

Minutes*

Senate Research Committee
Monday, May 13, 2002
1:15 - 3:00
238A Morrill Hall

- Present: Scott McConnell (chair), Melissa Anderson, Victor Bloomfield, James Cotter, David Hamilton, Lawrence Jacobs, Paul Johnson, Leonard Kuhi, James Orf, Mark Paller
- Absent: Gary Balas, Kathleen Conklin, Kris Davidson, Robin Dittman, Katherine Klink, Phillip Larsen, James Luby, Sharon Neet, Stephanie Root, Virginia Seybold, Sarah Shoemaker, Kenneth Winters
- Guests: Sheryl Goldberg (Sponsored Projects Administration); Mark McCahill (Office of Information Technology)
- Other: none

[In these minutes: (1) report from the chair; (2) research portal; (3) statement on the Mt. Graham telescope project; (4) issues for next year]

1. Report from the Chair

Professor McConnell convened the meeting at 1:20 and began with a few announcements.

-- At its last meeting the Committee recommended approving the request for an exception to the research secrecy policy for Professor Caroline Hayes. The Senate strongly supported the recommendation; the President has approved it.

-- Because the Senate met shortly after the last meeting, the recommendation for the exception to the policy went directly to the Senate, not to the Senate Consultative Committee (to act on behalf of the Senate). The Faculty Consultative Committee, however, did discuss it and what should be done in the event requests arise in the summer. FCC STRONGLY recommended that the full Research Committee try to act, rather than use an ad hoc committee. He proposes that the Committee do so as best it can.

-- Also related to research secrecy, the Department of Defense has released a memo on proposed regulations covering research secrecy for DOD-funded projects. These are part of an ongoing national discussion to try to come up with a more systematic policy that might be more favorable to the position taken by the University.

Dr. Hamilton observed that Vice President Maziar has made the point that there exists the potential for imposition of similar restrictions on biological research; most biologists are not thinking about this possibility. Professor McConnell said the issue of research secrecy arose in his regular meeting

* 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.

(as committee chair) with Vice President Maziar; he said he wants to be sure that faculty know what could be coming. Professor McConnell and Vice President Maziar agreed to jointly prepare and distribute a letter to faculty and staff investigators, perhaps in early June, about the issues of research secrecy, point them to sources of information, and urge that they stay in touch with the appropriate administrators about changes in policy.

-- He thanked Professor Kuhi for his years of service on the Committee.

-- Professor Kuhi reported that the Faculty Consultative Committee has appointed an ad hoc committee on research secrecy and that the group had its first meeting last week. It will review all policies that have any connection with secrecy and try to develop a rational scheme to deal with the conditions that may arise. The ad hoc committee plans to meet at least two more times this spring.

2. Portals

Professor McConnell turned next to Dr. Hamilton and Mr. McCahill and thanked them for agreeing to reschedule their presentation from last month.

Dr. Hamilton said he wished to talk about a "research portal," which is at an early stage of development. By way of background, Dr. Hamilton pointed out that there is a Web Integration Group (WIG), charged by the President and led by Vice President Gardebring, which is to establish a University portal. Dr. Hamilton is directing efforts for a research portion of the portal. The goal is to have things on the portal that aid researchers in all aspects of research and that is discipline-specific so that people can quickly get information pertinent to their area of scholarship. He explained that Mr. McCahill is the individual who is providing the technical expertise for the portal; he said he would like help from the Committee in making the research portal a mature product.

Mr. McCahill at this point put up a computer-based display on the screen and demonstrated how the research portal would work. Some of the comments about the portal:

- the contents would change reasonably frequently, although some aspects would be static; the portal content would be personalized and "user-customizeable"
- the log-in would be through the normal X.500 system
- one would be able to link to various channels to provide news feeds
- this would be different from "bookmarks" or "favorites" on a web browser because it would be updated reasonably constantly
- individuals can set up their own layouts
- the personalized portal avoids the necessity of visiting 5 or 6 web sites to be updated
- it would not be that difficult (and is currently planned) to deliver tasks related to research compliance to PIs (e.g., reports due to the IRB or other documents that must be prepared).

- the research portion as described is for internal use, for students, faculty, and staff; they are focusing on what researchers need and email notification would be eliminated. (Some might prefer email and need to be persuaded about the virtue of the portal, Professor Johnson observed, because they may not see it as solving a problem.)
- the portal will also connect to some PeopleSoft functions so people can receive reports

It will be a better way to obtain information, Mr. McCahill concluded, and provide for a way that the necessary applications can reach the PI.

The web browser becomes the central application people would use, Dr. Bloomfield said. Some might prefer email because it handles smaller mailboxes, with more control, rather than have everything sent to one place.

Is it possible to use the system for personal reminders, Professor Orf asked? To set up a "to do" list or reminders of report due dates? That is an interesting idea, Mr. McCahill commented and one that they have already decided to adopt. Mr. Cahill demonstrated some of this type of functionality.

The question is whether it can be a personal information manager, Dr. Bloomfield added, which is consistent with the direction of the portal. That verges on calendar functions, Mr. McCahill said. Could this be merged with MeetingMaker, Dr. Bloomfield asked? Dr. Hamilton said he thought calendaring would be easy but discovered it is among the most highly-charged issues at the University. He assured the Committee that they would work on the personal reminders and calendaring ideas, but that these may be in the future.

Dr. Hamilton said that what the research channel is must be defined; it could vary discipline by discipline and person by person. He said he would like the help of the Committee over the next five to six months. It seems likely use will be influenced in part by content and in part by function and integration, Professor McConnell said. To the extent it is simply a new tool that replicates all or parts of other tools investigators already have, its impact will be reduced; to the extent there is value added, its impact will be increased. If EGMS, AREPA forms, and other things that one must see are included-- anything that draws one to the research portal will be important. There must be something to get people there in the first place.

Ms. Schumi agreed that if it contains information one needs to know, that will be a reason to come to the site. Their intent is that it include information from EGMS and dates that things are needed. There will also be a tracking function for grants, Dr. Hamilton said, which will be very user-friendly.

Professor Kuhl recalled reading articles about the University of Michigan and others throwing out their system. How is this different? They used the wrong technology, Mr. McCahill said; they built their system from scratch while Minnesota used an off-the-shelf open source portal framework. Michigan built their system just as others were coming to the market, used niche software, and needed a lot of consultants. It was very expensive. Minnesota is doing everything the other way.

Dr. Bloomfield noted that he at one point promoted the concept of academic clusters: there are a lot of related activities at the University that do not align with college boundaries that it is important

people know about. The original plan collapsed but the self-organizing concept might have vitality (e.g., there are many people who work in environmental science), can people nominate their friends to be part of a cluster? They can, Dr. Hamilton said.

Dr. Hamilton said he was also thinking about syndication so that they don't have to re-invent everything here. The University of Washington has a channel for biomedical people with links to things all over the world; the University should be able to syndicate with Washington to achieve that functionality without having to do it all over again. So one could have an intelligent browser, Professor Johnson observed.

After a brief discussion of the expenses of the portal, which appear to be quite modest, Professor McConnell said he was concerned that the University communicate with people about the need for the integrity of the X.500 system. In particular, units should not be able to use the system without going through the Central Authentication Hub, which protect passwords.

Like the issue of calendaring, Professor McConnell said that much will be possible with such tremendous central resources, but decentralized resources are often where the power is. He said he was not sure if people could be persuaded to give up their Palm Pilots or MeetingMaker. If the only element of this is the research portal, without any incursion into one's desktop computer, it will not do as much as it can. Dr. Hamilton replied that when the University implements a robust and far-reaching wireless networking system, it will be possible to translate all of the portal functionality to a PDA. This is the way much of the wireless industry is going.

Professor McConnell thanked Dr. Hamilton and Mr. McCahill for the presentation.

3. Statement on the Mt. Graham Telescope Project

Professor Kuhl next distributed copies of brochures related to the Mt. Graham telescope project that has been the subject of considerable controversy; he also distributed a draft statement that the Committee might consider adopting. Committee members discussed a number of points as it considered the statement.

-- Are there a lot of members of the two tribes in the area, Professor Orf asked? Professor Kuhl said he understands there are two tribes, the San Carlos Apaches and the White Mountain Apaches, each with about 10,000 members. The nearest reservation boundary is about 30 miles to the north of Mt. Graham. Professor Orf said he asked because the people who purport to represent the tribes may not be an adequate sample. Professor Kuhl said there are two protest groups, the Mt. Graham Coalition and the Apache Survival Coalition. About 15 protested at the Board of Regents' meeting. The numbers are very small.

-- How is the peak sacred, Ms. Goldberg asked? It has been considered sacred in long-standing oral tradition by some tribal members. The Forest Service surveyed the entire mountaintop for graves and shrines and did find some on the highest peak on Mt. Graham (the observatory is located on another peak on Mt. Graham). The objections through the 1980s to the mid-1990s have largely been on environmental grounds, which have been settled as a result of 37 court appearances.

-- The Committee should make a statement, recognizing that this is a very complex, emotional issue for some, Professor McConnell said. Any statement should focus on the scientific concerns and the need

to balance them with other issues. This is like the research secrecy issues, which call for a balance between institutional mores and PI prerogatives. The goal is not to be incendiary but to talk about the University's interest in scientific research.

-- This is an unprecedented opportunity for the Astronomy Department because it allows it to buy into a huge suite of telescopes. The department has been trying for 20 years to get into a large telescope project; money has always been a problem, Professor Kuhl said. The University's entry in this project is possible because of a generous gift from Hubbard Broadcasting, and entry would make the University a major player in astronomical research. The project is not on reservation land and never was, he said; it is part of a national forest.

-- Asked about other participants, Professor Kuhl said the German group (Max Planck Institutes) visited the reservation to study the issues and concluded that some mountains in Arizona are sacred to some Indians some of the time. They also concluded that the environmental issues had been settled by the courts so saw no problem going ahead; they remain part of the project with a 25% share. There were about half a dozen other universities considering being involved; the protestors said those institutions pulled out because of the issues raised by the protest. Professor Kuhl said he called all of the universities and learned that they withdrew because of the lack of funding.

-- The Social Concerns Committee did not hear from others but passed a resolution, Professor Orf asked? The Social Concerns Committee heard only from the protestors and the individuals they brought to the committee, Professor Kuhl said. How did they reach a conclusion, Professor Orf asked? Professor Kuhl said he did not know. They received several pages describing the concerns of the protestors, did not hear the scientific case, and concluded that the scientific issues did not matter because it was a moral issue--so the University should not participate.

-- Ms. Goldberg noted that dissent and protest are important, observed that science does not take place in a vacuum, and suggested that Committee members ask themselves how they would feel about this work taking place in the vicinity of the graves of loved ones?

-- Who decides if the University participates, Professor Anderson asked? The Board of Regents because of the money involved, Professor Kuhl said. President Yudof said he wants to hear from all constituents, including other Indian groups. How much scientific information have the Board and the President received, Professor Orf asked? They have received the brochures and a summary of the scientific issues, Professor Kuhl said; he has not made any presentations. Dr. Hamilton suggested that Professor Kuhl write a letter to the President outlining the issues.

The Committee then voted unanimously in favor of the following motion:

The Senate Committee on Research has considered the question of the University's involvement in the Large Binocular Telescope (LBT) now under construction on National Forest Service land on Mt. Graham in Arizona and scheduled for completion in 2004. The telescope will provide a unique capability for astronomical investigation of all aspects of the universe in which we live, ranging from the formation of stars and planets to the very early stages of the universe itself. This in turn makes the Department a major player in astronomy and astrophysics, enhancing the reputation of the University and attracting the highest quality faculty and graduate

students. Therefore, the Senate Research Committee strongly supports the Department of Astronomy's effort to join the LBT and recommends its approval by the Board of Regents.

4. Next Year's Topics

Professor McConnell said the Committee would communicate by email about two topics that remained unsettled at this, the last meeting of the year:

- research infrastructure
- social sciences and the IRB (which Professor Feeney has decided that the Faculty Consultative Committee will also discuss next year).

He thanked everyone for their work during the year and wished them a good summer.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota