

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy**  
**Tuesday, May 30, 1995**  
**1:45 - 3:30**  
**Room 626 Campus Club**

Present: Kenneth Heller (chair), Anita Cholewa, Elayne Donahue, Darwin Hendel, Laura Coffin Koch, Judith Martin, William Van Essendelft, Darren Walhof

Regrets: Robert Johnson, Manuel Kaplan, Gayle Graham Yates

Absent: James Cotter, Megan Gunnar

Guests: Professor Victor Bloomfield (Chair, Council on Liberal Education), Linda Ellinger (Arts, Sciences, and Engineering), Elizabeth Grundner, Samuel Lewis (both Office of the Registrar), Provost W. Phillips Shively

[In these minutes: Report from the Council on Liberal Education; review of policies]

**1. Report from the Council on Liberal Education**

Professor Heller convened the meeting at 1:45 and welcomed Professor Bloomfield to report on the activities of the Council on Liberal Education (hereinafter CLE).

Professor Bloomfield said he was glad to join SCEP and believed that discussion between SCEP and the CLE was important. The CLE is a creature of the Twin Cities Campus Assembly that acts in the spirit of the report of the Task Force on Liberal Education (TFLE), he noted, but it exists somewhat independently of the governance system; it has frequent contacts with colleges and departments but not with SCEP. A transition period is approaching, so the times are important.

He distributed a handout to Committee members that outlined key features of the liberal education requirements specified by the task force, a chronology of events leading to the creation and work of the CLE, a statistical summary of courses and projected seats available for diversified core and theme courses, concerns and problems, and a copy of the request for proposals that is distributed to Twin Cities faculty. Professor Bloomfield made three points with respect to the new features of the liberal education requirements: (1) this is an effort to take a new look at distribution requirements in order to add intellectual breadth; courses approved for the core are to have special characteristics, not simply be menu choices for students; (2) the theme courses are required; and (3) there is to more emphasis on writing, both in terms of skills and in the disciplines. This has been the most difficult of the task force recommendations to implement, he told the Committee.

The requirements are to apply to all undergraduates on the Twin Cities campus. This has been felt worthwhile because all students deserve to receive a liberal education and because it will facilitate

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intercollege transfers. It also works with the transfer curriculum in Minnesota, which is important because 60% of the undergraduates on the Twin Cities campus are transfer students.

It was the hope that professional and predominantly graduate programs would participate in teaching in the diversified core; that has not worked out and needs attention.

One issue that will have to be faced is that courses approved for the liberal education curriculum are approved only for a three-five year period, in order to encourage regular review. The CLE needs to devise a mechanism to certify and decertify courses.

Professor Bloomfield recapitulated briefly the evolution of the task force and the CLE, and noted that he had agreed to serve as chair of the CLE only for a year. At present Provost Shively is seeking two vice provosts, one of whom will be the new chair of the CLE. He reported that by 1996 the diversified core and theme requirements will apply to transfer students, and they hope to have the writing requirement in place, although it is doubtful the latter will be accomplished by then.

Professor Bloomfield reviewed the distribution of courses in the various core areas and in the designated themes. 680 courses had been proposed, of which 523 have been approved by the CLE. It appears that there will be sufficient seats to accommodate students, although the estimates of the projected number of seats is "soft." The problem now may be one of having approved too many courses; there are some who believe there should be a narrowing of choices, that a "core" should mean something. As expected, the college offering the most number of courses in the core and themes is CLA, followed by IT; there are ten colleges that offer such courses.

Committee members then raised a number of points with Professor Bloomfield.

- Most of the courses in the core and themes are revamped existing courses; the hope had been that faculty would develop new courses, but that has not occurred. It may take more carrots and sticks.
- The General College offers a significant number of courses in the core and themes because its students take a base curriculum intended to meet the CLE requirements. GC is supposed to take less-prepared students and bring them up to speed so they can transfer into other units; if GC students did not have access to core and theme courses, they would be at a tremendous disadvantage when transferring to other colleges. GC agreed to limit enrollment in those base curriculum courses to GC students, but it appears that students from other colleges are enrolling in them; that must be halted.
- The CLE next year will have to consider the impact on the number of seats needed when the requirements also apply to transfer students; the CLE will have to evaluate what happens next year.
- It is to be hoped that the new CLE chair will meet with the deans of the professional schools, to encourage their participation. Some have indicated that if there is no money, they will not participate; others are interested.
- There are 65-70 departments participating in offering core and theme courses; some offer many courses and some offer fewer. There should be a limit on the number of courses any one department can offer; how does the CLE impose a cap? The issue has been discussed, but no

- decision reached.
- The offerings in the languages are uneven, with many in some and none in others. This reflects a lack of applications for courses in some languages; it also means that carrots and sticks may be needed, and pressure from the provost or dean may be required--that participation in the liberal education curriculum is part of how a department will be evaluated.
  - In one instance, the introductory course for a critical discipline was not going to be part of the core; pressure was brought to bear because it was felt that course **MUST** be in the core. A number of "fundamental" courses in many disciplines were not automatically approved for the core, and the department had to convince the CLE that the proper treatment of the field was part of the course.
  - One difficulty is that a course for majors in a few disciplines will not count for liberal education requirements--although the entire set of courses in the major fulfills the requirement--while a course for non-majors in the same field **WILL** meet the requirements. This is something the CLE has discussed and had concluded courses must meet the requirements or will not be admitted to the core.
  - Although bureaucratic, for consistency the CLE has adopted a rule that a course counts for the liberal education requirements only if listed **THAT QUARTER** in the class schedule as meeting the requirements. There have been instances where courses were approved one quarter and not the next, or approved by the CLE but not noted as approved in the schedule.
  - Each student petition is individual and is carefully considered. If a student was mis-advised, their petition is usually granted. They are hard cases.
  - There is a concern about the diversified core; it is not a core and it is not area requirements. The idea of a core implies limits and a common experience; the University is so large that it cannot achieve that kind of core. The result is a hybrid.
  - The CLE did a good job in reviewing proposals to see if they met requirements. It will be important to learn, for the re-certification process, if the course is being taught the way intended and if students are experiencing what was sought. This is something the CLE will have to grapple with. Since faculty are now supposed to have teaching portfolios, they could be reviewed by the CLE. The subcommittees of the CLE would each have to review about 20 portfolios a year, which is not an insurmountable task. With large numbers of courses in each category, moreover, the CLE could rate them, using standards it developed, on how well they satisfy the criteria for being in the core. Some are better than others, but the CLE was worried about the number of available seats. It should be possible, in the future, to make judgments about courses.
  - The CLE has not dealt with the conversion to semesters at all. They are aware the change is coming, and the next CLE will have to take it up. The task force report specified the number of courses in each area, and the Twin Cities Campus Assembly will probably have to vote on changes required by the semester system. One way to think about it may be that the task force recommendations called for approximately one-third of the 180 degree credits to be in liberal education requirements; that same proportion could be required with semesters. This may be a problem for programs with "cramped curricula," but the task force had hoped that majors would

integrate liberal education content into their courses; that has not happened. Moreover, most agree that a liberal education is a good idea for undergraduates.

- A change to the semester system would entail a reduction in the number of courses by one-third, presumably, and so would also include a reduction in the number of courses required to meet liberal education requirements. Would the cut be a mindless one-third by area, or by evaluation of each category? It would not simply be a numerical reduction.
- SCEP members had raised questions about labs. The task force required them, and the idea behind requiring a lab is that it is an important way of knowing in the scientific disciplines. The idea is not to learn a technique but how it is that scientists explore. One major concern about the change to semesters has to do with lab courses; they are usually full, so cannot summarily be reduced in number by one-third.

It was asserted that most lab courses do not fulfill the objective identified by the task force. That may be so, but the CLE can only act on the basis of what instructors tell it. The CLE has returned courses one or more times for reworking, and it has insisted that liberal education content be included in lab courses. They have no way of knowing if that content is really present, or just something on the syllabus.

- The course proposal form should be integral to college and department proposals and provided to the CLE, so that faculty automatically consider liberal education requirements and so the CLE can get ideas for new courses.

Provost Shively recalled that he had been on the CLE for the first two years it existed, and has become a STRONG supporter both of the core and the theme courses. Employers who spoke with Associate Vice President Dick Skaggs, while he chaired CLE, strongly supported the themes as the kinds of things students needed to succeed in their careers. It is important to note a point made by Dr. Ellinger, he said, and that is that the University celebrate what it is doing; people inside know the process and politics too well, and forget that this curriculum has a significant impact on the new students who come to the University. He also said he wants to be sure the requirements are user friendly, including what transfer students will have to do to complete them, and wants to avoid having 10,000 petitions filed because of misinformation or misunderstandings.

Professor Bloomfield reflected that most people did not realize that the liberal education requirements imply a major bureaucracy. The CLE is the closest thing the University has to a curriculum committee, and it has a very big job; there are many policies and a lot of paperwork involved. The job is not one that a group of faculty on three-year appointments can easily do; Dr. Ellinger provides the institutional memory and there are several offices that are part of the process. Unlike with most Senate committees, the CLE has a large operational component.

There is not, however, a large bureaucracy of employees, Dr. Ellinger added; the CLE has one half-time graduate student. What must be emphasized, she said, is how smoothly the system has run. There have been 86 petitions, but meantime thousands of students have registered, taken courses, and worked toward their degrees. Professor Bloomfield agreed and said the accomplishment should be celebrated; there will be an article in KIOSK, so that word will get out that the University has done something that is working effectively.

Professor Heller thanked Professor Bloomfield for joining the Committee.

## **2. Senate Educational Policies**

The Committee turned once again to the policy on classes and schedules.

The memorandum announcing the change in class hours provoked dismay from some on the St. Paul campus. The change, effective Winter 1996, will cause problems, to be sure. It will, however, permit better use of high-quality classrooms and will get away from an irregular schedule. It was noted that final materials for Winter 1996 courses are not due until June, and that no one has said the changes will cause problems for students; if anything, the existing schedule OUGHT to cause them problems, it was said. There have been no complaints from any of the deans, Ms. Grundner reported.

It is desirable that the administration react quickly to faculty policy suggestions, said one Committee member, but the Committee and administration must remain aware that there are problems of which they are unaware and which need to be solved.

If the change were not made in Winter, 1996, the computerization of room scheduling could not be implemented. Asked how big a problem or cost a delay would be, Mr. Lewis said there would be costs in time, money, and accuracy if they were obligated to continue to schedule classrooms by hand for additional quarters, and the delay would thwart the desires of many to move to more effective classroom scheduling. It would also be to the advantage of students to eliminate an irregular schedule as soon as possible, it was said. Professor Heller said he would send a note to those who object outlining the advantages of moving to the new schedule, and the new system, as soon as possible.

There will be many changes to the way people do things, observed one Committee member, and many may say they were not consulted on the changes. Those objections must be handled with compassion, but if the changes make sense for the vast majority of the University, they must be made.

Committee members then considered other part of the redrafted policy and made changes that Dr. Cholewa agreed to incorporate in another rewrite.

The Committee then took up policies on credits and degrees; Mr. Van Essendelft led the discussion, reviewing the work that he and Professor Graham Yates had done. Committee members made a number of suggestions which Mr. Van Essendelft agreed to write into revised policies.

The last meeting of the year will be June 13, 1:45 - 3:30; the agenda will include grading policies, peer review of teaching, and a continuation of the discussion of credits and degrees.

Professor Heller adjourned the meeting at 3:30.

-- Gary Engstrand