

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, April 21, 2010
2:00 – 4:00
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Cathrine Wambach (chair), LeAnn Alstadt, Tom Brothen, Norman Chervany, Megan Evans, Kaleb Kalinowski, James Leger, Robert McMaster, Peh Ng, Henning Schroeder, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Elaine Tarone, Michael Wade

Absent: Joseph Bartolotta, Cody Mikl, Kristen Nelson, Jane Phillips, Peggy Root, Paul Siliciano

Guests: Associate Dean George Green

Other: Suzanne Bardouche (Office of the Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education)

[In these minutes: (1) Morris campus calendars; (2) e-learning; (3) absence policy]

1. Morris Campus Calendars

Professor Wambach convened the meeting at 2:00 and called on Professor Ng to introduce the 2013-14 and 2014-15 calendars.

The 2014-15 calendar was approved unanimously after a brief explanation of it from Professor Ng. The 2013-14 calendar is a revision, with spring semester starting a week before MLK Day, because the Morris campus had a discussion with payroll and could not get a change required to avoid a 40-week schedule for nine-month faculty. The Committee also approved the change unanimously.

2. E-Learning

Professor Wambach asked the Committee to consider a set of questions about e-learning posed by Professor Brothen:

1. Do the terms online learning, blended learning, e-learning, etc., imply types of courses or a developmental process? That is, should the focus be on the development of one or the other or on a process toward some "final" form.
2. Should the U of M have a "5 Year Plan"?
3. Is a faculty development program good? Necessary? Possible? And what would be in it for them anyway?

* These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represents the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

4. Do we want to work with private providers like Capella?
5. What would an e-learning committee do?

She brought the subject back on the agenda because the Committee had no time to discuss the issues when Vice Provost Wahlstrom made her presentation. She said she also wanted to talk about an advisory committee because Dr. Wahlstrom said she would appreciate faculty participation. She has been thinking about the number of committees faculty are working on; she and Professor Brothen are involved in a second round of interviews with the e-learning consultant the University brought back to help develop a more concrete plan, following the first report last fall. She said she and Professor Brothen thought these questions would be a good starting point.

What does the terminology mean? The consultants' report said it would help to have consistent definitions. Dean Green said it would be helpful to declare definitions, although it won't be possible to impose on people the way they use terms—but the University can say what it means. It would be useful to distinguish between online and blended courses. The consultant saw e-learning as completely online, stand-alone courses delivered over the Internet, Professor Brothen reported, and also urged that the University get into the business of delivering it (e-learning).

Professor Chervany said that if the consultant said the University should focus on online learning, he believed that is the wrong way to go. There will be some courses online, but if one projects 10-15-20 years in to the future, the online question is far too narrow. The University needs to think about new technologies and asynchronous learning and activities. Online courses are too narrow and inhibit what faculty and students can do.

Part of online courses is about technology, Ms. Phillips said, but the core of e-learning is how to learn differently, asynchronously, etc. Some things can be learned that way, some not. One needs to ask what one wants students to learn and how best to teach the student-learning outcomes in a technology-rich environment. Professor Wambach reported that the consultants said they had not heard much about student learning. Professor Leger said he asked Vice Provost Wahlstrom about the distinction between e-learning and distance learning, and lot has to do with the kinds of students one seeks to serve. Ms. Phillips mentioned pedagogy, but there are students far away or whose schedule does not allow them to be on campus all the time. Those are two different issues and there is confusion in the terms.

Dean Green said that distance learning is a subset, a form of learning that is entirely online. But there are also residential students taking online courses as well as blended traditional courses. There are programs that are totally online, often for practicing professionals who cannot be served on campus. It is a subset that is completely appropriate and deserves attention and support, but that does not mean that online learning should take the place of blending technology into courses. But online instruction should not be divorced from the rest of instruction.

Professor Wambach observed that the first point in the consultants' report is about coming to an understanding about terms so that the institution can move to a shared understanding. The second point, more provocative, asks what the problem is that the University is trying to solve with these technologies. Their discussions with people here suggested that there is not much of a sense of purpose. Does the Committee agree?

Professor Brothen noted that one of the consultants, Dr. Mayadas, provided some facts, one of which is that the University of Phoenix has 500,000 students. Will they put the University out of business, Dean Green asked? Professor Brothen responded that 25,000 of those students might have come to the University. But at the same time the University is seeing an increase in applications, Dr. McMaster pointed out. Professor Wambach said there is great interest in post-baccalaureate education, and many students are place-bound, so one use of technology is to provide more access to post-baccalaureate programs.

Professor Chervany agreed that no problem emerges from the report. He said he was bothered by the lack of diversity in the people the consultants met with. The decisions about e-learning will affect the lives of the faculty who deliver it and the students who take it—but the people they met with were managers and administrators, with little representation of faculty or students. There are people who can be reached with e-learning whom the University cannot physically reach, and there is a group the University can reach but for whom timing is an issue; the power of technology is that it allows the University to reach students wherever they are. He has talked with a large group of students about how they use two new technologies: texting and Facebook. The students are ready to incorporate technology into all phases of life—except the courses they take at the University. There are rich opportunities to use technology, and individual faculty members have pursued them, but the University has not. The field is wide open and the consultants' report only scratches the surface.

Professor Tarone commented that she teaches professional-development courses for language teachers; there are guidelines for online course design. Faculty will need a lot of training and development to bring them to the point where students are and to teach them the best way to deliver which parts of a course online. This is a huge undertaking, moving from overhead projectors to an online course.

Professor Wambach said she thought there were two areas where the University could focus: reaching students when they do their (K-12) teacher education coursework, and working on hybrid/blended courses. Professor Tarone, she said, is talking about the former. No, Professor Tarone responded, she was talking about training faculty to develop online courses. So what program is needed for faculty, Professor Wambach asked?

With respect to the last question, Dean Green said, first one must ask what the University needs to do better, and then ask what technologies are available, and one must consider cost and uniformity—and then talk about faculty development.

Dean Schroeder reported that he met with a group of student fellows and talked about whether they have enough time to devote to their research questions. They need to take courses, don't know if what they need will be provided, and sometimes can't take what they need because it is not offered, so the time they need to complete their degrees is extended. More flexibility in when and how courses are delivered is key to improving outcomes of the graduate-student experience, both for on-campus students and those who are elsewhere. Dr. McMaster agreed that online versions of courses would be of great benefit, especially bottleneck courses, and enable students to get through more easily (e.g., Psychology 1001, Chemistry 1011).

Professor Ng recalled that the Committee has discussed requiring four years of high-school math as an entrance requirement for the Twin Cities campus, which brought up the question about rural high schools that cannot offer students access to the fourth year. One idea is that students could take an online course. She said, however, that she has reservations about teaching calculus online.

Professor Leger said he would like to see a clear set of goals because there may be instances where electronic tools are used where they should not be. When one articulates the mission of a course, the tools should not be used because they are fun but rather because they help meet the mission. Professor Spannaus-Martin reported that their program has expanded to the Rochester campus, so they offer a blended curriculum. They have a large number of students of color, both immigrant and permanent residents, and they were concerned about how well such a curriculum would work for those students; it has been a wonderful experience that allows the students to learn concepts and terms.

Ms. Alstadt said she shared Professor Leger's concern: Online courses can open doors to more students, but she was not sure what it means to add technology to a classroom. Doing so can be inappropriate. It is fine to use with students who learn well online and who are tech-savvy, but not all are. It does not help to infuse the classroom with technology that faculty may not know how best to use. Professor Tarone said it is not just whether the faculty know how to use technology tools but whether they know how to identify the *right* tools to provide the skills and knowledge students need to have at the end of the course. The issue is a lot more complex than whether to make a course online or not.

Ms. Phillips asked if it would be beneficial to look at studies that identify courses that do not work well online. Some concepts are difficult to learn when a student cannot ask questions. There have been studies and the University should not go down the road blindly.

One purpose of these technologies is to provide access, Professor Chervany said, either because of distance or capacity (the class has run out of hours or seats), as well as "cognitive access" (for students who need more time to understand the course material). The technologies can support certain materials or development or resolve certain learning problems. The University should be asking how to use the technologies if there is NOT an access problem—how can they be used to help teach better and help students learn better? What skills do they support? The University needs to look seriously at what is known.

Professor Wade said that the consultants' report criticizes the University. What does the central administration think of it? The report says there is no vision or coordination of e-learning. What do Provost Sullivan and Vice Provost McMaster think about it? Dr. McMaster said the Provost's response is to dig deeper, to bring the consultant back, and he (the Provost) has authorized the consultant to develop a proposal. That sounds like he is headed in the opposite direction from the members of the Committee, Dean Green commented, who are interested in blended courses, while he is interested in online courses. Dr. McMaster demurred and said the administration is open to ideas from the Committee. Professor Wambach agreed with Professor Wade that the consultants imply that the situation at the University is "a mess." With the coming budget cliff, Professor Wade added, this issue could be demagogued by politicians, but the University is open to being criticized for doing very little. Is anyone losing sleep over the question? They are not, Dr. McMaster said. When the Provost

receives the consultant's report, he will create a group and give it a charge on how to move forward. That is all a few weeks away.

Professor Wambach agreed with Professor Chervany that there appears to be no bottom-up contribution, something the Committee is starting, and there is nothing in the report about structure.

Does the University need a plan, Professor Wambach asked? Should it start paying more attention to e-learning? The consultants suggested that it need not pay attention because there are people working on it, things will develop, and one can argue that there is no need for a big institutional plan, and that the University should let things happen organically. Dean Green said the report offered several models and landed on a confederate one, because one size does not fit all. Professional schools can use online learning for continuing education, for example. The exemplars are those who work with a market need and have taken it up on their own. Colleges select the market situation or capacity constraints for online learning and the rest will be done in blended courses. He said it is best to leave the efforts to the colleges, an approach that also fits the budget model: Deans receive the money, something not likely to change, and there is a coordinating committee of college representatives.

How have peer institutions approached e-learning, Dr. Schroeder inquired? Organically? With a structured plan? There is a lot of variation in the ways universities are structured to deal with e-learning, Professor Wambach said—centralized, confederated, or not at all. Dr. McMaster said that Penn State is among the most successful. Not all institutions need to invest in the same areas.

Professor Chervany agreed with Dean Green that the market should drive what is done and that faculty and students should develop the programs, except that there is a need for a more centralized model on platforms. The Carlson School developed its own, and spent a lot of money on it, and is now switching to Moodle. The University needs a group working on platforms and tools that make the most sense to support so that resources are spent on the best tools available. Local options in this regard are very costly. The platform problem goes beyond e-learning, Ms. Phillips said. The University can't even agree on a uniform calendar system! It would be helpful if there were a centralized model to choose platforms. Professor Spannaus-Martin added that it would also be helpful to talk with MnSCU about common platforms. There are not enough faculty to teach clinical laboratory sciences and the systems need to share resources.

Professor Brothen recalled that when Mr. Yen ran academic computing, his view was that the University should not develop platforms itself but instead should buy them off the shelf, because development is too expensive. So the University is apparently reversing that policy at a time of severe budget problems. He said he hoped that the change works out in this new environment. Dean Green said it makes sense not to support a lot of different options but to zero in on one or two. Professor Brothen said that if the University is targeting Moodle, it is obligated to ensure that it can do as much as WebVista. The University does not always pick the best option, it picks the cheapest, Ms. Phillips said. Turnitin.com was a great program for identifying plagiarism and WebVista was an inferior product for doing that.

Professor Wambach concluded that the University needs to think about vision and should include faculty and students—it needs to be sure users have a big role in decisions. She said she was intrigued by the confederacy idea but there is a need to create a community so that people can share information about what they are doing. The consultants pointed out that the institution has no well-

developed marketing tool; if the University wants to do something on a bigger scale, it needs to think about what it wants to do down the line; should that occur centrally? Courses are not marketed in the same way, Dean Green said; nursing and calculus are done differently. If the markets differ, the colleges may approach them differently—but that approach would not preclude a central support group. Dr. Schroeder emphasized the need to bring students into the discussions; the University needs to tap into this savvy group, not because they are savvy but also because they are the end users.

Professor Chervany said he was thinking about a different kind of marketing. Individual colleges and campuses should do it, but even in this time of tight budgets, the University could put money into seed grants for faculty development courses. Why not teach calculus online? Because one cannot or because it hasn't been tried? One should think of such grants as educational research funds to make instruction more alive and meaningful to students. There is need for a group of people to think about this, Professor Wambach agreed.

Ms. Alstadt cautioned that not all students are technologically savvy, and some find it hard to learn when there is technology in the classroom. If the University were to think about using technology that students are already learning, it should ask them. Professor Chervany said Ms. Alstadt was right to chastise and that any team must include both sides. He said he did not see this as technology in the classroom, but as taking a class apart, with a content expert and the learners, to see how technology could help. Research grants are necessary and a team would include both faculty and students. And it should include students who are struggling with the topic, and where they are having trouble understanding it, Ms. Phillips added. Professor Tarone mentioned that one of her colleagues studies how people learn statistics: There is research and a lot is already known. The question is what tools exist to help people learn what they must. She suggested looking at pooling resources across the CIC as with CIC Courseshare, because there are concerns about doing this well. One must pay attention to how people learn.

Professor Wambach said that the Committee must not neglect the policy issues. Dr. McMaster reported that Vice Provost Wahlstrom is creating a policy group to look at the policies that affect e-learning. There have been multiple conversations about policies and the Committee will have to work through the difficult issues (e.g., a student must have 30 credits in residence). One policy that the report indicates is sticky for faculty members, Professor Ng observed, is the governing intellectual property; she said she did not know what the report meant by saying the policy was a concern or a deterrent. The report suggested that University of Minnesota faculty members are anxious about it, something that is not true at other institutions, Dean Green said, and that the University should get that concern out of the way so technology can triumph. Professor Ng said the issue needs more discussion because it is important to faculty.

The policy is clear, Professor Wambach said: The faculty own the content. There is a concern that the rights to content might not be protected and there are questions about what the rights of the University might be. The consultants were surprised at this attitude. Does it come from the Academic Health Center? There is still not agreement on the issues, Professor Spannaus-Martin said, and faculty members are not comfortable with the way things are. It remains a work in progress. It is imagined that a program could hire a short-term employee to develop a course for delivery, with no faculty involvement, and the University owns it. Faculty are seen as content experts, Professor Spannaus-Martin said, and instructional designers would put the course together—and would start changing the content, which made faculty members upset. There was a clash between the designers

and the faculty and questions about whose content it is. There is also a question about subsequent revenue streams, Dean Green added; faculty do not receive royalties from repeated delivery of a course.

If a faculty member creates a course, and materials are used online or for e-learning, the faculty member should receive royalties, Professor Ng maintained. What is the difference between materials in an online course and selling a textbook? Should not someone receive x% of the revenue? That can be dealt with in a contract, Dr. Green said. It becomes iffy if the faculty member develops the course but others deliver it and the University owns it, Professor Ng said. Ms. Phillips commented that her program has old technology, lab manuals that were written by multiple instructors over a number of years. The college owns the copyright; one could not tell who owns what part of the manual. There are models for dealing with these situations. There are questions about how to do contracts for a course, parts of a course, etc., Professor Spannaus-Martin said.

This needs to be the subject of considerable conversation, Professor Wambach said, before any conclusions are reached. The Committee can benefit from the experiences in the Academic Health Center. She identified several issues: the need for a vision, decisions about organization, support for users, and review of policy. This will be a big effort over the next five years. What about faculty-governance oversight, she asked? There are several committees (e.g., this one, Faculty Affairs, Information Technologies, Academic Freedom and Tenure) with oars in the water on this, she said; what is the recommendation for the consultative group? Dean Green said that more than one may be needed, because the different groups bring different angles, including a new group of college representatives to deal with cross-college coordination. This Committee could look at curriculum; Faculty Affairs could look at intellectual property issues. What is missing is cross-college coordination.

What is missing is vision, Ms. Phillips said. The University does not know where it wants to go. There is no need for a new committee. Talk to lots of people, especially young professors, because they will be stuck with whatever is decided.

A drafting group is needed, Dr. Green suggested, and then something can be brought to this Committee, to Faculty Affairs, etc. A vision of what the University wants to be doing in 20 years, Ms. Phillips said—a residential university or something different. Is there a separate vision for e-education needed, Dr. Schroeder asked? It is part of the University. Ms. Phillips recalled that she had served on such a committee at Wisconsin, which met for two years and then ended up restating the obvious. Any committee needs to have focus.

Professor Tarone said that as she read the report, it said the University is in a large urban area, so online education does not make sense. Because there are lots of people who can come to the University, it should pursue the blended option. That is related to "who we are." One might say the leadership should come up with a vision but then the Committee might say "no." Dr. Schroeder observed that the ATM was considered a stupid idea 35 years ago because it was said people could walk to the bank. He said the University should be very careful about abandoning distance education.

Dean Green recalled a group that reviewed proposals for electronic dissertations; there was a lot of concern, but ten years later the problems were worked out. If the timing is right, the University will not have to do a lot of training and workshops. The University wants "to be on the cutting edge,

not the bleeding edge." The most face-to-face education will be permeated with digital exchanges. The situation will evolve and the University can let events take their course; it does not need experts and gurus as long as it doesn't try to do things top-down (except platforms). The field will expand in ways that people can't imagine now. The University will adapt to the market.

3. Absence Policy

Dean Schroeder said that he and Dean McMaster have talked to students and are concerned about the absence policy. They suggest expanding the legitimate reasons for absence to include illness not only of the student but also of his or her dependents (e.g., graduate students with sick children). Many graduate students have families and they sometimes face problems with sick children (or sick parents).

Committee members discussed the terms that might be used and whether or not the provision might be abused (which is why verification can be required). Professor Wade commented that "if you can pass my class without coming to class, fine, we'll take the money and I'll be here." One is dealing with adults, Dean Schroeder said; they know if they miss too many classes, things won't work out for them. New faculty and graduate assistants need something in the policy that allows them to excuse a student for illness of a dependent.

The Committee agreed to take up amendments to the policy at the next meeting. Professor Wambach adjourned this one at 3:50.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota