

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy
May 27, 1993
1:15 - 3:00
Room 626 Campus Club**

Present: James Tracy (chair), Thomas Clayton, James Cotter, Michael Handberg, Robert Johnson, Andy Kuehnel, Lois Regnier, Clark Starr, Susan Wick

Regrets: None

Absent: Victor Bloomfield, Susan Donaldson, Megan Gunnar, Kenneth Heller, Darwin Hendel, Andrea Mack, Tim Swierczek

Guests: Vice President Anne Hopkins, Patricia Kovel-Jarboe (Academic Affairs), Dean Hal Miller, Professor James Orf

Others: None

[In these minutes: distance education; honors programs task force report; student registration in concurrent courses]

1. Draft Report on Distance Education

Professor Tracy convened the meeting at 1:15 and welcomed Dean Miller and Ms. Kovel-Jarboe to discuss the draft report on distance education.

Dean Miller began by telling the Committee that he serves as chair of the Distance Education Policy and Planning Committee (hereinafter DEPPC), a group that also included Joe Branin, Robert Cipolle, George Copa, Laurie Hayes, Steve Hedman, Pat Kovel-Jarboe, Pat Kumar, Rita Meyer, and Don Riley as members. The DEPPC has written a draft report and seeks comment on it from the University community. The DEPPC had a two-part charge: to provide guidance for colleges and units in developing plans for distance education and to make recommendations about expenditures on distance education. Dean Miller reported that the University had identified \$3 million for distance education; the DEPPC report recommends how those funds should be spent.

The DEPPC looked at earlier University studies, reports from other institutions, and considered State plans for distance education. Over the course of ten meetings, the DEPPC discovered three important things:

- the growth of technology to deliver distance education has expanded enormously, permitting distance education to be "dropped" anywhere in the country.

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- with the growth of affordable technology, Minnesota colleges and universities are active in distance education; the University needs to step forward and fulfill the State's interests in providing distance education.
- the University has done a great deal in distance education; those activities need to be built into strategic planning, research and development, and the human and technological infrastructure.

The draft report identifies three goals in distance education: support and encourage teaching and learning through distance education, support and encourage research and development and establish the University as a leader in distance education, and fund the infrastructure necessary to accomplish the first two goals. Dean Miller then reviewed the seven more specific recommendations that followed from the three goals.

One Committee member then commented that he got no sense from the draft report of what the University should NOT do. For example, in earlier years CLA courses sometimes appeared on TV monitors--a practice that has since been deemed undesirable and has been abandoned. What is it that should and should not be done? Dean Miller explained that the DEPPC looked at mechanical issues, the rationale for distance education, and tried to provide guidance to units on how it can be delivered and how to accomplish technological improvements in classroom instruction. The focus of the DEPPC was on how to link institutions together.

Dean Miller noted that the new curriculum at Crookston will rely heavily on distance education; UNITE in IT is a good example of how the University currently reaches place-bound students. Distance education provides a window on the classroom, it does not assume there will be large changes in the way faculty do things. The orientation of the report is that if the University offers instruction or information, it should be available to more people who are place-bound and cannot come to the campuses.

One problem with the DEPPC report, said another Committee member, is that it does not focus on the stakes involved in distance education. The possibilities for students to be networked at home and faculty in their offices, permitting a large number of people to be linked interactively via computer, could redefine teaching. US West, for example, conducts all of its training by interactive video, so staff no longer travel to training meetings. In the past, the University had a monopoly on higher education in the state; with the changes that are coming, it will have to compete with courses offered by Berkeley and Harvard--and if the University does not act, it will see its funding decline.

The most important part of the report, commented Vice President Hopkins, is its recommendation that distance education be a part of the strategic planning process. Colleges must think about the appropriateness of distance education for their curriculum as well as how it should be delivered. Faculty must be involved in the policy-making. While most faculty do not know that much about distance education, and will have to learn, they must also be involved in setting policy on how distance education will be used. Dean Miller concurred.

There are a number of long-term implications of distance education, said one Committee member. For example, if a course is offered by the University that other institutions might use as a requirement,

there is an implied relationship between the institutions that will require coordination--and there is a risk of dependency.

Committee members then discussed Jones Telecommunications Mind Expansion University and the British Open University and the applicability of the model of the latter to the University. One of the questions that arises has to do with interactive video versus one-way communication, said one Committee member. Most programs are now one-way video and 2-way audio; the trend is toward 2-way video, and for that fiber optic cables are needed.

There is no need to reinvent the wheel, Dr. Hopkins observed, but traditional faculty members--including herself--do not know what to do with interactive video; the University must invest in design: how to adapt courses to it, the options available to deliver them (video, electronic mail, etc.). Part of distance education will depend on what faculty are willing to do, and it will NOT be cheap to start out, because of the need for infrastructure and training. The funding from the University will go into design and delivery, Ms. Kovel-Jarboe commented; the infrastructure exists, although there could be shifts in structure, an issue that needs to be addressed in the strategic planning process.

There are a number of issues that need to be addressed in distance education, maintained one Committee member: courses versus a curriculum; existing versus new courses; the extent to which library resources are really available. It will cost a lot of money to bring all library resources onto computer--it will probably cost billions of dollars, nationally, to accomplish that objective. Dr. Hopkins noted that it is already possible to transmit library materials electronically. Dean Miller said that part of the report asserts that if the University intends to be involved in distance education, the activity must be supported by library and other student services. Other institutions will deliver distance education whether or not the University chooses to do so--Maryland, for example, could deliver the course and the student will use Minnesota's library.

Ms. Kovel-Jarboe said that there are two elements to faculty involvement in distance education: how the involvement should occur, and how the faculty can gain enough information to play the role of informed decision-maker. A third element, Dr. Hopkins added, is the faculty role in the control of the curriculum; the investment in distance education is so large, and so outside normal curriculum development, that it could be seen as a danger to that traditional faculty responsibility.

There are three levels of decision-making, one Committee member observed. First, at the University-wide level, about courses between campuses and institutions. Second, at the college and department level, about the kinds of programs and courses for individuals who cannot physically come to a campus; in this decision, the faculty will certainly be involved. Third, at the level of a resource unit that can help faculty members with distance education and how the technology can be brought into courses.

Dean Miller pointed out that providing a curriculum, rather than courses here and there, is what is more popular with students. Full offerings through which a degree can be obtained attract many more students than do isolated courses. This is one reason the British Open University is so popular--it turns a lot of applicants down, while accepting 20,000--and it appears to be meeting a demand. It is for this reason that UNITE has also been successful--it offers Master's degrees. Moreover, he added, the Twin Cities, as a large metropolitan area, is a tempting site for institutions that wish to offer distance education--and not all of them will have the same level of integrity as the University.

Another question about distance education that must be answered, Dr. Hopkins told the Committee, has to do with access; the University does not have the resources to have open admissions. Ms. Kovel-Jarboe added that one must get away from the notion that distance education is not-very-good education for not-very-good students.

Asked if businesses are interested in distance education for employee education and degrees, Ms. Kovel-Jarboe pointed out that UNITE provides exactly that service--there are 37 corporate customers who provide it to employees on company time at the company site. The state subsidizes UNITE, but the employers pay even more for it. Dr. Hopkins noted that now, unlike 20 years ago, there is much more in-house corporate education--and education that is of high quality. American higher education let that activity go, and one can inquire if it should get back into the business.

One Committee member contended that this effort makes the typical assumption that faculty time is free. It is also possible that faculty members would end up teaching in a sterile classroom to 20 or 30 people outside the University. This teaching, outside the classroom, will be a diminished experience for the students because they are not in the right setting. Ms. Kovel-Jarboe responded that this a programmatic question; there may some programs that are not appropriate for distance education, or that may not be cost-effective.

Another Committee member, recalling his experience with distance education, noted that there were problems but that it is not that difficult to do and it can be fun--and that faculty members ought not be afraid of it.

Professor Tracy thanked Ms. Kovel-Jarboe and Dean Miller for meeting with the Committee.

2. Meeting Schedule for 1993-94

Professor Tracy then asked Committee members about the meeting schedule for next year. It was agreed, subject to final approval by the incoming chair, Professor Heller, that the Committee would plan on meeting four times per quarter next year.

3. Report of the Honors Programs Task Force

Professor Tracy next welcomed Professor James Orf, a member of the task force on honors programs that SCEP appointed earlier this year. Dr. Orf said the task force had three issues with which to deal: consistency of standards, alternative ways to recognize high academic performance, and institutional support for honors programs.

On the question of consistency, the task force found that even though there are variable structures to enrich the student experience through honors programs, the colleges offer largely the same kinds of things. The level of expectations of students in the programs appears not to vary greatly.

On alternative ways to recognize high academic performance (i.e., high grade point averages achieved by students who choose not to be in an honors program), the task force recommends consideration of a University-wide policy on an English-language designation of graduation with

distinction (and reserve the Latin designators cum laude, magna/summa cum laude for those who complete honors programs). A note on the transcript should explain the difference.

Committee members noted the confusion that could surround the use of English and Latin designators, if not explained. The varying practices of the colleges and campuses were noted, as were variations nationally. Dr. Hopkins said that at most places, the Latin designators are used for GPA achievement levels while "with honors" indicates completion of a program. Minnesota has chosen to use the Latin designators for honors programs. It was also noted that not all programs recognize a high GPA by using a "with distinction" term--something that SCEP could address, it was suggested.

Committee members deliberated over the wisdom of a University-wide policy on use of a term such as "with distinction" for students who graduate with high GPAs. One reason for such a policy, Dr. Orf said, is so that those outside the University can interpret transcripts; if each college sets its own standard for graduation with distinction, there could be considerable variability. Any standard or language should be explained on the transcript, he repeated. Committee members concluded that a uniform GPA, however, would not be appropriate, given the differences in grading practices among the colleges. It appeared to be the consensus of the Committee that there should be a "with distinction" designation and that it perhaps should be based on percentile rank (e.g., within the top X% of the graduating class).

The Committee agreed to endorse in principle a policy on graduation with distinction; it also decided to leave the details of such a policy to next year's Committee. Among the questions that will be need to be addressed include use of the Latin designators when there is no honors program in a unit and whether or not a student can graduate with honors but not with distinction.

In terms of the third issue, institutional support for honors programs, the task force recognized that resources are in short supply so made no recommendations that carry significant financial implications. It did suggest that the "honors coordinators network" be revived; Dr. Hopkins promised the Committee that it would be. There should also be a regular report by the network to SCEP, Dr. Orf said, perhaps once per year, in order to keep the honors programs visible and to keep SCEP informed. It was suggested by one Committee member that any visibility include information about outcomes, not just activities; the Committee concurred.

There was also agreement that with the new admissions office, there should be a way for prospective honors students to be able to learn about honors programs and courses. The new director is interested in these students, Dr. Hopkins reported, and honors programs are an important part of recruiting students.

If the financial situation of the University stabilizes or improves, Dr. Orf concluded, then perhaps some additional financial support to honors programs could be considered. The key to honors students, Dr. Hopkins added, is scholarship money, of which the University is woefully short. The President's Development Committee has scholarship funds as its highest priority; Dr. Hopkins also encouraged Committee members to nudge their colleges to set it as a priority.

Professor Tracy extended the thanks of the Committee to Dr. Orf and the members of the task force, who were: Elizabeth Belfiore, Richard Christenson, Elizabeth Cummings, Brent Kalar, Joyce

Lyon, James Orf, Robert Pepin, Anne Pick, and Michael Simmons (chair).

4. Registration in Courses Meeting Concurrently

Professor Tracy next turned to Dr. Hopkins for explanation of an item she had raised in a letter to him. Dr. Hopkins explained that the registration system on the Twin Cities campus does not block a student from registering in two courses that meet at the same time. And because of the move away from standardized hours, students can have a slight overlap in classes.

There are two ways in which this problem could be addressed. One would be to standardize the schedule or students could be prohibited from registering from courses that overlap in time; the latter possibility was one that the Registrar did not want to enact on his own. A lot of faculty have told her, she reported, that students come late or leave early in order to get to another class.

Committee members did not leap to endorse a policy prohibiting concurrent enrollment. Student members pointed out that some students enroll in overlapping courses out of necessity--it's the only way they can get the courses they need and still graduate in a reasonable length of time. A lot of students, it was pointed out, only show up for midquarters and finals, and because they work must listen to tapes of classes rather than attend. Prohibiting concurrent enrollment would possibly have an adverse effect on time to graduation or graduation rates, it was said. Another problem is that departments may set their schedule of classes but then not consider their entire array of offerings as a whole. Another possible problem, it was said, is that faculty prefer certain times for classes, and certain rooms, and those combined preferences sometimes make it difficult for students to schedule their courses.

Dr. Hopkins said she was "dead serious" about improvements in graduation rates and time to a degree but this is a question of the integrity of the curriculum.

Committee discussion inclined toward supporting a more rigorous policy on class hour norms rather than departmental review of course offerings and an outright prohibition on concurrent enrollment. Dr. Hopkins suggested that it would also be helpful for colleges to assume the burden of checking the schedule of its courses. If SCEP were to propose a policy, and the Senate/administration were to adopt it, it was said, no class times would be permitted except the standardized ones, with a proviso for exceptions.

The Committee agreed to take this issue up next year as well.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:50.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota