

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, March 11, 1998
1:00 - 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall

Present: Laura Koch (chair), Avram Bar-Cohen, Elayne Donahue, Darwin Hendel, Gordon Hirsch, Robert Leik, Judith Martin, Kathleen Newell, Palmer Rogers, Jessie Jo Roos, Craig Swan

Regrets: Thomas Johnson, Tina Rovick, William Van Essendelft

Absent: Adam Miller, Kevin Nicholson, Gayle Graham Yates

Guests: Dr. Roberta Armstrong; Susan Van Voorhis

[In these minutes: Student 2000 project and grading; Morse-Alumni award winners and issues; policy review]

1. Grading and the new Student System

Professor Koch convened the meeting at 1:00 and welcomed Dr. Roberta Armstrong to the meeting to discuss a concern expressed at the Faculty Consultative Committee about grading practices with the Student 2000 project. If there is an electronic gradebook, would all faculty be mandated to use it? How would grades be sent to the Registrar? What are the safety features in the system to protect the integrity of grades.

Dr. Armstrong said she had noted the concern in the FCC minutes. The idea of doing more electronically has been part of the Student 2000 (PeopleSoft) vision for a long time; it is intended to make students more self-sufficient and to help faculty and staff as well (e.g., the latter would be able to make changes in their W-4 forms themselves, with appropriate security). The vision is one where faculty would be able to enter grades electronically if they wished, with appropriate security. With respect to the question "do I have to?" Dr. Armstrong said they hope to have enough consultation with faculty on the subject that they will realize it is fun.

Some faculty will refuse, said one Committee member. Dr. Armstrong said that must be dealt with at the department level. With large classes, departments often have trusted staff enter grades. She has seen examples of excellent electronic gradebooks, and would like to make them available to faculty. How to submit grades electronically will take more work, and there will be paper for some time yet. Dr. Armstrong said that one objective of an electronic grade posting system is to have it replace calls, postcards, notes, or posted grades--it would let students see their own grades, in real time.

One question is whether there should be mid-term reports during a semester, one Committee

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member commented. Dr. Armstrong said that she and Ms. Van Voorhis are working on PeopleSoft implementation, and grading is really out of their scope, but the software does allow storage of mid-term grades, and some faculty may wish to use that capability.

One Committee member inquired what happens now when a faculty member files grade reports. Dr. Armstrong said the existing process is why a change is needed. The grade reports, created by computer, lead to a stack of paper that is divided up and delivered to departments, and then distributed by departments to faculty (usually in mailboxes, probably). The faculty have the records, put the information on the grade report, and the forms are returned to the Registrar's Office. The forms are supposed to go through the department heads, but it is not clear how much review the grades receive at that point (it probably varies a lot by department). The Registrar's office checks to make sure the rules have been followed in awarding grades, and the forms are sent to a keying group.

It is an efficient process, Dr. Armstrong said, but there is a big stack of paper, a lot of people are paid to handle the paper, which ultimately simply needs to be in the hands of the faculty. There is also a policy question about when grades are due; Minnesota does worse than most peer institutions on timeliness (about 11% are late). If the grades are in by the deadline, they are part of the process; if late, Ms. Van Voorhis's office must key the data in.

One Committee member pointed out that if the department collects all the grade reports, and sends them in as a group, then the 72-hour rule is not being followed. A number of departments do this.

Dr. Armstrong said there are many ways to improve the process. Delivering grades electronically would make them easier to turn in, would get the department out of the way, and the departments could be informed what grades were not reported. The way to get grades reported has not been designed yet, Dr. Armstrong observed, and developing it will need much faculty participation.

The Committee discussed with Dr. Armstrong the need for security and the need for departments to have access to grades (which they use for various purposes). She hoped departments would have easier access to information they need, but cautioned that they are doing in two years what has before been 20 years of system development, so information access by departments will not occur for another 15 months to two years. They must first complete registration, admission, and financial aid, then other options will be added. In terms of grades, she said, that is the purview of the faculty and the administration.

Dr. Armstrong told the Committee, in response to a question, that she has seen examples of gradebooks that she wished she had had when she was teaching. Some make grading easier, particularly with large classes and sections. They are also quite flexible, and can accommodate a variety of grading practices within a class. She said she was intrigued at how word had gotten around that they were going to "make" faculty do things; that is not in their interest, she said, and they are trying to make changes that will benefit everyone.

One Committee member suggested that it will be important to speak to faculty groups. Dr. Armstrong they want to know what is broken, what is annoying for faculty and staff, and want to try to help. She asked for the assistance of the Committee in this respect.

One Committee member asked if or when faculty would be provided better information about the

students coming into a course. Dr. Armstrong said that what is being done with Clarity is an effort to make more sense of financial information for deans and officers--the goal is to give people more of the information they want in a user-friendly way. Student information has not yet seen parallel development, but it is being thought about.

Asked how one knows a sophisticated student is not entering the system and changing grades, Dr. Armstrong said there is a group working for Dr. Riley thinking about security. Access to student information is very channeled, but she said she is not altogether comfortable with the security in place. She said they try to be very careful about allowing student access to student data; a supervisor must request access for someone, and usually they are granted "view only" status, or perhaps ability to change addresses and the like. She also reported that there is an audit trail of changes on such things like salary and grades, so the person making the changes is identified. With respect to the miscellaneous grade reports, if departments are not careful about forms and stamps, there is room for dishonesty, because if the form has the right faculty name and right stamp on it, they do not check them.

Dr. Armstrong outlined some of the security provisions that are made to protect and back up the data in the system.

One Committee member pointed out that faculty have no idea if a student's grade has been changed, unless the faculty member makes the change (and even then, the faculty member receives no notification). It would be helpful if faculty were notified of all grade changes. Dr. Armstrong agreed, and said that an email could be sent to a faculty member on all grade changes, or grade changes outside the normal cycle of grading. She said it would be helpful for them to have a session with faculty to learn better what would help the faculty in their work.

Professor Koch thanked Dr. Armstrong for meeting with the Committee.

2. Morse-Alumni Award Winners

Professor Koch accepted a motion to close the meeting in order to discuss the nominations for the Morse-Alumni award. The vote on the motion was unanimous.

Professor Martin reported for the nominating committee. There were five nominees this year. In addition to presenting the nominees, she noted several other issues that had arisen during discussions by the members of the nominating committee.

- There were in several instances very strong contenders for the award (that is, members of the nominating committee KNEW the candidates were likely worthy) but the dossiers were insufficient to convince the committee. The level of attention paid to dossiers is uneven across the University. (The successful nominations are available in the libraries, so departments can see what is needed; there is a need to increase the number of nominations and the quality of materials in the nominations.) The quality of the NOMINEES had not declined, but the quality of the materials had. (One Committee member suggested that the nominating committee may need to be more active in alerting nominators when files are insufficient.)
- Some nominators seem not to understand what the award is about.

- It may be that the University is at the point where most of those capable of winning the Morse-Alumni award have already been nominated or won the award. Does this suggest there should be a concern about whether there is sufficient emphasis on undergraduate education?
- The possibility of communicating with department chairs about renomination of some individuals was discussed. (The amount of work required to assemble a successful file is considerable, and one reason for a decline in the number of nominations and the quality of the files may be that it is an extra task on top of the many things faculty are already doing right now, and it carries with it no reward or recognition.)
- SCEP agreed to open up the nominations to non-tenured faculty members. It is clear, from the nominations that have been made, that those individuals will never be competitive, and one question is whether it is fair to continue to permit them to be nominated when they are handicapped by the criteria established for the award.

It may be necessary to reshape or modify the expectations for the files of nominees, and to clarify who should be responsible for them. A workshop might be appropriate, especially with the advent of the graduate/professional award, to inform departments what is needed, samples of files, and student letters.

Professor Koch said the Committee would take up these issues this spring, and sponsor a workshop in the fall.

3. Policies

The Committee then turned to a discussion of policies. Professor Koch reported that the review of the recommendations from the Zetterberg and Hudleston groups had been completed (except for the disposition of the "Adult Special" status), and that a summary of the SCEP-recommended revisions would be available at the March 31 meeting.

There was discussion of whether these recommendations should be taken to the Assembly for action, thus "freezing" them in place. The problem identified was that if they do not have the legitimization of Assembly or Senate adoption, they are not seen as enforceable policies.

Minor changes were suggested to a couple of the policies, and it was agreed the Committee would review the final recommendations at the end of the month.

4. Other Business

It was agreed that Ms. Van Voorhis's office would prepare a draft 2000-2001 calendar for consideration by the Committee.

The policy on degrees with honors and degrees with distinction will be taken up at the next meeting, and should go to the Senate in April.

The Committee unanimously approved two policy statements (one for the 1998-99 academic year,

one an amendment to the policy on exams and schedules for semesters) which prohibit offering any in-term exams at times other than the normal class period; the policies will be presented to the Senate in April.

Professor Koch then adjourned the meeting at 2:30.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota