

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, April 29, 1998
1:00 – 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall

Present: Laura Coffin Koch (chair), Elayne Donahue, Gayle Graham Yates, Gordon Hirsch, Judith Martin, Kathleen Newell, Craig Swan, William Van Essendelft

Regrets: Darwin Hendel, Thomas Johnson, Robert Leik, Tina Rovick

Absent: Avram Bar-Cohen, Adam Miller, Kevin Nicholson, Palmer Rogers, Jessie Jo Roos

Guests: none

[In these minutes: teaching awards; staggered class start times; in-term exams; new policy on prerequisites; communication on Senate actions]

A Number of Items of Business

Professor Koch convened the meeting at 1:00 and reported that there were a number of items that required the brief attention of the Committee, in particular the items that would appear on the docket of the Senate and Assembly on May 14.

First, she reported that work on the Academy of Distinguished Teachers was moving forward. A funding source is being identified.

The graduate/professional teaching award is also moving forward; Professor Koch said she was awaiting word from Dr. Bruininks on funding. She noted that this needed to be settled quickly, so that information could be distributed and nominations begin next fall.

The teaching award and the Academy are two separate items; funding for the teaching award must, in any event, be obtained.

STAGGERED CLASSES

Professor Koch distributed a revised motion for the Twin Cities Campus Assembly. One motion calls for the Assembly to vote yes or no on staggered class start times between Minneapolis and St. Paul. Two additional motions provide the Assembly with options on when the classes would start (8:00/8:30 on Minneapolis/St. Paul, or 7:45/8:15, respectively). She noted that the Registrar very badly needs a decision one way or the other this spring, in order that class scheduling can begin.

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

DEGREES WITH HONORS/WITH DISTINCTION

With respect to the application date of the provisions governing degrees with honors, the Committee agreed to delay implementation until Fall Semester, 1999 and after, for students entering honors programs, in order to give colleges the opportunity to establish honors programs, if they do not have them, or to revise them for semesters.

PROHIBITION OF IN-TERM EXAMS OUTSIDE OF CLASS

Professor Koch reported that some had objected to the policy, especially at Crookston and Morris, because they do not face the kinds of conflicts that exist on the Twin Cities campus. While the policy could be changed to apply only to the Twin Cities, the problem is for students who object to having exams outside of regular class, who may have a legitimate conflict, but who are afraid to speak up. Students should not be put in that position, especially because some faculty refuse to give make-up exams, so the student cannot easily resolve the problem. The policy provides that exceptions may be granted by the dean.

PREREQUISITES

The Committee approved without further debate a revision to the language covering prerequisites, following an extensive exchange of emails in the preceding week and discussion at the previous meeting. The new language to be proposed to the Assembly reads as follows:

16. Prerequisites: Where prerequisites have been set, bulletins and course materials should explain that prerequisites may be enforced. Their purpose is to advise students to take only those courses for which the prerequisites have been met.

[POLICY BEGINS HERE:]

Departments and colleges should be selective in determining prerequisites for courses. Prerequisites should not be set for a course except in progressive, sequence courses or where departments can clearly demonstrate that a student will not be able to complete the course successfully without first completing the prerequisite course work.

Where prerequisites have been set, instructors may require that any student who has not taken the specified prerequisites for the course must withdraw. Instructors may, however, grant permission, on an individual basis, for a student to take a course without having taken the prerequisite(s).

In the rare case when a student takes a prerequisite course after successfully completing a subsequent course that required the prerequisite, credit for the prerequisite course will be granted. Colleges and departments, at their discretion, may also allow students to receive credit by examination for the prerequisite course.

RESTRICTIONS ON COURSES

The Committee then spent a long period debating whether to revise the language governing college restrictions on the number of elective credits students may count toward a degree in specific fields (physical education, applied music, study skills, and ROTC). Among the problems identified were that if colleges could not impose restrictions, the door would be open for them to impose additional general degree requirements in order to obtain the same end (e.g., establishing a list of courses from which a student must select). In many colleges, this is not a problem, because degree requirements are so extensive that the student has little room for electives.

The question of how this rule would affect transfer students was also discussed briefly, and it was agreed that the Committee would need to revisit all of the policies being recommended to the Assembly in terms of the impact they have on transfer students, and the possible differential impact they would have on transfer and already-enrolled University students. It was noted that students who transfer, or who change majors, will almost inevitably end up with extra credits that are not counted toward a degree.

The Committee agreed that there should be a campus-wide limit of 6 semester credits, combined, from physical education, study skills, applied music, and ROTC, unless the credits are a required part of the student's program. This rule would apply equally to currently enrolled students as well as transfer students.

COMMUNICATION

Professor Koch inquired if the Council of Undergraduate Deans had been talking with senators about these policies; Dr. Swan suggested that a message could certainly be sent urging it to do so. Professor Koch recalled that last summer, she encountered one college that knew nothing about the new grading policy, because the senators don't always communicate anything back to the colleges. The problem of communication will be exacerbated if the agendas of the Senate and Assembly are no longer printed in the DAILY. Professor Koch noted that FCC recently received a task force report recommending greater communication between college consultative committees and senators; perhaps, said one Committee member, SCEP could be in more regular contact with collegiate educational policy committees. Relying on senators will not work, it was said. Another Committee member agreed, pointing out that the University is not as collegial as one might want, and that election to the Senate depends mostly on name recognition, not on communications or interest in educational policy matters.

Professor Koch adjourned the meeting at 2:00.

-- Gary Engstrand