

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, November 11, 1998
1:00 – 3:00
Room 626 Campus Club

Present: Judith Martin (chair), Shumaila Anwer, Darwin Hendel, Gordon Hirsch, Laura Coffin Koch, Christine Maziar, Kathleen Newell, Martin O’Hely, Jeff Ratliff-Crain, Palmer Rogers, Richard Skaggs, Thomas Soulen, Craig Swan

Regrets: Robert Johnson

Absent:

Guests: Roberta Armstrong (Enterprise Systems Project); Susan VanVoorhis (Office of the Registrar); Joel Weinsheimer (Council on Liberal Education)

[In these minutes: work of the Council on Liberal Education, writing-intensive courses; the Student2000 project; issues in graduate education; exemption for Men’s Athletics basketball team; adherence to Senate policy by colleges]

1. Report from the Council on Liberal Education

Professor Martin convened the meeting at 1:00 and welcomed Professor Joel Weinsheimer to discuss what the Council on Liberal Education (CLE) has been doing.

Professor Weinsheimer explained that CLE has been implementing the Report of the Task Force on Liberal Education, adopted by the Twin Cities Campus Assembly in 1990. This involved calling for and approving courses for the liberal education core and themes; there are now over 800 such courses.

In the last two years the major task has been the conversion to semesters; the task is mostly finished, and there will be enough classes to meet the needs. In many cases the review was simple, and courses obviously fit the category; fewer than 1% of proposals were rejected, and a few were ambiguous, so clarification was sought.

The other major item of business has been implementation of the writing intensive courses – an element of undergraduate liberal education that was clearly recommended by the Task Force but that has been delayed for a number of years. It has now been brought to fruition, in part because of the administration of Provost Shively and in part because of the persistence of Associate Deans Huddleston and Waltner. The deadline for proposing writing-intensive (WI) courses was October 23, and WI requirements will be in place for Fall Semester, 1999.

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At present there are about 350 WI courses proposed; that is sufficient to begin with, but will not be enough for the long term. Colleges vary in their commitments; many of the departments one expects would have WI courses have them, but also a number of departments are offering WI courses where they might not be expected.

Professor Weinsheimer said the WI courses were off to a promising beginning – when one considers that the effort came at the end of a period when faculty and administrators were asked to do a great deal in changing to semesters. The process for obtaining approval for WI courses is streamlined, although there are baseline requirements: there must be at least 10-15 pages of finished work, with revisions required, that are a big part of the course grade. The proposal is modest, but it assumes writing will be a widespread part of instruction in undergraduate colleges. All students must take 4 WI courses AFTER freshman writing; two of the courses must be at the 3-XXX level, and one must be in the major field. CLE is assuming that every major field will offer at least one WI course.

Professor Weinsheimer then explained the interaction between existing writing courses offered in English and in Composition and the new WI courses. The goal is to move writing instruction into the specialties, rather than have English or Composition offer specialty writing.

A number of points were made in the ensuing discussion.

-- There is no plan to reduce the number of graduate students who teach writing. If the need for writing instruction remains stable, the number of graduate students hired could increase by 50%.

-- With respect to non-native English speakers, first, it is the faculty member's responsibility to offer WI, and not to deliver it through labs or recitations. Second, there will be workshops and 8-XXX courses for non-native speakers. There will also be efforts connected with the Center for Teaching and Learning. The Center for the Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing will also help departments implement WI courses.

-- Funds are being provided to the colleges for help in offering WI courses; the Executive Vice President's office will NOT negotiate with individual departments. There is already writing offered in the colleges; it is expected those efforts will continue. One concern is that a physics or accounting professor will have to worry about commas; if a student has serious difficulties with the mechanics of writing, he or she should be referred to a writing lab. The faculty member should concentrate on argument and evidence.

-- It is not expected that offering WI courses will adversely affect courses offered by Rhetoric.

-- Currently-enrolled students will have the option to use the new or the old writing requirements; transition students will be permitted to work out a plan.

-- There will be a quick approval process for designating freshmen seminars as WI courses – as soon as they figure out what the process is.

-- Both Composition and WI courses will be offered for awhile, but it is expected that demand for the former will decline over time, freeing up funds to be directed to the colleges to support WI courses – in addition to the funds that have already been provided. 1-XXX level composition courses will continue

to be offered indefinitely, and one general course in exposition will be offered during the transition, 3-XXX specialist courses will disappear with semester conversion.

Professor Martin thanked Professor Weinsheimer for making his report.

2. Report on the Student 2000 Project (new central computing systems)

Professor Martin now welcomed Dr. Roberta Armstrong to the Committee, to discuss the status of the Student2000 project.

Dr. Armstrong explained that the Student2000 project is part of the Enterprise Systems Project, which has responsibility for human resources, the web, and infrastructure needs. The Student2000 project had an advisory committee of students, staff, and faculty, chaired by Vice Provost Craig Swan; Ms. Van Voorhis and Professor Koch are also members.

Dr. Armstrong distributed a handout which outlined the nature of the Student2000 project (provision of systems to support admissions, financial aid, registration and records, advising, and student financial transactions), why it is needed (to provide better service, to provide timely and accurate information, and to be more user-friendly), and what part of the project has been implemented thus far. She outlined briefly the impact of the change on colleges in such areas as admissions and recruitment, application processing, student financial transactions, and course implementation. They are making the changes to provide better services, she said; much of the change is being driven by the Year 2000 problem and the conversion to semesters.

The goal this year has been to get the core “business processes” in place and “rock solid” (admissions, financial aid, registration, and so on). After that, they will move on to providing a new level of student services. Admissions information is used by a number of units, and many offices will have “look and see” capability. Student financial transactions will be collected in one place; before, they were very scattered. The course implementation program includes semester information – it is not as elegant as they wish, but it will provide what is needed.

Training will be provided to those who must use the PeopleSoft systems.

The easy parts have now been done, as have the less visible business processes. Early next year on-line registration will be implemented – which MUST work, and it will be closely watched. Many want things on the web; they wish first to be sure the registration system works. The University has a project with IBM and there are other projects going on as well with respect to use of the web; the intent is to make the sites as seamless as possible, so students do not have to search the web for what they need.

Dr. Armstrong said that she or someone working on Student2000 is to talk to departments or groups that want information.

A number of comments were made.

-- There are three things no one should see being made, not two: laws, sausages, and bringing up a computer system. The effort has been enormous, much unseen, but if not completed successfully, much at the University will not work on January 2, 2000.

-- There will be safeguards to protect information which is not legally public. Students, moreover, can suppress directory information. Whether a student graduated is public. Employees may not suppress the fact they work at the University, but may suppress home information. There are inconsistencies between requirements for students and staff.

-- There were many problems when human resources information was downloaded; addresses were wrong, colleges could not send bills or put holds on student records. What assurance is there that something similar will not happen when student data is put on the PeopleSoft system? The problem with human resources information was that there were multiple and inconsistent sources of information. They have studied the PeopleSoft system at length, and involved many people who know the old system well, and are evaluating every data element and conducting testing as they go along. There is no guarantee there will not be problems, but they are trying to ensure there will not be a catastrophe. Students are being informed about what is going on, through the web site, in the class schedule, and with signs.

-- Students will see information about themselves when they register, and can note inaccuracies; faculty and staff will have to look at staff demographics. Few, however, will have access to actually make changes.

-- There will likely be more and more on-line applications, but it is not expected that there will be any more errors in the process than there are now. People must learn to enter information correctly, and it will be a major task to eliminate duplicate files.

-- The use of credit cards is sometimes seen as a fiscal issue, which is the wrong way to look at it; the process should be made easy for people. University College permits use of a credit card, Day School does not. This is hard to explain to people.

Ms. Van Voorhis reported that courses offered for credit through University College are now on the system. She also reported that her office is now gathering information about Fall Semester classes and the availability of classrooms, and would report to the Committee in February on the size of the problem that will exist.

Professor Martin thanked Dr. Armstrong for her report.

3. Issues in Graduate Education

Professor Martin turned next to Dr. Maziar for a discussion of graduate education and issues that had been raised at the SCEP retreat in the fall.

One question had to do with the increase in the number of graduate programs and the University's inability – or distaste – for discontinuing them. Dr. Maziar distributed copies of the Graduate School policy on merger or discontinuance of programs, noted that it had only been in effect for about two years, and that they did not have enough experience with it to be able to assess it. Even given that, she said she intended to take it back to the Graduate School Executive Committee to find out if it should be continued or rewritten, because there were parts of it with which she not comfortable.

In particular, the indicators that would trigger a review of a program have been dropped; in a number of cases, they would provoke a review of very fine programs. Rather than using absolute data from a specific point in time, it would be wiser to use trend lines.

There is a natural reluctance to discontinue programs that may have become stale or that are not used by many graduate students. There is a need for mechanisms that either reconfigure them or merge them with other programs. There are practical reasons for doing so – one is that the Graduate School funds graduate student needs through block grants, in order that the programs can tailor support and recruitment to their own needs. When programs are more and more finely divided, it is more difficult to make block grants – they become chip grants. In addition, graduate students need programs with sufficient flexibility that they can study what they need to and better prepare for the job market; some programs may be too narrowly focussed.

The policy will be reviewed – but not next year, the first year of semesters.

Dr. Maziar reported again that she had suspended program reviews, a decision that provoked “overwhelming joy” from the Policy and Review councils. This is not a long-term decision, however; the reviews will resume once the transition to semesters is completed, and the reviews will be redesigned to be integrated with the compact process.

Again, a number of points were made in the ensuing discussion.

-- The possibility of a merger, due to a small number of students or faculty, can be raised either at the initiative of the Graduate School or the program. The first concern of the Graduate School is that students are well-treated and supported during a transition.

-- Cooperation with other institutions, when demand is small and important to both programs, needs to be considered. Collaborations now in place are between STRONG programs. There needs to be an evaluation of what both institutions can achieve.

Another issue brought up at the SCEP retreat had to do with joint bachelor's-master's five-year programs. Dr. Maziar said there is much interest in these programs in IT and the engineering departments; they are popular at MIT and Stanford. The idea behind it is that many students come to college well-prepared; if the University works with them early, they can complete a coordinated program leading to the bachelor's and master's degree in five years – which will give them a better opportunity to pursue a Ph.D. or make them better prepared to go into the private sector.

One question is whether courses should be permitted to count twice, at both the undergraduate and master's level. Her view, Dr. Maziar said, is that they should NOT, but she is consulting with faculty and policy groups on the issue. She said she does not have a problem with allowing a course to meet requirements in both programs, but does not favor counting it twice. Most institutions do not permit double counting. The question is whether students will meet a minimum credit requirement or if they will learn a specific body of knowledge; the two are not the same. Dr. Maziar agreed; it is bean-counting versus competency. It may be, it was said, that some compromise is needed, or that a system that measures both beans and competency is needed. Her concern, Dr. Maziar concluded, was that double-counting could mean a sacrifice of breadth in the combined program.

What about transferring credits from one institution to a second, and then to a third, in these five-year programs; would they transfer? Dr. Maziar thought it unlikely. In the case of conventional programs, the credits would only transfer if the full transcript were available and there were no misrepresentation of the work done.

On the matter of a University voice with accrediting agencies, Dr. Maziar said there is increasing coordination among the CIC presidents and Research I universities in order to take a stand against the undue influence of the agencies. If one is in a field that does not have a powerful accrediting agency, one is at a disadvantage (a circumstance in which most of the social sciences find themselves, for instance). Asked if the deans of graduate schools have taken a position on accrediting agencies, Dr. Maziar said there are multiple groups of deans, but that in general the problem is greater in undergraduate and professional programs than in graduate programs.

Dr. Maziar commented briefly on the status of searches being conducted in her office, and Professor Martin then thanked her for her comments.

4. Request for Exemption, Twin Cities Men's Athletics

Professor Martin distributed to Committee members copies of a letter from the Associate Director of Men's Athletics requesting an exemption (in fall, 1999, for a basketball game against the University of Oregon at Oregon) from the policy prohibiting athletic travel or competition during study day and finals week.

The Committee was unwilling to consider this request in isolation. After brief discussion, it was agreed that Professor Martin would write to both the men's and women's athletic directors to ask for identification of ALL requests for exemptions for the first fall term on semesters. It was also suggested by some that it would be pertinent for the Committee to be informed of the contractual obligations between Minnesota and Oregon. Others said they would be uncomfortable making a decision on the basis of the finances involved; doing so would simply encourage such requests in the future.

Professor Martin said she would write to the directors.

5. Other Business

Professor Martin distributed a draft proposal of a policy on academic standards (addressing the need for students to graduate in four years), following up on the conversation earlier in the year with Dr. Zetterberg. She said it would be brought up for discussion at a future meeting.

It has been reported that some colleges are not adhering to the policy on repetition of courses. The policy approved by the Senate leaves it up to a college to decide if courses can be repeated, but also provides that IF a college permits repetition, it must follow the policy (which calls for, inter alia, counting only the last grade earned, rather than averaging them). Ms. Van Voorhis commented that the transcript entry follows the policy.

It was agreed that Professor Martin and Vice Provost Swan would notify the deans of the necessity of following Senate policy.

Professor Martin then adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota