

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, December 9, 1998
1:00 – 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall

Present: Judith Martin (chair), Darwin Hendel, Gordon Hirsch, Laura Coffin Koch, Christine Maziar, Kathleen Newell, Jeff Ratliff-Crain, Palmer Rogers, Richard Skaggs, Suzanne Bates Smith, Thomas Soulen, Steven Sperber, Craig Swan

Regrets: Shumaila Anwer, Robert Johnson, Martin O’Hely

Absent: none

Guests: Professor Leonard Kuhi; Professor Charles Speaks; Dr. J. Peter Zetterberg (Office of Institutional Research and Reporting)

[In these minutes: a proposed rule on academic progress and the related topic of tuition banding]

Professor Martin convened the meeting at 1:00 and welcomed Professors Kuhi (who had experience with semester conversion at Berkeley) and Speaks (who has served on the semester conversion committee and expressed an interest in tuition banding) and Dr. Zetterberg. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss a proposed policy on academic progress (appended to these minutes) and a proposal, to be made to the Board of Regents, to band tuition. She noted that the draft policy had been circulated well beyond SCEP, and had elicited a number of comments, mostly in opposition. She turned to Dr. Zetterberg for initial comments.

[NOTE 1: the tuition banding proposal is for the Twin Cities campus; the other campuses would not have a band unless they chose to, or already have one.]

[NOTE 2: “tuition banding” means charging the same tuition for a range of credits. One proposal that might be made to the Regents, for example, would call for the same tuition to be charged to students who enroll for 13 or 14 or 15 or 16 credits. It would, in essence, offer 5 courses for the price of 4.]

Dr. Zetterberg began by noting that a couple of questions had been posed to him in advance of the meeting. One related to the proposition that it costs the University money to have students take more than 4-5 years to get their degrees. He said he did not have a dollar amount, but pointed out that if all students were full-time, and the University had the same number of Full Year Equivalent (FYE) students that it does now, the student body would be considerably smaller.

A smaller student body would lead to cost savings, although not in instruction. It would, however, reduce pressures on the food service, on housing, on parking, on financial aid, on student service units in every college. The amount of savings would be in the millions, although Dr. Zetterberg

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

said he could not identify an amount. (Student or user fees pay for some of these services, but none of them is truly self-supporting.)

People also asked if tuition banding is fair. Tuition is never fair, Dr. Zetterberg observed, but one can also ask if it is fair NOT to band tuition: students who are here longer cost more.

If the University were to decrease the number of part-time students immediately, Dr. Zetterberg said in response to a question, it would reduce its revenues; it is, at present, sized to accommodate a certain headcount. It has evolved to where it is over the past 50 years.

There are economic benefits to a student who graduates in 4-5 years rather than 6-7. The tuition costs for 200 credits are basically the same (except for nominal increases over the years of enrollment), but students must support themselves as students for a longer period, rather than being full-time in the workforce. Student fees must also be paid each term if one registers for more than 6 credits.

Members of the Committee, and its guests, then engaged in a lively discussion of the issues (comments were focussed on the draft policy as well as on the comments from Dr. Zetterberg).

-- First-years students take more credits than upper division students; the former seem to learn from the latter to take fewer. The curriculum exacerbates the problem: there are more 5-credit courses at the freshman level and more 4-credit courses at the upper division level, so a freshman can get used to taking 3 courses and being enrolled for 15 credits; they continue to take 3 courses as they advance, but are then enrolled for only about 12 credits. The average credit load for freshman is 14 credits, but it drops steadily as they advance. (Up until next year, the tuition structure exacerbated the problem as well; an upper division student paid 20% more, at the same time they are probably receiving less family support and working more; that will not be true any longer, as tuition after next year will be equalized for all undergraduates.)

The problem of the curriculum exacerbating the problem of students taking lighter loads as they advance will not go away with the change to semesters. Most lower division courses under semesters will be 4 credits; most upper division courses will be 3 credits. So first-year/lower division students will get used to taking 4 courses, and will continue to do so, but will only take 12 rather than 15-16 credits. To maintain a full load, students in upper division will generally have to take 5 courses, but will be accustomed to taking only 4.

The decision to change to a predominantly 3-credit module was, however, correct for a number of reasons, Zetterberg said. One that has not been mentioned previously is that if the predominant semester credit module had been 4, there would not have been a tuition revenue problem but there would have been a student success problem. Since many degree programs cannot be completed within the confines of 30 courses, the University would de facto have forced students to take more credits -- and made out like a bandit on tuition revenue.

-- If there are savings to the institution from having students move through in 4-5 years and not more, and the University wishes to encourage that behavior, why put any upper limit on a tuition band? Why not charge a flat rate for students who enroll for 13 or more credits?

There is a discount that results from a band; the price for the 17th credit is one credit more than the price for the 13th credit, if the band is 13-16 credits. The discount for 3 credits continues for as many credits as a student enrolls above 16.

In addition, the impact on the cost for students who take fewer credits must be considered. A tuition band, by definition, reduces tuition revenue from those who make use of it, so that revenue must be recovered elsewhere in the tuition schedule. The only way to do that is charge more for students who take fewer credits, and that increase must be reasonable. If it is not, the result will be that students who would have taken 12 credits will instead take 9.

-- The proposal being considered has two incentives. (1) A tuition band at the upper end (e.g., 13-16 credits). (2) In order to minimize the impact on students who take only one course per term (typically through University College and working professionals enrolled in graduate programs), the proposal being considered would reduce the base tuition rate. (The base tuition is the \$62 everyone pays in addition to the per-credit tuition charges. A flat conversion under semesters would make it \$93. One possibility is to charge \$50 per semester. That would lower the cost of taking 1-3 credits.)

The largest increases in tuition would be for those who enroll for 6-12 credits. It is necessary to keep an eye on the price of one course, because for UC students and others, the increase in price in the conversion from quarters to semesters, plus the 15-week commitment, could seriously harm enrollment. The deans who have been involved in the discussions support the idea of a band plus keeping the cost of one course relatively low.

-- The use of tuition bands at other institutions is quite common. Those institutions believe that it stimulates students to take more than 12 credits per term. Dr. Zetterberg said he did not have evidence that tuition bands have an effect on behavior, but since virtually all other institutions have them, he is willing to accept their judgment that they have some effect. (The University has had a tuition band in the past, but it was for more credits, intended to stimulate students to take MORE than 15 credits. It is not clear that it worked.)

What about the group of institutions that do not have per-credit tuition, such as the University of California system? In that circumstance, the "band" is from 0 to infinity (that is, tuition is a flat charge); it is the "Genghis Khan" approach to academic progress and tuition banding, said one.

There may not be evidence that tuition bands affect behavior. Alone, they may not. In one table Dr. Zetterberg presented to the Committee, the word "advising" appears 7 times. Advising alone will also not change behavior. But good advice, communication, and incentives might together help.

-- One objection to the proposed draft is that it seems to be punitive with respect to students and the role that advisors must play. There is also an implicit assumption that all students are alike, a view which none on the Committee accepts.

-- Dr. Zetterberg's model of success, in terms of student credit load, after the conversion to semesters is no change (i.e., no drop in average load). He pointed out, on a chart he distributed, that average credit loads on all campuses have increased steadily over the past 5 years (on the Twin Cities campus, they have increased from 12.8 to 13.4 credits). The best "worst case" would be if 1000 more students than at present want to take 15 credits; there is a risk the University could succeed, and need to

offer more instruction than it has planned for. No one dreams all students will take 15 credits per semester, but the University should do everything it can to ensure that credit loads do not DECREASE.

In order for there to be no change, students will have to accept the idea that they need to take more courses per term (although the same number of CREDITS); this would still be fewer courses per year than under quarters. Students, however, are accustomed to scheduling courses around work and other activities, and it will be a battle to persuade them to take an additional course.

The goal should be steady improvement, rather than dramatic change. There are enclaves in the University that see regular progress to a degree; the allied health programs are one area, the Law School is another. Dean Stein changed Law so that there are now only three "correct" answers to the question "what class are you?" -- first year, second year, or third year. There are things that can be done to change the culture.

-- The campus climate is one that promotes part-time attendance, and this is not only because of students; faculty and staff are responsible as well. Carleton would be proud to have the cohort of students in the biological sciences or in the Carlson school, but those students would not do at Carleton what they do at the University; at Carleton, they would attend full-time. The entering cohort of first-year students at the University is what one would see at private colleges, right out of high school, and they are higher ability than students in the private colleges. Both they and their parents WANT them to graduate in 4 years -- but then the culture grabs them.

It seems that at Morris the band changed cultural belief about what "full time" means: it is between 15 and 20 credits. Above or below that, students actively take cost into account as well.

It is also the case that many students do not realize that they will not graduate in four years if they take fewer than 15 credits per year. The University must be clear with students about what will happen if they take only 12 credits per term. At the same time, financial aid rules (federal) define 12 or more credits as full time, while state financial aid requires 15 credits. The problem is with the term "full time," because what the financial aid rules consider full time the institutions do not.

-- The focus is on credits and courses, and efforts to get students to take more of them, but the Committee needs to look at why students do NOT take more. First, there are financial reasons; second, they are working. About 80% of undergraduates work; that is why some of them come to the University, because they find the structure of the Twin Cities campus attractive. It can be argued that students are going to work no matter what the University does, and they will look for opportunities outside the University. If the problem is to be addressed, the employment piece must be examined in a more concerted way.

The problem is not that students work. The problem is the myth that students cannot work and be full-time students at the same time. Probably 80% of the students at some of the local private colleges also work. The University has convinced itself that students who work cannot do well and be full-time. Part of the culture problem is reflected in the Regents' policy requiring that all non-academic positions of less than 75% time be made available to students; of the 30,000 employees of the University, 14,000 are students. Students who work on campus complete degrees more quickly than those who work off-campus.

Unfortunately, while the retention rate is higher for students who work on campus, many students do not take such jobs, and continue instead to work at jobs off campus.

The culture of the University sets the wrong priorities; it considers employment first and education second. That is completely backwards; this is an institution of higher education.

-- The University should have a minimum progress rule. The University of California system has such a rule: $15 \text{ (credits)} \times (N-1)$, where N = number of semesters enrolled. It sets the minimum number of credits required per term (15 in the UC formula) but allows some flexibility in that it is $N-1$. The big difference is that the formula does not allow part-time students. Part-time students are rare, and only in extension. Such a formula allows students to set their own pace, within the confines of the formula, and is not as punitive as the draft policy.

At the same time, there are students who, for good reasons, cannot average 15 credits per semester. The University also recognizes the value of sound academic options such as internships, which might reduce credit loads, but which provide invaluable academic experiences.

-- Although the loss of revenue could put an edge of urgency in the discussion, the real reason for it is student progress. This is a valuable discussion, and it is clear that in schools around the country where the student credit load is 12 or 13 credits, graduation and satisfaction rates are poorer.

-- The 4-year plan has had problems. Developed while the University was on quarters, it is difficult to make the transition to semesters. There have also been procedural problems with it. Retention rates have been about 50%. The plan is important for the signal it sends, however, and needs broader shared responsibility; the colleges need more ownership of it, and it needs more flexibility and reasonable criteria. Participation this year is up 125% over last year.

The benefits of the program are course access and University payment of tuition if a student is denied courses needed to graduate in 4 years. There is no preference in financial aid; that is driven by federal rules. If a student registers for 15 credits one term, that student has priority in registration the next term among students in the same class.

-- One frustration in some programs (that require full time attendance) is that students are told not to take full loads so they will be more competitive for entry into programs. The programs, however, then do not know if students can carry a full load.

-- There seems to be agreement that the culture should change. Is that an institutional goal? One can make arguments in opposition to doing so, given the University's location as a metropolitan land-grant university, but if the goal is change, it must be realized how the University got to where it is. It was not overnight, it was long-term. Given the incremental incentives that are being discussed, the speed of recovery will be the same as that which got the University to where it is. Can the University stand that pace? It should not, so a minimum progress rule should be adopted.

The question is whether the policy should be punitive, and if the change should be made too quickly. The approach to exceptions will be an issue; the message to send is that those who are NOT full time are the exceptions. The University should consider the UC model, with separation of day and extension students. Here day and University College students are mingled, and should be distinguished.

At the same time, a minimum progress rule need not be that adopted at Berkeley; the University could adopt 13 X (N-1), for example.

The battle over separating University College students from others was fought six years ago, when U2000 was released.

-- Incoming students do not need to be changed. It is the ones already here (along with faculty and staff) who are the problem. There is an opportunity, with the change to semesters and a new incoming class, to start with a cadre of advisors properly trained and enable these students to get a leg up, and everyone else -- the faculty and staff -- need to be convinced this is normal. The University seems always to be dealing with the exceptions rather than the norm.

-- This is a committee on educational policy. Perhaps the most valuable thing it could do would be to construct the best case for why graduation in four or five years is desirable, apart from the job benefits. For example, it does make a difference if courses are taken together; timely graduation affects the assessment of applications to graduate and professional schools: if one is going on to advanced schooling, they need to get done with their undergraduate work. The case can be made for the academic advantages of completing a degree in a reasonable period. It would be helpful if the faculty would affirm that it makes a difference how quickly one moves through college. There are exceptions, but for the most part one gets a better education at the University if one completes it in 4-5 years.

The focus should be on full loads per semester; that is an easier sell than graduation in 4-5 years. One can be nervous about arguing for graduation in 4-5 years; those who do not should not be penalized. (In contrast, the Carlson school charges the same tuition for MBA students in years one and two; if a student takes more than two years, there is a steep tuition hike the third year. One could propose something similar for an undergraduate degree: hold tuition constant for X years, then impose a significant increase on students who take longer.)

-- The proposal that Dr. Zetterberg is working on calls for a tuition band from 13-16 credits and a reduction in the base tuition by about 50%. It has three advantages: it provides a financial incentive at the upper end, it has only a modest impact on the cost of one course, and the overall cost to students is acceptable. The highest increase, about 10%, would be for students who enroll for 6-12 credits. (Of that 10%, about 6% next year would be the result of equalization of upper and lower division tuition rates; the difference would be lower in future years.)

The proposal is to go to the Regents in February. It was agreed that Dr. Zetterberg would return to the Committee in January with the final proposal, at which time the Committee would take action on it.

The band is not 12-16 because of the cost. The 13-16 band costs about \$6 million, which must be recovered by charging others more. If the band is extended to 12 credits, the cost is about \$12 million, which would cause other tuition charges to increase by 20% or more. The change should not be so great that it drives students to enroll for fewer credits (e.g., 9 rather than 12).

-- The Committee should not write policy that will embroil the University in procedures it does not like (such as requiring advisor signatures). It should also consider other actions that can be taken that ENCOURAGE the behavior that is wanted, rather than adopt punitive rules. The Committee and Assembly last year approved the standardization of policies in part to eliminate barriers to students.

-- The algorithm suggested by the Berkeley model is a good one, but could encounter a buzz saw of opposition. Questions that must be addressed include how to deal with transfer students, or with students who take one course per term, in the evening, but who will graduate eventually, how it will apply to both full-time and part-time students. Such a rule is reasonable, however, and would apply to 90% of the University's students. (It would be a BIG change, and inappropriate, to say that students who are not taking a full load are placed in University College. That effort failed 6 years ago.)

It is better to think of incentives rather than being punitive. A punitive policy would generate significant public relations problems if adopted. Tuition banding is an appropriate incentive, and the change to semesters is an appropriate time to introduce it. It might also be possible to set targets by college, so that if the college does not meet the target, it is the college that is affected, not the student.

One can think of certain provisions as punitive; one can, however, also think of them as setting expectations. An expectation established by a minimum progress algorithm is NOT punitive; what if one hires an employee, expects them to work 40 hours per week, and they do not do so? Each student and advisor should be told of the expectation, and the University can deal separately with exceptions.

(1) Whatever the percentage of exceptions, the students who need them are the most vulnerable, the most in need of education, and to disadvantage them contains public relations land mines. (2) This may not be true. The average credit load for student with financial need is HIGHER than for those without need. It may be that there is a need for two different student statuses: full time and part time. If one does not meet the full-time rule, one becomes part time. Becoming part-time need not carry any onus, but it might make a student ineligible for residence halls, not eligible for priority in the registration queue, and would make them ineligible for certain programs (such as those in allied health).

Professor Martin thanked Professors Kuhl and Speaks and Dr. Zetterberg for joining the meeting. It was agreed that that this policy would be redrafted in light of the discussion and be brought back for further consideration, and recommendation to the Senate for adoption if appropriate, in winter quarter.

After appointing subcommittees to complete certain tasks, Professor Martin adjourned the meeting at 2:45.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota

I. Draft policy for discussion.

NOTE: This was the policy being discussed; it is being redrafted for a future meeting.

DRAFT

Policy on Academic Progress
Senate Committee on Educational Policy

1. The University expects students to graduate in four years. This requires a student to complete at least 15 credits per semester, on average, for eight consecutive semesters (excluding the intersession and summer terms).
2. All colleges must have a curricular plan in place for students to graduate in four years. The plan may not require of students that they enroll in fewer than 15 credits per semester, on average.
3. Full-time students are defined as those who enroll for an average of 15 credits per semester. Enrolling for fewer than 15 credits for more than 2 consecutive semesters shall mean a student is not full-time. If a student is not full-time, he or she must obtain written permission from an academic advisor to register for fewer than 15 credits.
4. Any student who will take more than four years to graduate must obtain written permission from his or her academic advisor. Any student who has fewer than 50 credits after four semesters of enrollment will be considered unable to graduate in four years.
5. Tuition rates shall be established which favor significantly students who enroll for at least 15 credits per semester.
6. Campuses, colleges, and departments may, on vote of the faculty and approval of the dean, require students to be full-time in a program.

II. Comments from Professor Kuhi after the meeting

1. The Berkeley rule I quoted was for the minimal progress expected from a student. It did not define a full-time student and we shouldn't use it that way. Obviously the only way to graduate in four years is to take 15 credits per term on average over the four years. It also could result in a very low load for the first semester, thus setting a pattern that may be hard to break. Given all the problems with the 12 credit load, I don't think we want to do that.

2. For financial aid purposes many agencies (but not all) consider a 12 credit load the minimum load necessary to receive full time financial aid. But a student taking 12 credits is not normally taking a full-time load.

3. We have the choice of what load to define as a full-time student. Berkeley uses 13 credits. We could do the same to get students out of the 12 credit mode or we could do something else. But the issue of full-time is less important here because students pay by the credit. At Berkeley tuition was a flat fee and only students taking less than 13 credits could petition for lower fees. This was rarely granted and usually only for hardship cases. The purpose of the minimum progress rule was to get students out in a timely manner. At the U students pay by the credit so the distinction between full-time and part-time becomes very fuzzy. We could try to be as strict as Berkeley in separating day and UC students but I think that is much too big a culture change to consider at this time. Getting students to think in terms of 15 credits will be hard enough.

Therefore I think that a full-time student (if we even want to use that term) should be defined as one taking 15 credits. Then those students could be given all sorts of rewards to encourage others to sign up for 15 credits and become full-time students. I think that is a good thing. But would we really want to

exclude someone from a residence hall for taking less than 15 credits? I think not but here's where the minimum progress rule might come into play: a student must be making minimum progress in order to be eligible for residence halls. Since all freshmen are guaranteed a spot anyway this would affect only the sophomore and beyond students. Perhaps some of the other incentives could require the same thing.