

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy
March 31, 1992**

Present: Stanford Lehmberg (chair), Victor Bloomfield, Stephanie Carr, Thomas Clayton, James Cotter, Joanne DeMoss, Karen Karni, Kenneth Heller, Susan Wick

Guest: Vice Provost Anne Hopkins

1. Discussion of Senate Policy on Ratio of Credits to Contact Hours

Professor Lehmberg welcomed Vice Provost Hopkins to the meeting to discuss the Senate policy requiring a 1:1 ratio between credits for a course and weekly contact hours. He noted that the Committee should understand the history behind the relationship between credits and contact hours, which he would recount following Vice Provost Hopkins's comments.

Dr. Hopkins explained that she simply wished to have a conversation to clarify the Committee's views. The policy is short and clear--but not that easy to implement. Who is responsible for implementing it? Nor are the academic vice presidents are not certain what they should be doing to meet the intent of the policy. The colleges follow very different practices with respect to the policy. When she writes to the deans about it, printouts of classes which do and do not comply are enclosed; she asks them to look at those that do not comply and grant exemptions where appropriate. The question, she told the Committee, is what standards should be used in granting exemptions? She observed that she believes the policy is sound and it reflects national academic standards.

Professor Lehmberg then explained that a number of years ago the normal class module was three credits, which meant that students enrolled for five courses per quarter if carrying a full load. A faculty committee reviewed this situation, did a survey, and concluded that students spread themselves too thin and could not do a good job with five courses. It was decided that the normal course load should be four, each carrying four credits. There were several ways a course could be changed to meet this new arrangement, including condensing multi-quarter courses into fewer courses or retaining three lectures but doubling the amount of outside reading.

The present Senate policy might be accommodated by increasing the number of class meetings per week (although this could cause room scheduling difficulties, create problems for students who are working longer hours, and asking the faculty to give one-third more lectures when salaries have been frozen and given the importance of research would not be well-received). Or, a course with three lectures could be offered for three credits, a return to the system which was earlier abandoned.

The question, Dr. Hopkins said, is what standards would justify fewer class meetings; arguments about the policy itself are not what she wished to review.

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One mechanical step that can be taken is to have four-credit courses meet 67 minutes three times per week, or 200 minutes. Apart from scheduling rooms, this has proven to be a satisfactory solution in some units.

The question, argued another Committee member, is what credits are for. Are they an accounting for student effort or work required? Are they an accounting for faculty effort? Or are they a measure of contact hours? The three are different and not interchangeable; if the Committee knew what they were, the debate could be moved along.

Nationally, Dr. Hopkins responded, they are a measure of getting one's money's worth. Earlier comparisons between Minnesota and national standards in terms of the ratio of credits to contact hours proved very embarrassing. Credits, in any event, can be different things to different people; what are they to this institution, she inquired. Asked what "embarrassing" meant, she said that Minnesota had 25% fewer contact hours than its peers.

It was pointed out that Regents' policy equates one credit in course with three hours per week of student work (except in the case of labs, typically one hour of class session and two hours of outside study), and is thus an accounting for STUDENT effort. Dr. Hopkins noted that there ought to be equivalence between the Regents' policy and the Senate policy, but that she, in any case, is right now charged with enforcing the Senate policy.

This is not an intelligent policy, said one Committee member, and the alternatives are to go the Senate to change it--which is a counsel of despair--or to undermine it the best way one can so that sound practices can remain in place. Is the hidden agenda, it was asked, what the nation at large is doing? The University needs to consider what IT is doing and try to obtain the maximum educational effect.

Dr. Hopkins pointed out that she is not advocating the policy; it is already in place. Implementation, however, can define its meaning. External events are not at issue; VERY different practices prevail among the colleges, and some are in full compliance--and irritated with those that are not. This is an all-University policy, she observed, that applies to all programs, and the appropriate exceptions need to be defined for all. Writing-intensive courses might be such a case, she noted.

One Committee member spoke up in favor of the existing policy. Shorter and fewer classes, he noted, shortchanges the students. If a four-credit course meets three times a week, and the additional credit is to be for a paper, that has to be a BIG paper (the equivalent of 30 hours of work if one takes the Regents' policy as the standard).

Discussion turned to whether or not the reduction in contact hours had an impact on the ability of students to enter graduate school; inasmuch as most of the concern appears to be about lower division courses, it is difficult to ascertain the impact in this regard. One Committee member suggested that contact hours are not that important; what is important is student effort and how it is supervised. In some fields, one can learn more by independent work.

Committee members also considered the differences between student work in the humanities and social sciences and in the physical and biological sciences (such as labs versus library work or independent reading or practice in music), and although there was no agreement on the implications of

those differences, there appeared to be agreement that the differences should be respected.

One Committee member reported that he had agreed to pass along observations by his colleagues, on this subject, that in their opinion the stronger the University, the SMALLER the number of contact hours. He acknowledged he did not know whether or not that was true.

Dr. Hopkins said the main point at issue is that roughly equivalent learning experiences are occurring; the policy requires that exemptions be made while still ensuring that the learning is occurring. This may be a backwards way of approaching the issue, but the University may NEVER agree on what a credit is. She reported that the pressures are such that in some colleges classes are scheduled but then not held at the scheduled times; in other instances, student credit hours are used as the basis for assigning resources, and the University is moving toward examining with more care the cost per credit (by this standard, no matter how measured, CLA is the worst-funded unit in the University).

Being in CLA constitutes permanent peonage, observed one Committee member, and it would be nice if it were recognized that different disciplines handle their materials in different ways. Credits could be defined differently because the subjects are dealt with differently. Quantification, however, always rears its head in these discussions.

Some general policy along these lines is required, argued another Committee member; it is not fair to students in most fields to hand them a book and tell them to read it, especially in 1-XXX and 3-XXX courses. This is a point which should not be overlooked, opined another Committee member; the requirement for contact may be more convincing for lower level courses than for those which are more advanced. The policy does not differentiate between graduate and undergraduate courses, Dr. Hopkins observed, but the concern is about undergraduate education. The Committee was also told that in the original SCEP deliberations when the policy was adopted, it was assumed that the standard would be largely inapplicable to graduate work.

Following additional exchanges about the differences in work between the sciences and the humanities, Dr. Hopkins once again reminded the Committee that she was looking for standards and justifications for variations from them. The deadline for compliance with the policy is this Spring, which will not be met. One Committee member suggested that departments or colleges should be able to devise rough approximations of the amount of work required in its courses and to attach the appropriate number of credits. Another Committee member said the policy would be easy to follow if credits equal contact hours--and the University should be clear that credits do NOT measure student work or cost. Any policy should make clear what credits represent as well as what they do NOT represent.

When it was suggested that learning and teaching in the sciences and the humanities are different enough that they cannot be compared, Dr. Hopkins pointed out that the University will continue to give credits and assign grades. She told the Committee that she had learned little from the conversation but that she would, in the next week, write to the deans providing instructions on evaluating compliance with the Senate policy. The policy exists, with a deadline date, and the administration should try to achieve compliance with it. She said she continues to believe there should be definitions of what can substitute for a contact hour and that the colleges should be permitted to use their discretion--and then expect them to trust each other. Dr. Hopkins said she had understood the complexities of the issue before she arrived at the meeting and had sought guidance; she will now take action which will permit "respectful diversity"

among the colleges.

It was noted that the Committee was not asked if the policy should be changed; Dr. Hopkins replied that the administration did not make the policy and that the Committee or the Senate can always change its policy. Administrators, she noted, are often told that the Senate adopts a policy and they--the administrators--never do anything about them. She will move forward on this policy, she said, and if changes are desired, the Committee could of course recommend them to the Senate.

One Committee member applauded Dr. Hopkins's attempt to clarify the meaning of the policy; doing so makes it clear that if the policy is bad, it needs to be changed, and if it is fuzzy, everyone thinks they are complying.

Dr. Hopkins also reported to the Committee that she has spoken with Associate Vice President Carol Carrier about teaching evaluation; Academic Affairs is prepared to hold workshops on improvement of instruction, which she--Dr. Hopkins--will fund. Professor Lehmborg thanked Dr. Hopkins for joining the meeting.

After additional discussion, including apparent agreement that the Regents' policy is valid and that the Senate policy should be in accord with it, Professor Lehmborg appointed a subcommittee to draft a revised policy.

[Subsequent to the meeting, it was determined that the policy setting one credit equal to three hours of student work per week was a SENATE policy, adopted February 16, 1922.]

2. Report of the Chair

Professor Lehmborg then reported on several items.

- Vice President Hughes is appointing a task force on student employment and has asked for representation from SCEP; Professor Starr has tentatively agreed to serve, and he may also chair the task force.
- Two men's athletic events were held on the Sunday between study day and the first day of finals and he wrote to Dr. Boston to inquire about them. Mr. Meinert responded, explaining that the department had misunderstood the policy but that no such events will take place in the future.
- The football team may be asked to play in Japan; he has insisted that approval of SCEP is necessary because the game would take place during finals week.

3. Approval of the Morse-Alumni Nominations

Professor Lehmborg distributed a memo from Professor Graham Yates, chair of the nominating committee and turned to Professor Wick for a report from the committee for Morse-Alumni Award nominees. Dr. Wick noted the distribution of proposed award-winners (from many colleges across the University) and reported that one issue that arose during the deliberations was the question of

indoctrination versus education.

One Committee member said he hoped the nominating committee examines what the nominees actually DOES, educationally, in the classroom--rather than just looking at statistics and letters. It was noted that there is a personal statement from the candidate--if one believes it--and syllabi and course handouts. But the committee does not go beyond what is provided.

The Committee then considered several recommendations for next year's nominating committee that were contained in the memo from Professor Graham Yates. After considerable discussion, it was agreed that these were the reactions of this year's committee, and that a new group of nominees, along with a different committee, might have very different experiences and recommendations. The Committee appeared to agree that the existing policy document was sufficient to guide future nominating committees.

The Committee was concerned that some departments or colleges may never submit nominations because they do not believe it possible for them to win; it was agreed that departments should be advised that the procedures have been changed and that nominations from all units are welcomed.

It was moved, seconded, and unanimously voted to approve the nominations made by the nominating committee.

Professor Lehmberg then told the Committee that in addition to the dollar awards to the individual winners and their departments, and a certificate, the winners have been awarded a sculpture by Katherine Nash. This will be the last year of the award of the sculpture, however, because there will be no more left. He inquired of the Committee if they believed it necessary to have this kind of item to present to the winners.

Several Committee members expressed strong support for continuing to give the winners a token such as the Nash sculpture; it was agreed that a sculpture was most desirable and that the ideal solution would be to have a recasting of the Nash piece. Absent that possibility, Professor Lehmberg said he would inquire about the possibility of another design.

The Committee adjourned at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota