

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STUDENT AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF MEETING
JANUARY 30, 2002

[In these minutes: Welcome, 13-Credit Minimum Initiative]

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University Senate or Twin Cities Assembly; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represent the view of, nor are they binding on the Senate or Assembly, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT: Jason Stingl, chair, David Lenander, Robert Jones, Cheryl Meyers, Sara Nagel, Gerald Rinehart, Janet Schottel, Brittny Barnes McCarthy, Dave Gibson, Bao Ong

REGRETS: Yasemin Kaygisiz, Nick Cecconi, Lars Nelson, Tina Falkner, Ray Wakefield

ABSENT: Terry Hietpas, Tim Flannery, Steve Taggart

GUEST: Vice Provost Craig Swan

I). Chair Stingl called the meeting order and welcomed all those present.

II). Chair Stingl introduced Vice Provost Craig Swan who was invited to speak about the 13-credit minimum initiative. Vice Provost Swan provided Committee members with information on this initiative. Highlights included:

- Discussions surrounding improving graduation rates began in the spring of 2001 as part of an undertaking by a Subcommittee of the Twin Cities Council of Undergraduate Deans called the Subcommittee on Graduation & Retention on the Twin Cities Campus.
- Formal consideration of a 13-credit minimum rule was prompted by a letter this fall from the President and Provost to the deans of undergraduate colleges on the Twin Cities campus.
- While this initiative focused on the Twin Cities campus, results were shared with the coordinate campuses.
- In the fall of 2001 the Student Senate passed a resolution that allowed for campus autonomy.
- This initiative is based on the premise that the University needs to be absolutely committed to a student's success and the whole range of what that means. Part of the motivation for this initiative is that the University is not where it needs to be in terms of graduation rates. Graduation is an integral and important part of a student's ultimate success.
- The University of Minnesota's six-year graduation rates do not compare favorably to other similar institutions. Rationales put forth to try and defend the University's poor performance include the following: the University has a lot of

part-time students, the University of Minnesota is an urban campus, students need to work, etc. Efforts to control for these factors either by part-wise comparisons or statistical modeling show that the University still under performs peer institutions.

- On a positive note, four and five year graduate rates have increased dramatically over the past decade. There is a need to make sure that these rates do not stall, but rather continue to improve.
- To improve graduation rates as a whole the administration would ask students to think differently about their academic experience. Clearly stated, unambiguous institutional policies, actions, expectations and incentives for behavior that would help students move towards graduation would be critical.
- The President and the Provost endorsed the report of the Twin Cities Council for Undergraduate Deans and asked the deans of undergraduate colleges on the Twin Cities campus to consider "...implementation of a requirement that all students seeking to register at less than full time status need explicit college approval to do so." Thirteen credits has been suggested as a possible target.
- If a 13-credit minimum policy is implemented, it must be administered humanely. Students with legitimate and important reasons why they cannot maintain full-time student status will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and, naturally, allowances will be made.
- The institution needs to make resources available and work with students to make them accountable if a 13-credit minimum policy is to be implemented successfully.

Next, Vice Provost Swan fielded questions from Committee members. Responses to specific questions and comments included:

- Vice Provost Swan stated that a final decision regarding the 13-credit minimum issue until it has been thoroughly discussed. As a result, specific details such as whether such a policy would be phased in or how exactly it would be implemented has yet to be determined.
- Vice Provost Swan believes that for such a policy to be successful, every undergraduate student should have a written graduation plan. Such a plan would help students achieve objectives that have been thoughtfully studied and documented. It is important to recognize that there is a different mindset between a part-time student with significant family obligations or a documented learning disability arriving at the University versus an 18-year old student fresh out of high school starting at this institution. In either case, however, Vice Provost Swan would challenge all students to have a written graduation plan.
- To graduate in four years in most programs a student needs to take an average of 15 credits a semester. Ideally it would probably be better to convey to students the need to take 30 credits/year. The 13-credit minimum, while being reasonably aggressive, allows for the notion that some semesters are heavier and some are lighter in terms of credits taken.

- A Committee member mentioned that there are some built-in incentives to carrying a full-time course load i.e. financial aid, insurance, and scholarship monies.
- Many people have argued that the non-residential nature of the campus has worked against graduation. Over the past 20 years, the number of students who consider themselves commuters as opposed to residents has completely flip-flopped.
- A concern was raised as to whether there would be enough classroom space should the 13-credit minimum policy be implemented. Vice Provost Swan indicated that is yet another reason for considering a phased-in approach should the policy be implemented.
- A Committee member posed an argument that the administration appears more concerned with improving the graduation rate than improving the student experience. Vice Provost Swan indicated that this is not the case at all. He further added that it is important to keep in mind the difference between degree seeking students and non-degree seeking students, and that a non-degree seeking option will continue to be a registration alternative.
- How would a 13-credit minimum policy impact the admission process? Currently more students apply to than can be admitted. Each year a lot of effort and thought is given to the size of the entering class relative to the capacity of the institution. As a result, consideration is given to faculty size, classroom availability, residential hall space, etc. in order to assure a positive student experience.
- Currently student athletes need to take 24-credits during their first year and 27-credits each succeeding year. Strong consideration is being given to requiring student athletes to register for 14-credits per term. Part of the motivation behind changing the cumulative credit requirement of student athletes results from the University having had to repeatedly ask for exceptions for student athletes not meeting credit requirements which is likely to reduce its credibility when seeking other exemptions.
- All undergraduate colleges on campus realize that should a 13-credit minimum policy be instituted it will have significant implications for advising and the need to mobilize other resources as well.

Committee members decided to draft a resolution outlining its position on this issue. Chair Stingl and Senate staff, Renee Dempsey, will craft a resolution and send it out electronically to Committee members for input. The Committee will finalize the resolution at the next meeting on March 6, 2002.

III). With no further business, Chair Stingl adjourned the meeting.

Renee Dempsey
University Senate