

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, November 1, 1995
1:00 - 3:00
Room 626 Campus Club

Present: Laura Koch (chair), Avram Bar-Cohen, Anita Cholewa, Paul Cleary, Elayne Donahue, Gayle Graham Yates, Megan Gunnar, Darwin Hendel, Thomas Johnson, Jeffrey Larsen, Judith Martin, Glenn Merkel, Ryan Nilsen, Helen Phin, Mark Schuller, William Van Essendelft

Regrets: Robert Johnson

Absent: none

Guests: Robert Leik (Graduate School), Provost W. Phillips Shively, Professor Thomas Scott (CURA), Dr. Peter Zetterberg (Academic Affairs)

Others: none

[In these minutes: North Central Association accreditation review of the Twin Cities campus; policy on degrees with honor/degrees with distinction; Morse-Alumni awards; semester conversion standards; grading policy]

1. North Central Association Accreditation Review

Professor Koch convened the meeting at 1:00 and welcomed Professor Scott, who, with Dr. Hendel, were asked to discuss the North Central Association (NCA) accreditation review of the Twin Cities campus of the University, taking place this year.

Dr. Hendel explained that he would coordinate the review and that Professor Scott is chair of the advisory committee for the review. Their purpose in meeting with SCEP is to explain the process and solicit the thoughts of Committee members about it.

Each campus of the University is accredited separately by the NCA. The NCA is the largest of six regional accrediting associations, and institutional accreditation is totally separate from the accreditation of programs in colleges and departments. The regional associations are loosely affiliated nationally. Unless there are specific concerns, institutions are accredited every ten years.

There are two types of site visits: focused and comprehensive. The last University review, in 1986, was focused on three areas (institutional planning, research, and graduate education). By review rules, there must be a comprehensive review following a focused review.

*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 reflect the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate or Assembly, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

The President appointed an advisory committee this summer which is broadly representative of the Twin Cities campus, the membership of which includes faculty, staff, and students. It is meeting twice a month and must outline what is to be done to prepare for the self-study report that is to be provided to the NCA.

There several different components to the self-study process, three of which are major. First, in the document, the University must say how it met each of 26 requirements necessary for accreditation. Second, it must provide information on how the institution meets five general criteria for accreditation (e.g., does it achieve its institutional purposes). The third component is a descriptive overview of the campus, especially the collegiate units, that identifies significant issues for the institution. The essence of the self-study process and report is collectively deciding how to bring parts of the campus to the process-- what will be attended to.

Professor Scott then commented that the main components of the process will be done during this year. The report will be sent to the site visit team, similar to what happens in a graduate program review. The site visit team then comes to the campus in mid-May; it is composed of individuals selected by the NCA to represent the kind of institution the University is. The site visit team is free to do what they wish when they visit; they then submit a report commenting on the self-study and the visit, and are free to pursue whatever topics they wish. The University then responds to the report, and at some point a decision is made that the University is accredited again.

He said that the advisory committee is operating on the general philosophy that there is also a lot going on at the University and this is one piece that is happening now because it must. They want this process to complement other activities rather than be a brand-new add-on, so it will focus on U2000 and other activities. The University is obliged to do a comprehensive analysis, unlike the focused review of ten years ago. The question is how to do a self-study report that satisfies the accreditation process and provides value added to other University activities.

In the discussion that followed, several questions, answers, and observations were made.

- The NCA review has no direct relationship to the program reviews. Regional and program reviews were loosely affiliated up until about 18 months ago, at which time the coordinating organization was disbanded; there is now a national discussion about what to do. There has been a sentiment, both in Washington and the states, that despite all the monitoring that goes on, there are still things happening that should not. There was legislation to create more monitoring, but that has fallen by the wayside; the concerns remain, however (e.g., about student loan default rates).
- Are there items in the report from 10 years ago that identified areas that needed attention? Will those be reviewed? There were none, except for a few comments and concerns; those will be addressed.
- If the Committee believes the University could benefit by spending time on particular issues in the review process, they would welcome suggestions; otherwise there is a risk that the review will not relate to anything else occurring on campus.

- The membership list of the advisory committee will be sent to SCEP.
- The review looks at all of the Twin Cities campus, as a whole, not at specific collegiate units-- although the site visit team could focus on a particular unit if it wished, or if the institution requested. If that were to occur, the University would want site visit team members experienced with the unit being reviewed.
- A list of accredited programs at the University will be provided, and it would include the programs that have lost accreditation. It will not affect the NCA review if a couple of University programs have lost accreditation; if it is losing accreditation in a number of programs, not intentionally, there would be a concern. (Some institutions say that accreditation is too time-consuming in some fields and choose not to be accredited, even though they have outstanding programs.) The University has perhaps 40 programs that are accredited separately, out of over 200.
- The self-study is one of several major efforts currently underway on campus; had it been a "quiet" year, it could perhaps have done more. When, it was asked--to considerable laughter--was there a "quiet" year in the last decade? To put it more accurately, Dr. Hendel conceded with a grin, this year will probably be even busier!
- The site visit team could help with the transition to semesters.
- Would the site visit team look at grants management? The team gets general guidance from the institution and from its chair, but can look at whatever they want. Grants management has been an issue, and the University will need to describe what it is doing about it in the self study. Whether the team looks at grants management, or helps the University, is as likely to depend on who is on the team and interested than anything else. The University could be lucky and get something helpful that would not affect accreditation.
- What happens after the site visit? After the team makes a report, the University can review it and then accept it or not, and negotiate a final report. When it is finally submitted to the University, it went to the Board of Regents in 1986; Dr. Hendel said he did not know what the follow-up with collegiate units was. There was probably very little because no major problems were identified. If there are problems, the institution would work with the colleges or other units and develop a plan to deal with deficiencies.
- They would work with units before the site visit on problems that are identified as well. The basis for accreditation is that the University meets institutional requirements, such as having a mission statement that appears in all relevant publications.
- There are 26 General Institutional Requirements that are fairly specific, plus evaluation criteria: it has a clear, publicly stated purpose; it is effectively organized; it accomplishes its educational and other purposes; it can continue to accomplish its purposes; and it demonstrates integrity in its practices and relationships. Structuring the discussion in terms of U2000 will enable the University to address most of these criteria.
- The work on the critical measures will also be useful and will be folded into the self study report.

One issue that could be addressed is graduation rate.

At some point later in Winter Quarter or early Spring Quarter, they will want to return to the Committee, and perhaps earlier if they believe they need guidance.

Professor Koch thanked Dr. Hendel and Professor Scott for informing the Committee about the review.

2. Policy on Degrees with Honors/with Distinction

Professor Koch then asked the Committee to consider final changes in the policies on grades and on degrees with honors/with distinction. She reported that the undergraduate deans were concerned about the use of percentages in the degrees with distinction policy, rather than a set GPA. Setting a specific cut-off gives students a goal to work toward, while use of a percentage could mean the GPA for a degree with distinction would vary from year to year, depending on the class.

- The percentage is better, so that students will not choose courses in order to raise their GPA by a small increment; that is not a good reason to select courses.
- Students typically do NOT know where they stand in their class, and it would be hard to figure out.
- If a specific GPA is set, it could be possible for students graduating with honors to have a lower GPA than those graduating with distinction. But using a percentage could mean--although unlikely--that students with a 3.2 GPA could graduate with distinction. If the percentage were set at 10% or less, a college could decide that no one with a 3.2 GPA would graduate with distinction.
- It would be helpful to learn what the distribution of GPAs has been for the last five or ten years. It would be preferable for students to know a GPA, rather than have a percentage that fluctuates from year to year. But perhaps the distribution of GPAs does NOT fluctuate very much each year; if so, the Committee could be more comfortable in stipulating a GPA.
- There could also be a hybrid, stipulating a GPA but also requiring that no more than 10% of students graduate with distinction.

It was agreed that the Registrar's office would be asked to provide data on GPA distributions for recent years.

3. Morse-Alumni Awards

Professor Koch asked the Committee to approve one small amendment to the Morse-Alumni policy: rather than providing that award winners "could designate themselves" as Morse-Alumni Distinguished Teaching Professor of [X], they "would be designated" as. This slight wording change means the individuals would not have to do the designating themselves; it would come automatically with the award.

The Committee agreed to this change without dissent.

4. Semester Conversion Standards

Professor Koch then turned to the redrafted semester conversion standards (hereinafter SCS); she explained that she and Dr. Engstrand met last week to revise the proposal to take into account the comments that had been received on the original document and also to develop at least a sample 15-week semester calendar. The major reactions to the initial proposal (perhaps 15 faculty) were very positive, except that some did not like a mid-August start. There is also debate about the proposed 40-course minimum for a baccalaureate degree.

Professor Koch proposed reviewing the document point by point; Provost Shively said he would like first to know what disposition would be made of the document. He said he had reservations about presenting it to the Senate in November; while it is a wonderful idea to stimulate discussion, past experience with the Senate leads him to observe that if a committee brings a full-fledged proposal to the Senate, that tends to CLOSE discussion, not open it, and the Senate only deals with the edges--unless it rejects the entire proposal. These issues are complex enough, he said, that they require a lot of discussion, and it would be better to bring detailed questions and alternatives to the Senate. After short discussion, it was agreed that Dr. Shively would speak with Professor Adams, chair of the Senate Consultative Committee, on how to proceed.

This is only a document for discussion, Professor Koch affirmed, and reported that she is both receiving and hearing about pressure from department chairs and deans to get something done; they need something to start their own discussions. She expressed concern about how to get students involved in the discussion.

One Committee member said one concern was how to deal with students who are at the University when the change from quarters to semesters is made, especially with new liberal education requirements. That is a subject that needs discussion, Professor Koch agreed.

Another Committee member inquired whether there is semester oversight committee. Dr. Zetterberg said that both he and Professor Koch are disappointed that one has not yet been appointed, because there should be interchanges between that committee and the Committees of the Senate. He agreed with Provost Shively that there must be time allowed for careful discussion; all the right issues are raised in the Committee's proposed SCS, he said, and time must be allowed for all of them to be considered.

He told the Committee he had prepared comments on the draft SCS, at Professor Koch's invitation, and said it would be relatively easy to prepare a document that makes very clear the various options on the Fall Semester calendar; examples of starting before and after Labor Day could be provided.

It is true that department heads and chairs are anxious, but there is much they can do while also thinking about these questions, he said, and decide if they have positions on them.

Following further discussion on the structure of the process, it was agreed that SCEP would continue to work on educational policy issues of the SCS and would work with whatever appropriate oversight committees are appointed. Ultimately all of the legislative issues will go through Senate

Committees to the Senate Consultative Committee and then to the Senate for debate and action.

Asked if any additional thought had been given to the State Fair, Professor Koch said the concerns vary, depending on whom one talks to. The Committee must look at it, she said, and think about the educational policy implications for students. Some may not want 55- or 60-minute classes in a 14-week semester, so some other alternatives must be considered. (The argument against the 60-minute class, she reported, is that students' attention span is not that long, an assertion to which the Committee reacted with skepticism; the 50-minute hour, she observed, may be one thing some faculty see as not changing, when everything else will--it is one thing they can hold on to.)

One Committee expressed a concern that the SCS document conflates policy and the implementation of policy. The policy should be a principle; how it is worked out is where the confusion arises. The document should identify the principles and then identify how they could be implemented. When the policy is agreed upon, then ways to work it out can be identified. In later discussions, the Committee agreed to reformat the document in this fashion.

The policy statement with respect to the State Fair, said one Committee member, is that it is not an educational policy issue. Dr. Shively cautioned that the Committee cannot simply put aside a part of the environment; the prior question must be resolved: is the State Fair a problem? From what has been heard thus far, the answer to the question is unclear--but that does not mean the Fair is not a problem. SCEP probably cannot answer the question.

One Committee member said SCEP needed to be careful about the State Fair, because in some cases it is a lightning rod for other issues; people arguing against proposals on the basis of the Fair may in fact not like the calendar or starting school in August, for example. Even the Fair is demonstrated not to be a problem, careful thought must be given to starting school during the nicest time of the year, and ending early.

Dr. Zetterberg then reviewed with the Committee the information about the State Fair: that the contract giving the Fair control over the northern part of the transitway and 4000 parking spaces on both campuses ends in January, 2002, although it was written with the expectation that it would be renewed. Those include parking spaces in contract lots--they are spaces in addition to Fair parking, and amount to almost 30% of Twin Cities campus parking. University buses during this period would have to use other routes to and from the St. Paul campus. The Fair has use of these facilities 6 days before the Fair, during the Fair, and 5 days afterwards. The parking problem could probably be dealt with, Dr. Zetterberg said, but how to get students and faculty back and forth between St. Paul and Minneapolis would be a major problem. Students, for example, would probably schedule classes to avoid having to make the trip.

Asked about the number of students involved, Dr. Zetterberg said that almost all St. Paul students come to Minneapolis for classes, as do some faculty. Not as many Minneapolis students go to St. Paul. For lower division St. Paul students, almost every student every quarter must go to Minneapolis; that is less true for upper division students. About 3000 students per day go back and forth.

Buses could use city streets, Dr. Zetterberg agreed, or exit from the transitway. Students could not take an 8:00 class on one campus and a 9:00 class on the other; they would need an hour to make the trip between classes. It was noted that buses used city streets before the transitway was built; that is not a

problem; the problem is the use of Cleveland Avenue--THAT is where the congestion would occur, it was said. Because of that traffic, the trip could take more than an hour.

It was suggested that if the Fair makes an August 19 start date not feasible, the Committee should not waste time talking about it. If there is no support for that date, it should not be considered. Moving the date forward a week, it was pointed out, does not eliminate the problem with the Fair; only moving the starting date to after Labor Day resolves most of the problems.

One Committee member said one of the chancellors has asked why a common calendar should be supported, if it starts after the State Fair and messes up calendars generally, or why make the change at all? It would be better to start earlier for most students, it was said.

Other points were then raised in the discussion.

- The 60-minute class hour would permit later start and end dates, but it could also reduce the number of class periods in a day.
- There would not necessarily be a uniform number of class days in the 14-week calendar; in five years there would be 72 days, in one year there would be 71 days, and one year there would be 70 class days. That assumes a weekend study period and a five-day exam period. This is the semester calendar used by Michigan, Wisconsin, Connecticut, and others.

Professor Koch then inquired if Committee members had comments about the proposal to reaffirm the 1922 Senate policy calling for three hours of academic work per week for each credit in a course. Committee members had comments.

- The policy needs to make clear that the three hours includes classroom time.
- This part of the policy should not be limited to undergraduates, although it is assumed that graduate courses require considerably MORE than three hours per work per week per credit.
- It was agreed that the requirement of three hours of academic work per week applies to the "average" student.
- The draft said that student members of SCEP were startled to learn of the Senate policy; a number of students claim they do work that hard. There may also be a difference between what is required and what students do, and students learn which courses require more work and which require less.
- The standard may reflect current practice; if one wants to look at the problem, SCEP should look at what students do for the grade they receive; if students can do one and one-half hours work for an A in a course, SCEP needs to talk to the faculty member.
- Who should police the policy? Campus and college curriculum committees. Existing structures should be used and incorporated in the policy (which they are).

Curriculum committees will not have the time to ask faculty to be sure they have the right number

of hours of work in a course. These committees cannot realistically be expected to enforce the policy, unless the way they operate and interact with faculty is changed.

- The point is to raise expectations. If students are taking 15 credits, that should mean 45 hours of academic work per week to get a C average. But most students and faculty would say students taking 15 credits should receive A's, which reflects a slippage in what the faculty expect students to do and to get from their college education.
- The idea is to reaffirm the policy, place it in front of students, and remind faculty of it. The information about workload should be contained in the syllabus for a course.
- This will not be effective unless there are five-year reviews. And in many cases, students do what they want to; faculty do not make assignments they check on.
- This is using an opportunity to rethink the curriculum, how faculty should deal with students, what the entire University is doing. To put this in syllabi will benefit education.
- This change is an excuse to do what everyone meant to do years ago. Some students do the work required, want to do it, and care more about learning than a grade.
- This is not a big deal and is not meant to get at the quality of teaching; it is intended to identify how many credits a course should receive. A question the Committee must ask is this: setting expectations is a good idea, asking that they be stated is good; how will the curriculum be judged? If it will not be, then the policy should not ask that it be done, because doing so will create a fiction and ultimately hypocrisy.
- There should be very brief statement of policy, without detail; the elaboration is extraneous and all the Committee needs act on is the policy. There must be room for flexibility of interpretation. Who is responsible for implementation? Give that responsibility to those people.
- There needs to be a policy statement and then an elaboration of implementation. It was agreed that Professor Koch and Dr. Engstrand would revise the draft appropriately.

One question that arises with respect to this and other policies as well: do they apply to all campuses? Morris objects strongly; some policies do not recognize its mission and the day-to-day activities of the campus. The policy calling for a 1:1 ratio between contact hours and credits does not recognize that much is not formally scheduled at Morris, and some of the best interactions are outside the classroom. Many classes would be exceptions to the rule that would need approval; it is better to let the campuses make decisions. To dictate to the campuses is a poor way to proceed. Committee members offered observations:

- The SCS calls for campus curriculum committees to make the decisions, so the Morris committee would be the one to do so.
- If much instruction is informal, is it offered to every student in the course, or do only some of the students have it? If only 13 of 25 students receive it, then the other 12 are getting short-changed.

It is both--some students seek out extra instruction; more commonly, with a lab activity, a faculty member will be available for a period of time to work with students, but it is not formally scheduled instruction.

That would fall within the policy, several Committee members suggested, and would not require justification.

-- The word "justify" should not be used; it implies someone has done something wrong.

5. Grading Policy

Professor Koch then turned to the grading policy and reported on the comments that have been made. Most like the policy, including the provisions about repeating a course, and there have been questions about how the D grade affects probation and academic progress and if it counts for transfer credit. On the last point, she observed that every program makes its own decision in this matter. There has also been widespread negative reaction to the A+; how strongly, she inquired, does the Committee feel about the A+?

Why the added gradations on the scale at all, asked one Committee member? Some students believe it is elitist. The reason, it was said, is to have a uniform grading policy for the University; right now there are a lot of variations, which creates problems for students who want to transfer between colleges and campuses. The multiplicity of systems also makes record-keeping very expensive.

The effort to regularize the grading policy is a good one, said one Committee member; if necessary to keep the pluses and minuses, the A+ should be scrapped. Following brief discussion, it was agreed without dissent to drop the A+ from the proposal.

Student members of the Committee split in their views about the plus/minus system. One said that most students, when asked, did not favor it; another said that most students who had been asked favored it. Another Committee member expressed frustration, in assigning grades, at the inability to differentiate more than the present system allows; there is a large difference between a student who just scraped by to get a B- and one who just barely missed an A-. One Committee member said it is hard to distinguish between a C- and a D+.

This is only an option that faculty can use or not, as they wish, it was pointed out.

It was moved and seconded to approve the policy and ask the Senate Consultative Committee to place it on the Senate docket for discussion at the November 16 meeting. The motion passed with one dissenting vote.

The reason for the dissent, it was explained, is that the scholastic committee at Morris adopted a resolution asking that Morris be exempted from the policy and they oppose have a policy dictated to them. There are complex reasons, related to the system they have (ABCDN and SN) and how students can withdraw from courses and so on.

If there are objections, they should be heard by the Committee, it was said, not on the Senate floor. Have they been brought up in the past, asked another? The Committee has been discussing this policy since early last Spring Quarter, and there was a Morris faculty representative on the Committee.

The objection is more to the way the policy has been developed than to the elements of the policy, it was said. It has to do with the climate of the campus and being told what to do.

It is not clear why Morris feels this is "being done to them" when Morris has representatives on the Committee and in the Senate, said another Committee member. They have a voice in these policies. It only has four senators, it was pointed out; many on the Twin Cities campus do not even know the Morris campus exists. These policies are designed to solve problems on the Twin Cities campus, not at Morris, so the Morris campus objects.

This is one university, it was said, but it is geographically separated, and the Committee needs to understand the implications of implementing a policy.

There needs to be a decision about which policies will apply to all campuses, it was said; if the representatives from each campus do not speak for the campuses, what is SCEP to do?

There was a statement that the policy would not be taken up for action by the Senate before there was widespread discussion, it was said. The presentation of the policy will be a surprise to many. The draft policy went out to over 600 people by email, including all department heads, faculty senators, deans, and so on, and was mailed to all student senators. Why is the discussion not happening?

There was general agreement that the policy should be discussed more widely and should not be acted on at the November Senate meeting. It was moved, seconded, and voted to put the item on the docket for discussion; there were two dissents from the motion.

Professor Koch then adjourned the meeting at 3:15.

-- Gary Engstrand