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Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Minutes
April 25, 1986

Members Present: Susan Collison, Gretchen Kreuter (ex officio), Andrew Collins, William Hanson (chair), Marvin Mattson, Mary Young, Michael Root, Patricia Thomas (staff), Ian Maitland, Thomas Daniels, Brenda Ellingboe, Shiela Corcoran, Van Gooch and Kathy Ebnet via telephone hook-up from Morris.

Guests Present: Roy St. Laurent, Darwin Hendel, William Boylan, James Tracy, Wendell DeBoer.

Announcements: William Hanson stated that the winners of the Morse Amoco awards had just been selected and their names would be made public once the recipients had been notified.

Professor Hanson also noted that the Senate Research Committee reversed its recent resolution on Indirect Cost Recovery, voting instead 7-1 in favor of the SCEP recommendation passed March 7, 1986.

He said that the April 11, 1986, SCEP amendment to the motion of the Special Committee on Unified and Increased Preparation Standards was endorsed by the University Senate April 17. The motion, as amended, was then approved by the Senate.

Professor Hanson announced that Andrew Collins would be the chair of SCEP next year.

Minutes: The minutes were approved as written.

Semester Change

Darwin Hendel, Research Associate, Academic Affairs, explained the "Analysis of the Academic Calendar Survey" materials distributed to SCEP members. He said that 1,727 regular faculty members on the Twin Cities campus (or 63.5% of the tenured and tenure-track faculty) had responded to a February 1986 survey, and 49.9% of those responding preferred the quarter system and 53.9% preferred not to change to the semester system. He stated that the majority of the comments favoring the semester system were educationally connected in context and learning, citing "greater depth possible," "more time for students to do research, writing and projects," and "more time to develop topics adequately" as examples of faculty reasons for supporting a change to the semester system (Table 9). He further stated that those comments favoring the quarter system tended to emphasize flexibility in scheduling and diversity of learning experiences, citing "more courses possible," "more variety and diversity of curriculum options," and "flexibility both for faculty scholarly and research time and for student programs" as examples (Table 8).

William Boylan, chair of the Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs, said his committee will take Darwin's report to the Senate Consultative

Committee and then to the Senate. He explained that there were two issues before his committee: 1. to conduct a survey and prepare a report and 2. to make a recommendation to the Senate. His committee had just voted 7-1 to retain the quarter system.

William Hanson noted that SCEP had talked about this issue last year but didn't offer a clear statement other than to consider seriously the educational consequences of a switch to the semester system. He suggested that since a majority of both faculty and students oppose a change and there appears to be no compelling reason to change to a semester system, then SCEP should oppose it.

Andrew Collins also pointed out that although Tables 8 and 9 list different sorts of remarks, they both bear directly on the quality of education. It was moved and seconded that SCEP join SCFA in opposing a change to the semester system. It passed unanimously.

William Hanson and William Boylan will draft a joint resolution and report back to the committees on May 9.

Grade Change

William Hanson reminded the committee that SCEP, at its November 22, 1985 meeting, had considered the College of Liberal Arts' proposal to change its grading system. Because it favors a uniform grading system on the Twin Cities campus, SCEP recommended at that time that CLA not change.

Wendell DeBoer, chair, Student Academic Support Services Committee, said his committee passed the following motion in March and asked SCEP to consider it:

That the grade of "F," fail, be used in an A-F grading system for the Twin Cities campus replacing the "N" in the current A-N system as soon as practical. The "F" represents performance that fails to meet basic course requirements and is unworthy of credit. The "F" would be included in calculating grade point averages as zero(0) grade points in the current four-point system.

Michael Root suggested SCEP look at this issue in the same way it had considered the last issue: Is there a compelling reason to make a change? He said the advantages offered for the change are not compelling and proceeded to respond to each of the three arguments.

1. The "N" is ambiguous. If the "F" grade is used, the grade would still be ambiguous. How does changing the symbol resolve the issue of ambiguity?
2. Manipulation of the grading system, i.e., taking an "N" to avoid a "D" on the transcript. There are costs to the student involved in doing this. Students would receive no grade for their efforts.

Not many students are willing or financially able to sacrifice the credits and potentially extend the number of quarters they must enroll.

3. The GPA is misleading. This is not the case, because businesses do understand the system. Also there is no problem in the colleges of monitoring student performances.

Michael also explained that SCEP decided two years ago that there were no compelling reasons to change the system and voted to leave the system as it is.

James Tracy, Chair, Council for Curriculum, Instruction and Advising, observed that 14 years is a long time to evaluate the current system. SASS, he said, now favors the A-F system. Transcripts are misleading for students who think the "N" carries no penalties. Professional schools might interpret the grades as an indication of inadequate work and lower the GPA. He also noted that a faculty poll now favors the A-F grading system.

Michael Root said the reason to change to the A-N system was to get students to take risks, making it less costly to students by not counting these courses in the GPA. The S/N gets at the same risk-taking. "F" is a symbol for failure and is demoralizing to students. The "N" grade should remain. This information plus more input from students should be brought to the Senate and let the Senate make a decision based on the information.

Andy Collins moved that SCEP support the motion of SASS. Ian Maitland suggested as a friendly amendment that Michael Root's letter of June 15, 1984, and a comment from the chair be included in the docket with this motion. The friendly amendment was accepted. The motion passed 7-3. William Hanson will provide this information to the Senate.

The meeting adjourned at 4:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Patricia Thomas
Administrative Fellow, SCEP

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