol for Student Evaluations of Teaching**

Professor Tracy then welcomed Vice President Hopkins and Drs. Jocelyn and Perry to the meeting to discuss a proposed protocol for handling the student evaluations of teaching required by Senate policy adopted last year.

Dr. Perry explained the involvement that University Counseling Services has had in scoring student evaluations of teaching and then told the Committee that in the paper they prepared, they tried to focus on issues that it should deal with to anticipate or avoid problems that might arise as student evaluation increases under the Senate policy.

There are four key issues:

- standardization: One major step was with the identification of standard questions to be asked; the same step needs to be taken with respect to oral and written instructions to students and procedures for administering the evaluation form in the classroom.
- confidentiality: for students, that they will be anonymous, and for faculty, that the results will be treated in confidence.
- instructional improvement: as the summative items of the survey are emphasized, there

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must continue to be support for instructional improvement and encouragement for faculty to take advantage of it.

- norms: comparison data can be useful but they must be carefully assembled in light of what is known can affect the them; information must be gathered and archived with the survey data.

One Committee inquired about the recommended proviso that only the faculty member be privy to the results: the purpose of the policy, it was argued, was to provide information to the departments. Dr. Hopkins agreed, noting that the Senate policy required the data be used in promotion and tenure and merit salary increase decisions.

Committee members deliberated for some while about the issues; the following points seemed to be generally agreed upon:

- There would be a chilling effect on experimentation in teaching if faculty members were forced to evaluate every single course and there were no allowances made for change.
- University-wide norms will not be developed, but every college should be required to develop a policy on the retention and release of information and how the norms will be used.
- Norms will be calculated, using as variables class size, class level, academic department, college, whether the class is required or elective, instructor rank, and GPA of the student filling out the survey. These data will be calculated in a central office on each campus and the results provided at no cost to all departments. It was understood that the Office of Measurement Services (part of Counseling Services) would provide more than just means and that other appropriate statistics (e.g., standard deviations, etc.) would also be provided.

It is the CLASSES that will be classified, not the students, it was pointed out--norms will be developed by college/department for introductory courses, upper level courses, courses that are primarily for non-majors, courses that are electives, and so on--it is not expected that the classes themselves will be analyzed by different variables.

There was considerable discussion of the norms, with widespread agreement among Committee members that they are important for both faculty members and departments and colleges, that they will be important for salary-setting and promotion and tenure decisions, and that collecting raw data but not calculating norms would be a waste of time and money. No department, however, will be REQUIRED to use the data that will be provided; the Committee surmised, however, that if accurate and useful data were available, few units would not make use of it--and it was unclear how a department would provide the required information on teaching evaluations WITHOUT using the norms.

- It must be remembered, when using the data, that they can only discriminate at the extremes of the scale; the difference between a 4.2 and 4.7 on a 7-point scale is virtually meaningless. But if a department uses the data inappropriately, the dean will be responsible for correcting it--but the tool of these measurements should not be withheld

from departments just because it MIGHT be misused in a few cases.

- The question of the cost of writing the computer programs, processing the surveys, and calculation of the statistics was of concern to some Committee members; processing 200,000 or more surveys per year will not be inexpensive. Dr. Hopkins assured the Committee that these are administrative details that her office will be responsible for; if implementation of the Senate policy becomes unreasonably expensive, she will return to the Committee to explore alternatives. To the extent small financial support may be needed on the coordinate campuses to implement the policy, Dr. Hopkins promised it would be provided. The Committee wanted it understood that it did not want to be in the position of calling for implementation of a Senate policy without regard for the cost.

The cost of administering this program, it was pointed out, will be large--but the expense of processing forms and calculating statistics is a very small part. The larger part will be in the time taken in classes and effort put into the policy.

- In terms of the data made available to departments, it was argued that some flexibility should be built into the programs so that additional information could be obtained--and so that complete re-programming would not be required to obtain it. Clearly, not all requests could be honored, because the expense would be too great, but some flexibility should be allowed.
- The distribution of the information was also discussed. One argument was that deans distribute funds differently among departments, usually dependent on the differing levels of research productivity; if the University is serious about teaching evaluation, the data should also be provided to the deans so they can also discriminate among departments on the basis of teaching effectiveness.
- The problems of comparing apples with oranges on small campuses was recognized, as was the corresponding problem of creating "norms" for a 2-person department. It was agreed that norms for a Twin Cities department X could be provided to the same department or faculty on a coordinate campus for use as they saw appropriate.
- The use of the surveys in small classes was seen to be a problem in that it becomes difficult in a class of 5 students to promise confidentiality. Also a concern, with small classes, is the reliability of the results. It was suggested that identifying information, in smaller classes, should not be sought (e.g., whether elective or required). It may be that classes as small as 5--or below some number X--should not even be surveyed, although omitting them would work to the disadvantage of faculty who teach primarily small graduate courses. Students in small classes should also be cautioned that confidentiality becomes more difficult to maintain.
- There may be a "use of human subjects" issue involved; it was agreed that Professor Tracy would follow up on this matter. Those involved in human subjects research questions might also have good advice on maintaining confidentiality with small groups, it was observed.

It was agreed that Professors Heller and Johnson would act as a subcommittee of two to draft a proposed policy for consideration by the Committee and ultimate presentation to the Senate; the draft is to be prepared by the end of December for discussion at the first meeting of the Committee in January.

Two additional issues need to be addressed, Dr. Hopkins told the Committee. One is whether or not "anchoring points" (e.g., very good, very bad, outstanding) need to be attached to each number on the scales in the required questions (the version adopted by the Senate contains "anchoring points" only at each end of the scale. (It was recalled that the Committee deliberated this point at some length last year and concluded it did NOT want anchoring points attached to each number on the scale.) Two, it has been suggested by several that the second question in the survey ("How would you rate the instructor's knowledge of the subject matter") should be deleted, because it is not something students are in a position to judge very well.

Professor Tracy then distributed a redrafted version of the peer review protocol and expressed thanks to Professors Gunnar and Wick for their work.

The Committee adjourned at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand